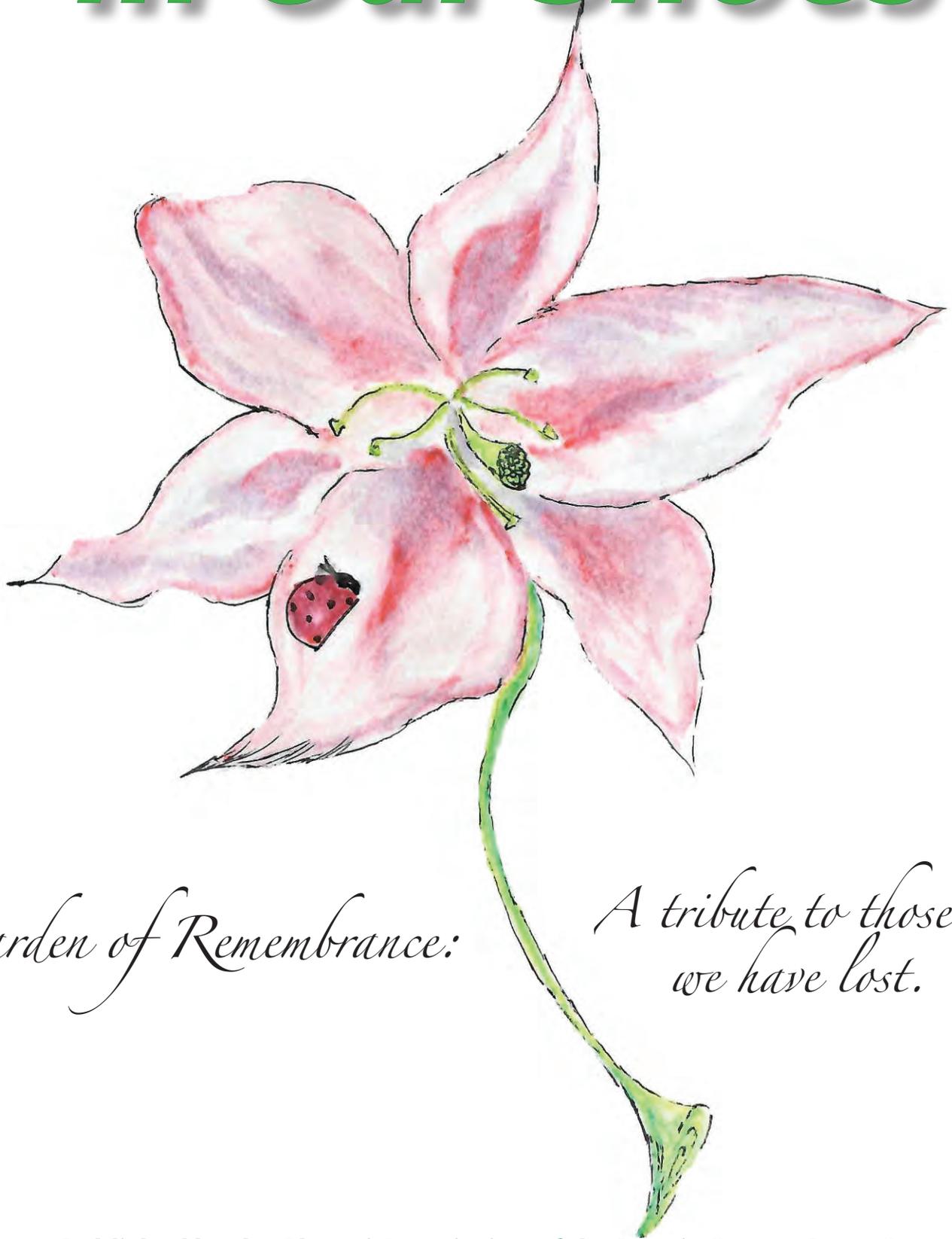


"In Our Shoes"



Garden of Remembrance:

*A tribute to those
we have lost.*

Published by the Alumni Association of the Morris County Drug Court

Seventeenth Edition, June 2020



*To the Drug Court Graduates: Best wishes for a future
filled with hope!*

The Drug Court Creative Positive Expression Team

creativepositiveexpression@gmail.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks go to the Drug Court Teams of the State of New Jersey, Morris and Sussex Counties, and to the people and organizations listed below. Their wisdom, suggestions, encouragement, and enthusiasm continue to enrich and expand the program of Creative Positive Expression that is supporting recovery from the disease of Substance Use Disorder.

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Mr. Charles C. Johnson, Jr. Retired Drug Court Coordinator and Executive Director of the Alumni Association of the Morris County Drug Court. From the beginning, Mr. Johnson recognized that creative expression would help people recovering from substance use disorder. Other members of the Executive Staff include: Anthony Justo, Assistant Executive Director and Drug Court Graduate, Eulena Horne, Coordinator, Creative Positive Expression Program. On the Executive Board of Trustees: Barbara Ward, President, Chris Schuette, Secretary, James Ward, Treasurer. Trustees include: Joseph Bell, Esq., Minister Yasin Cobb, Donald Collester, Retired JSC, Nicoleta Danicic, Darby Davidson, Charles Femminella, Scott Gorman, Esq., Kahli Murphy, Susan Nobleman, LCADC, and Joseph Scura, Esq.

Theresa Gehring for her kindness, patience and skills in setting up and supervising the printing of this text book, and the Genesis Project Initiative, a 501-C3 non-profit, ex-offender, re-entry organization that encouraged the integration of the Creative Positive Expression Program into the Drug Court process.

Support from the County College of Morris (CCM) is extraordinary. In 2014 the college began donating, twice a year, the printing of the Drug Court magazine, "In Our Shoes." The superior quality and dignity of the printing enhances the self-esteem of the Drug Court participants whose writing and art work are showcased in the magazine. These magazines have attracted the attention of the community at large and engendered respect for Drug Court participants.

It became apparent that the Drug Court population was rapidly expanding and the Positive Creative Writing program needed many more volunteers. In 2017 CCM worked with the Drug Court volunteers to enable the training of more volunteers. CCM promotes the program with on-line information, public flyers, and open houses. Classroom space is also donated along with whatever electronic equipment is needed. CCM's support helps this program grow and become even stronger. Thank you.



By Amanda Conklin

About *In Our Shoes*....

"In Our Shoes" is a literary and art magazine that showcases the writing and artwork of Drug Court participants. The magazine is published by the Alumni Association of the Morris County Drug Court and presented three times a year to Drug Court participants, their families and others in the community during the spring and fall Drug Court graduations and the winter holiday season. The County College of Morris and Sussex Technical High School donate the printing.

Lost to the
battle of
addiction



Kimberly
Chrissy
Melissa
Kenny
Amanda
Matthew
Chrissy
Jesse

Cover Artist: Danielle Marie Walker is our Cover Artist for this edition of "In Our Shoes". Her delicate and beautiful drawing and heart-felt poem capture the essence of the theme of the collective memorial garden.

Death is not the end
Nor the final word
Death is a separation
Temporarily unheard



Death has no power
To keep apart
A love forged so deeply
In a persons heart

Death creates a veil
And shields us from view
But death can do
nothing
To disconnect me from
YOU.

RIP
Ken

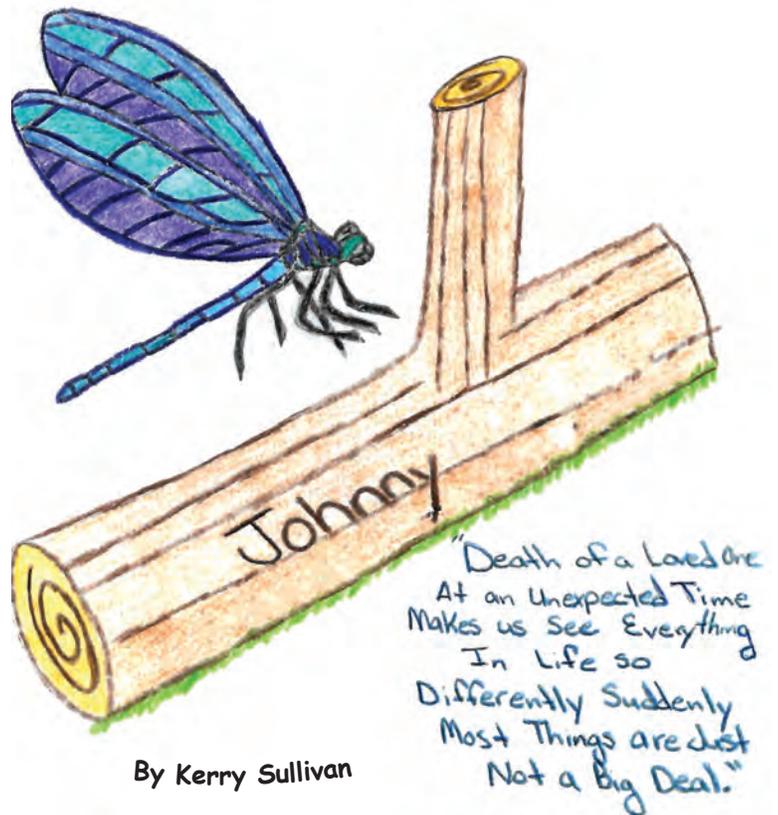
Disclaimer: Artwork has been modified by the removal of the last name. It is necessary to protect the identity of the deceased, their family and associates.

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Founder of the Magazine: "In Our Shoes," Rebecca Conviser, D Litt
"In Our Shoes" is published by the Alumni Association of Morris County Drug Court,
Charles C. Johnson, Executive Director

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"In Our Shoes" June 2020, Featured Writers and Artists

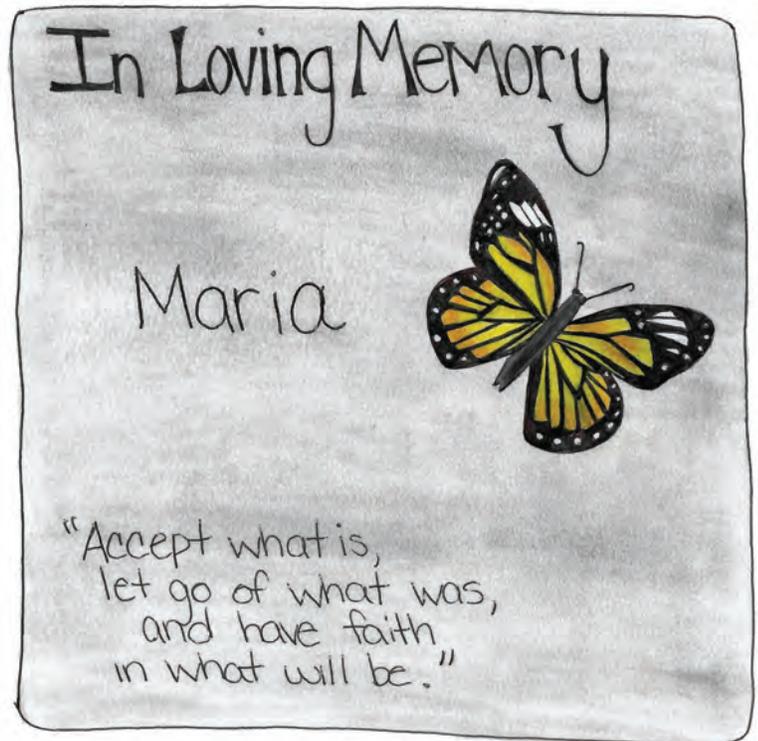
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Kirsten Miller
Sean Miller
Maria Rizzo
Christopher Rubin
Eva Sliker
Tiffany Smith
Jennifer Space
Kerri Sullivan
Dana Villano



To all the ones we lost
We love and miss you!



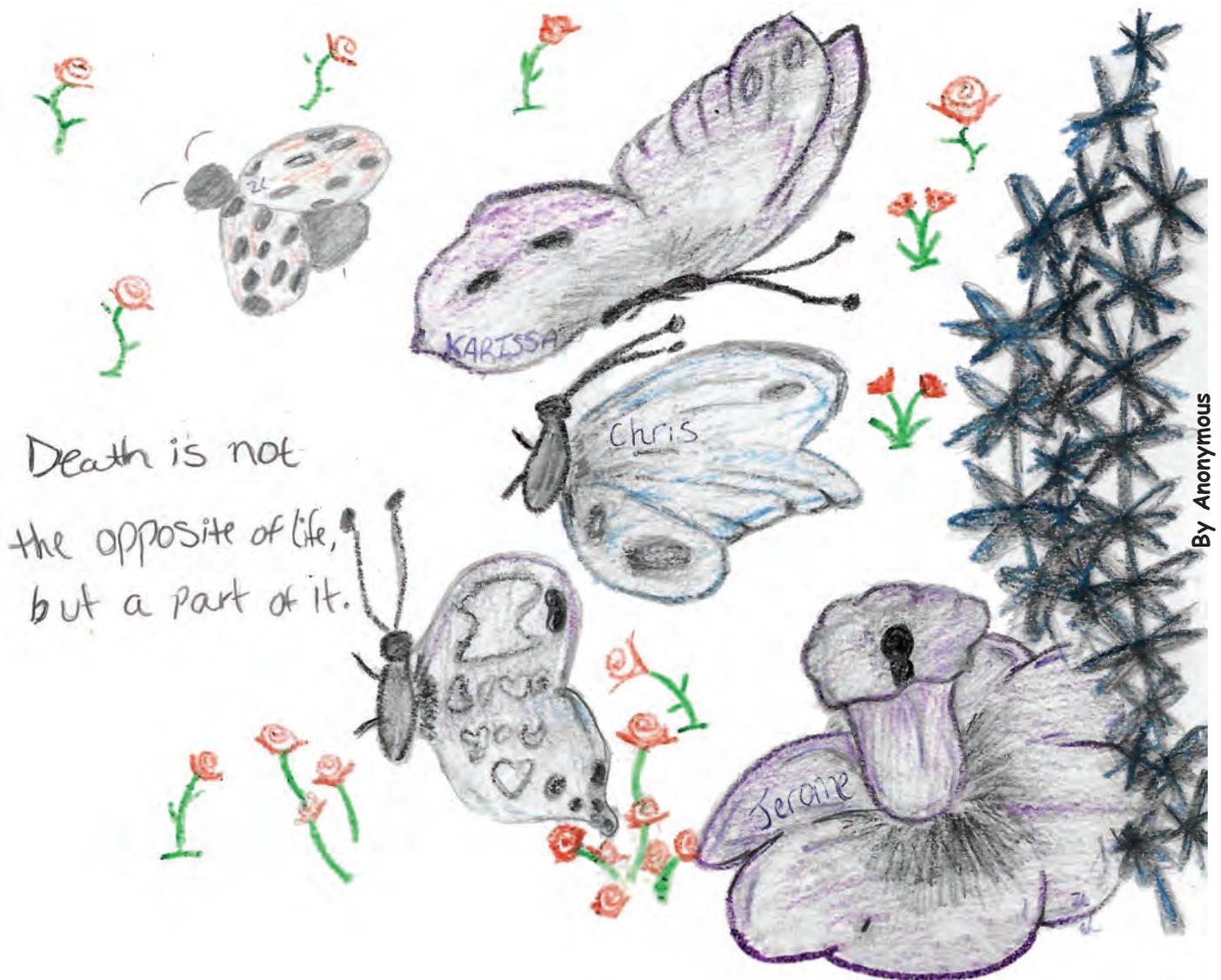
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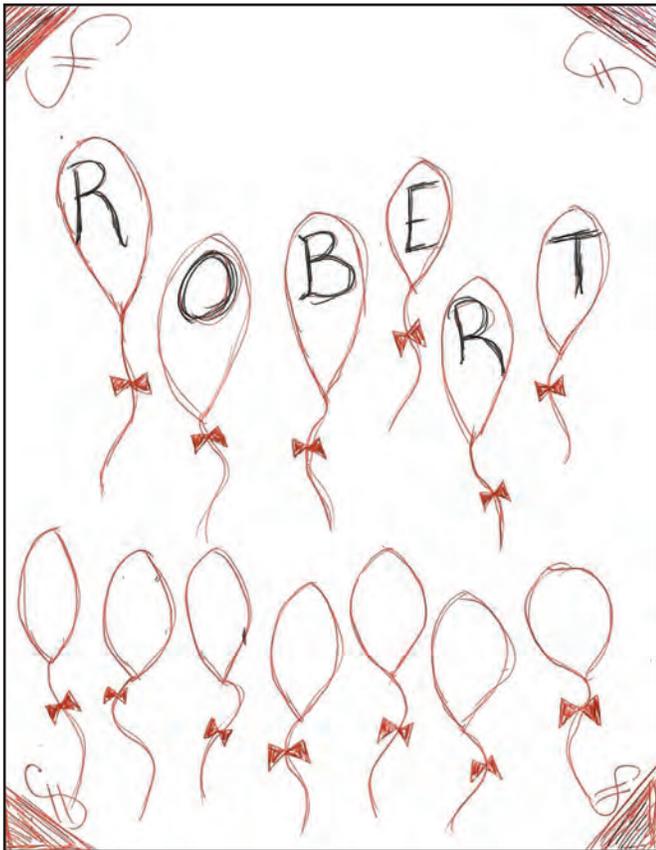
43 pieces of Writing
and Artwork by
anonymous Authors
and Artists

GARDEN OF REMEMBRANCE

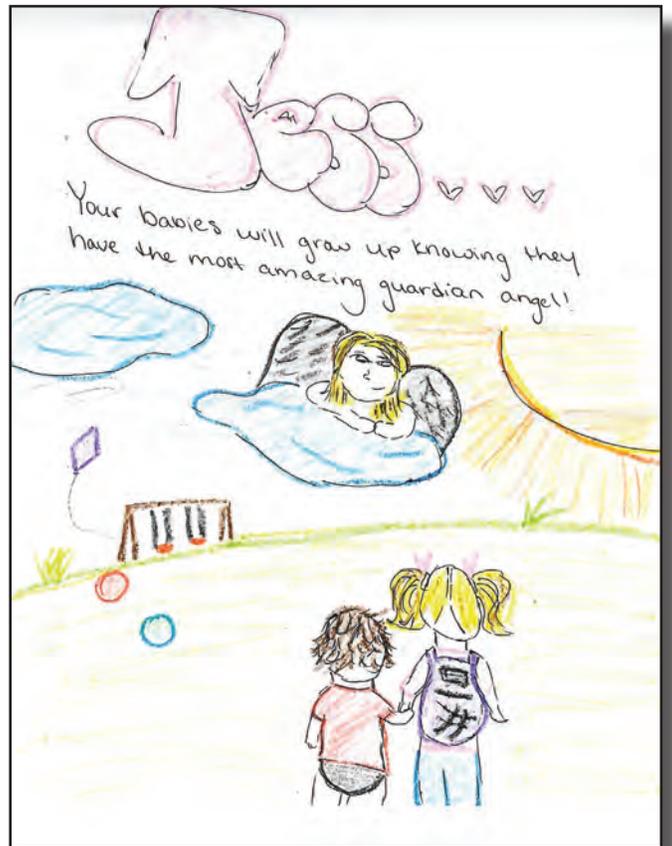
The Opioid Crisis has claimed many of our loved ones and friends long before their time and it hurts us every time we lose someone we love. One way we can honor their memory and keep them alive in our hearts is to create a special memorial tribute to them.

In this section individual memorials are combined in a garden of remembrance to reflect the beauty of lives that touched us in some way and to share our collective grief and hope.

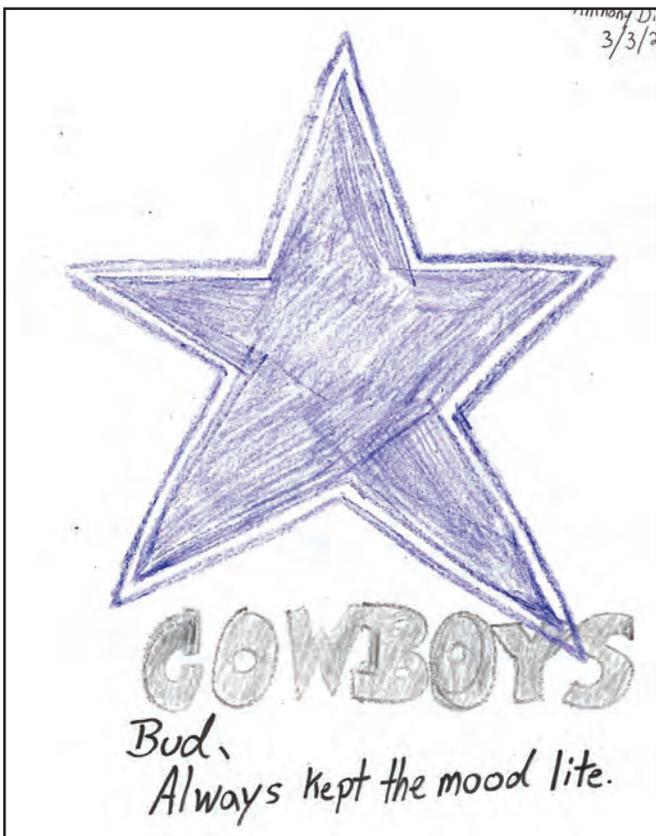




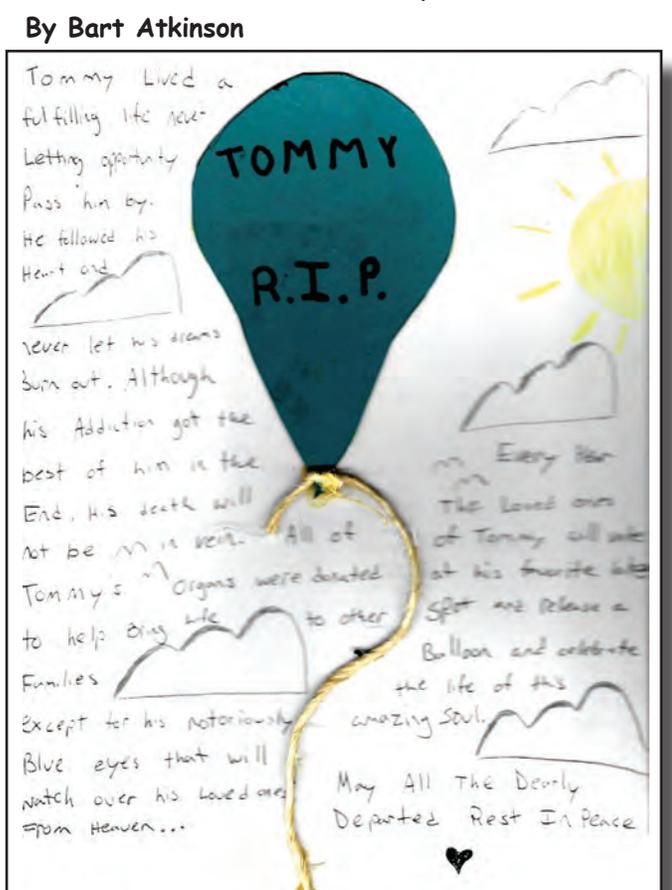
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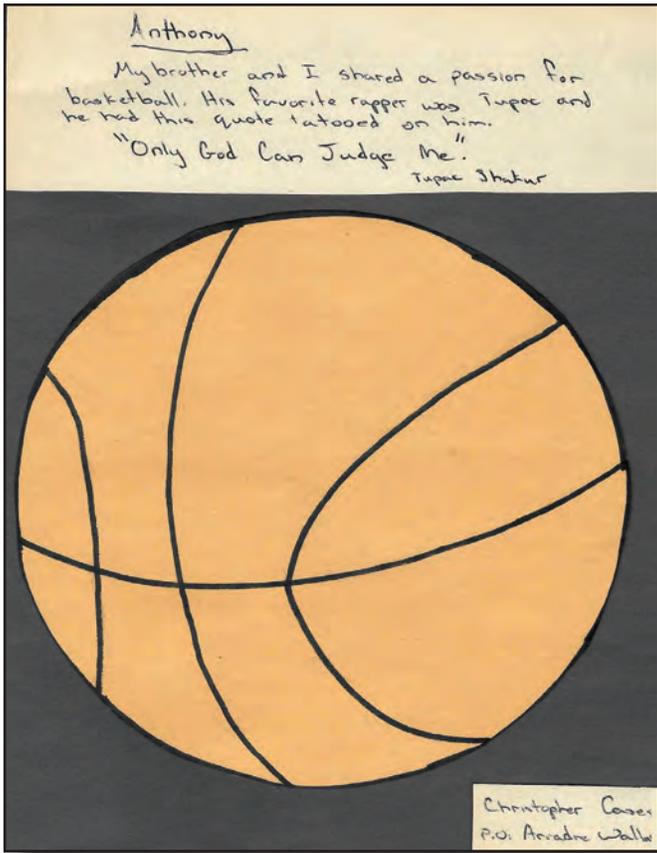
By Alexa Demarest



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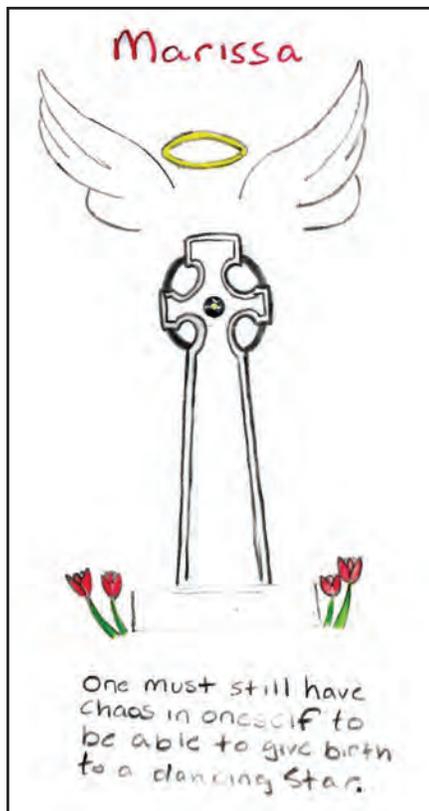
By Bart Atkinson



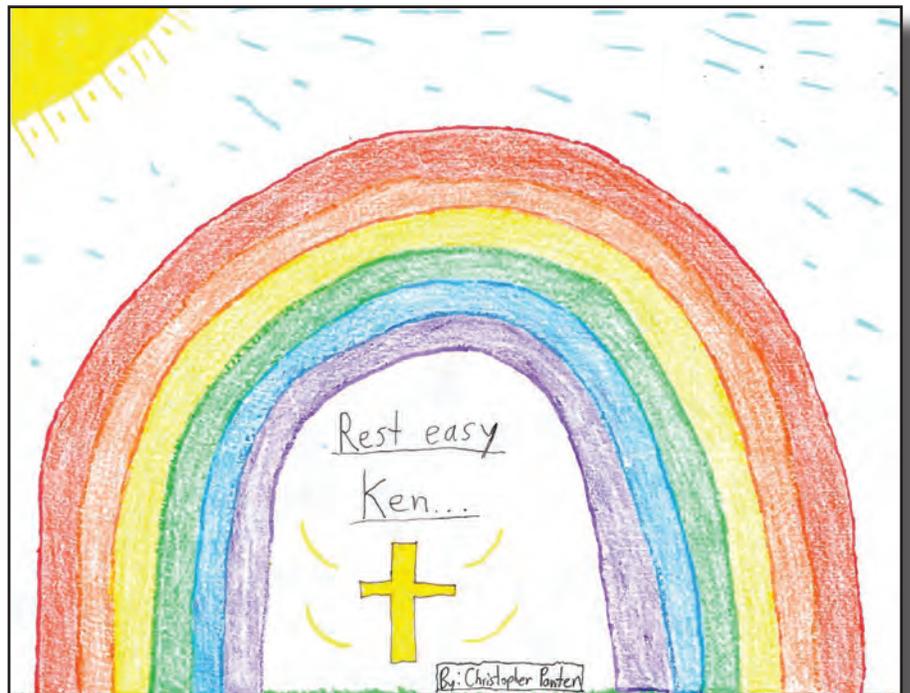
By Christopher Casesa



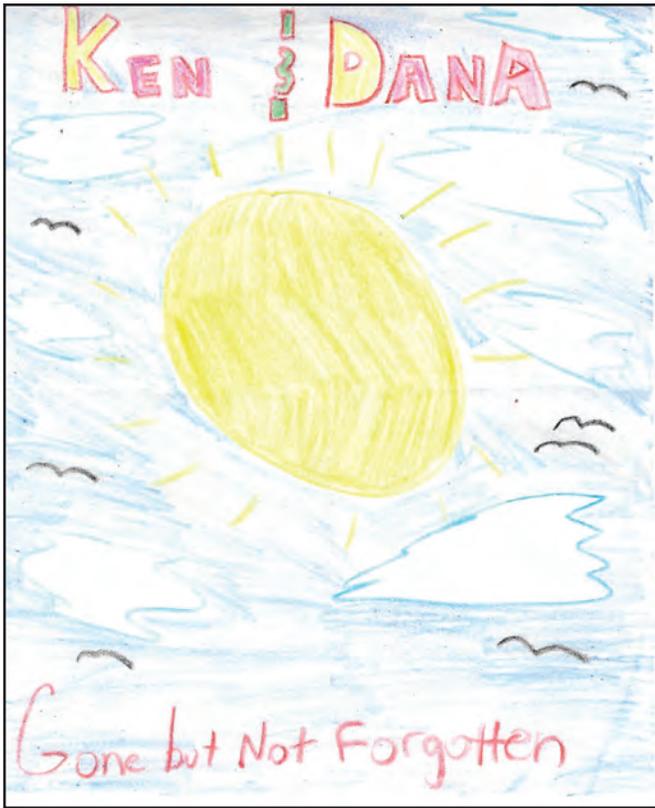
By Brandon Henkelman



By Josiah Occhiuto



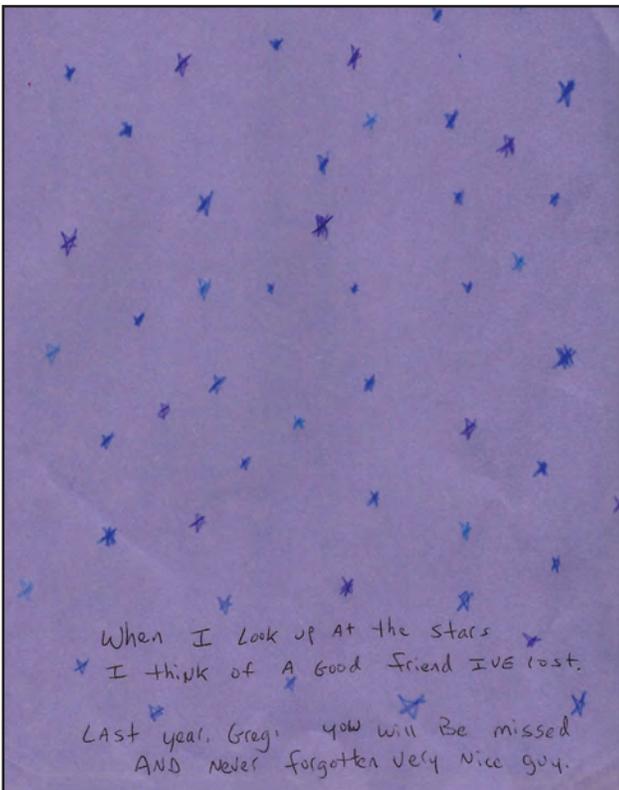
By Christopher Patten



By Dan Devine

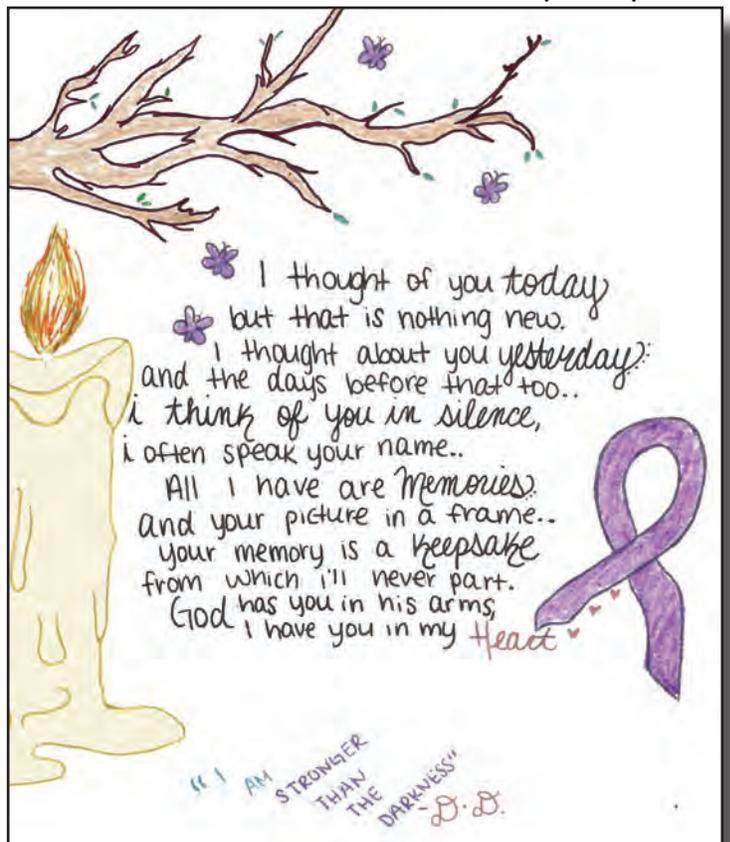


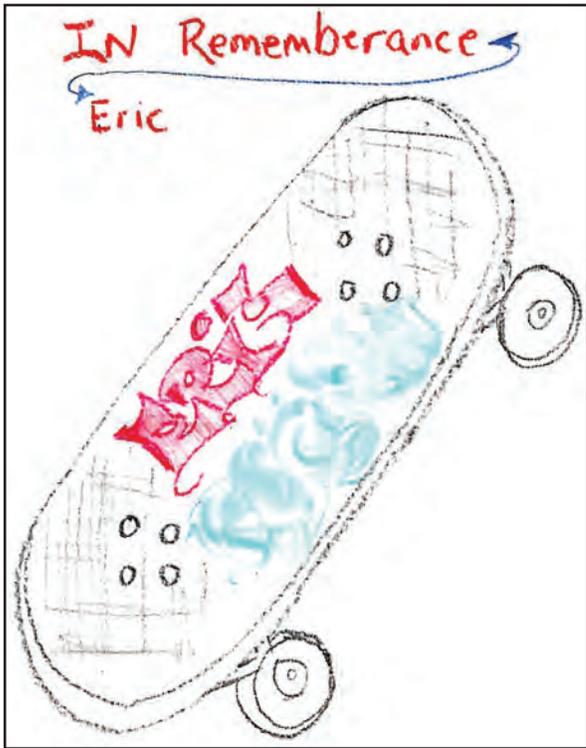
By Elizabeth Headley



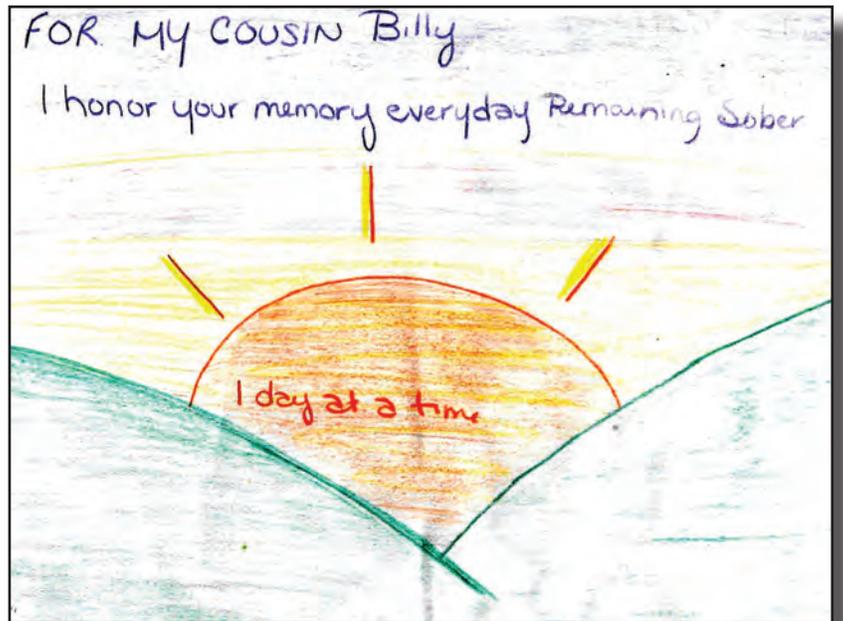
By Eric Manno

By Anonymous





By Zach Pederson



By Lester Hoffman



By Howard Dieterle



By Jenn Van Houten



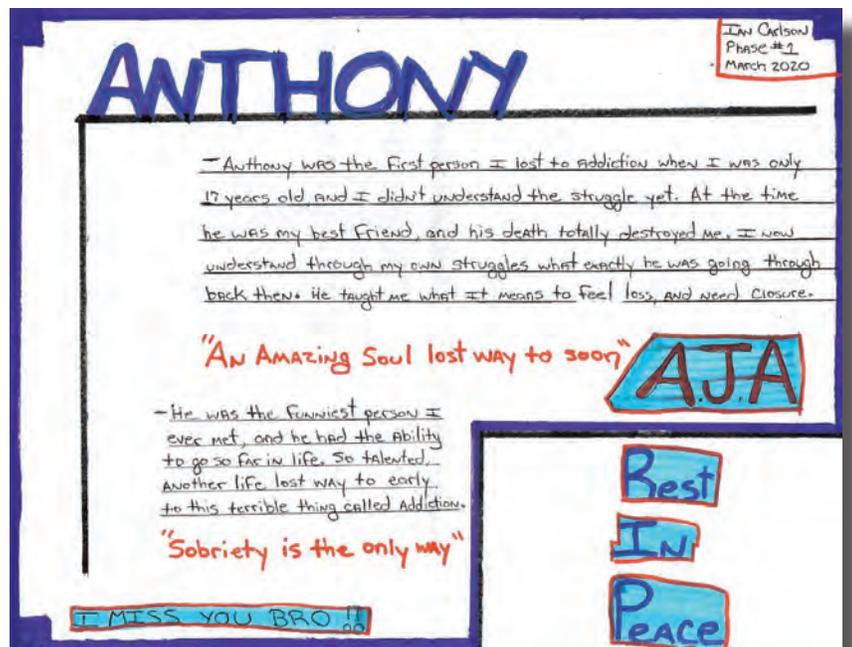
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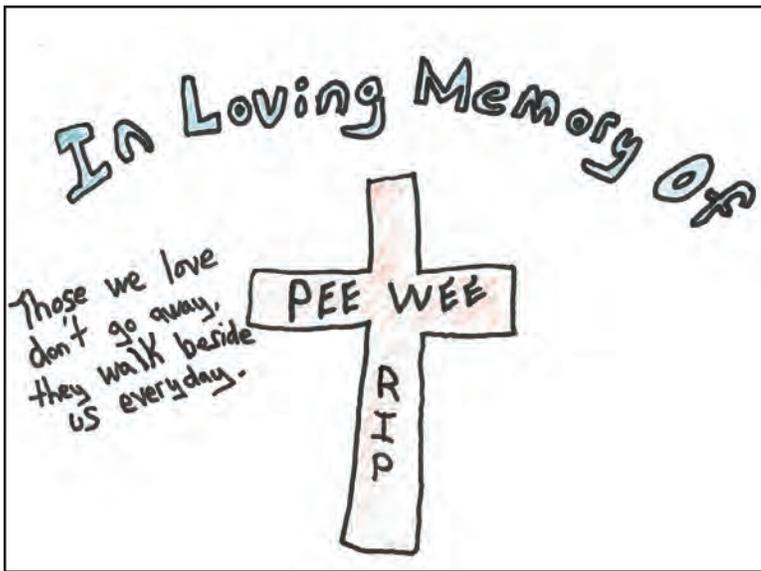
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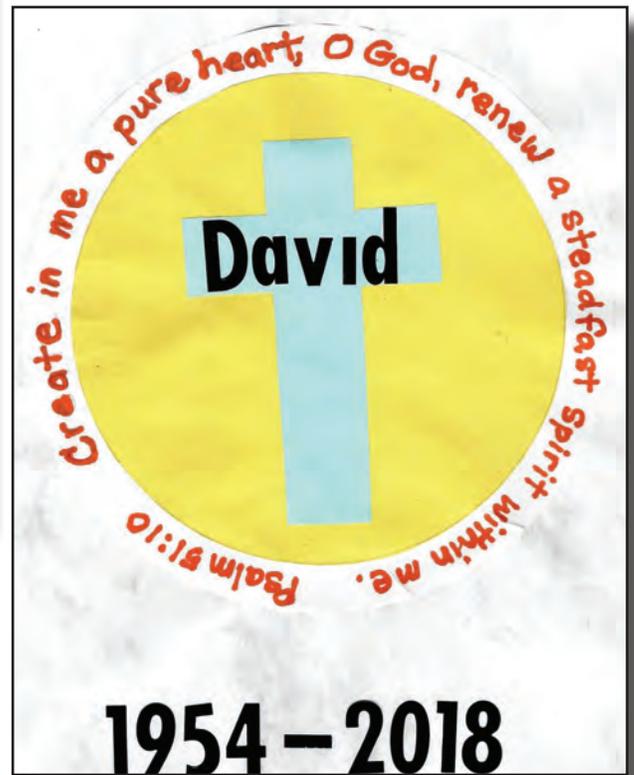
By Melissa Zabriskie



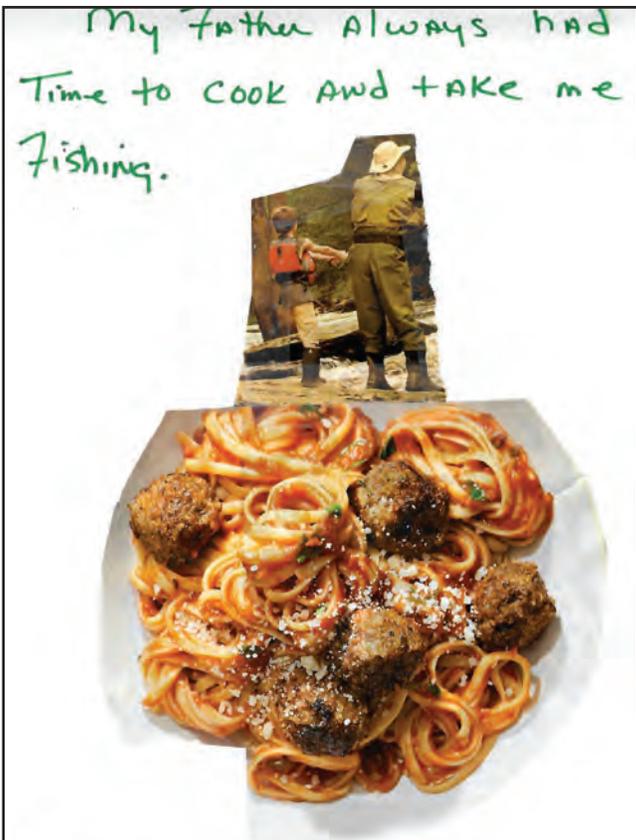
By Ian Carlson



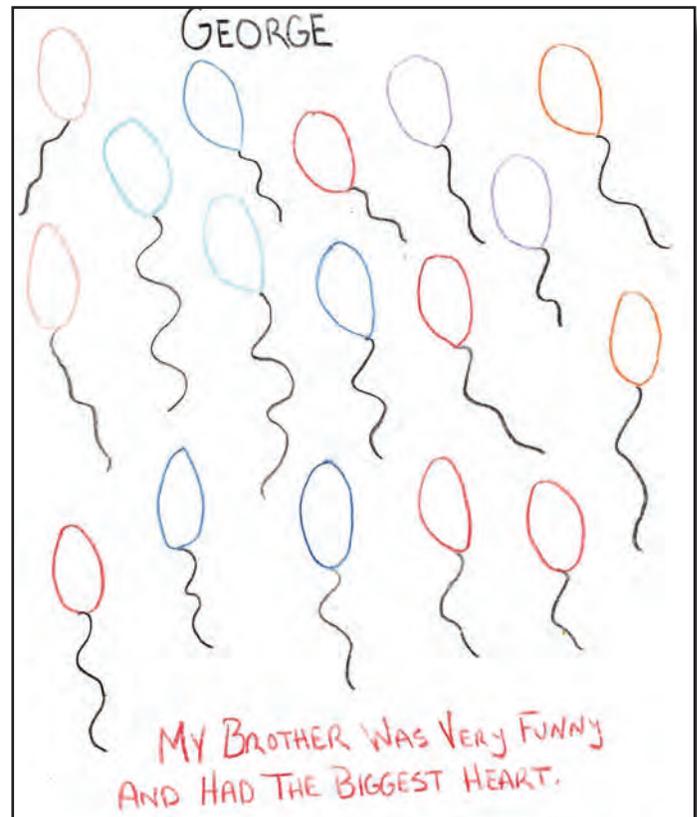
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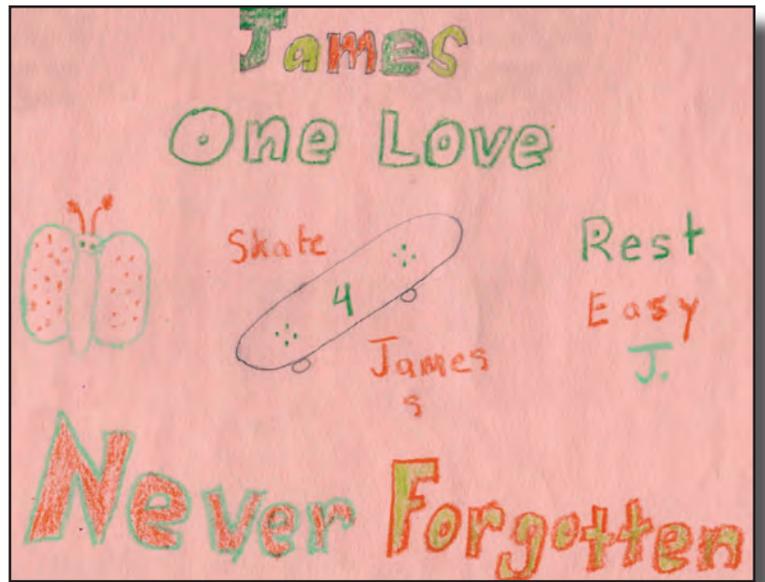
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By Michel Tizzano



By Anonymous

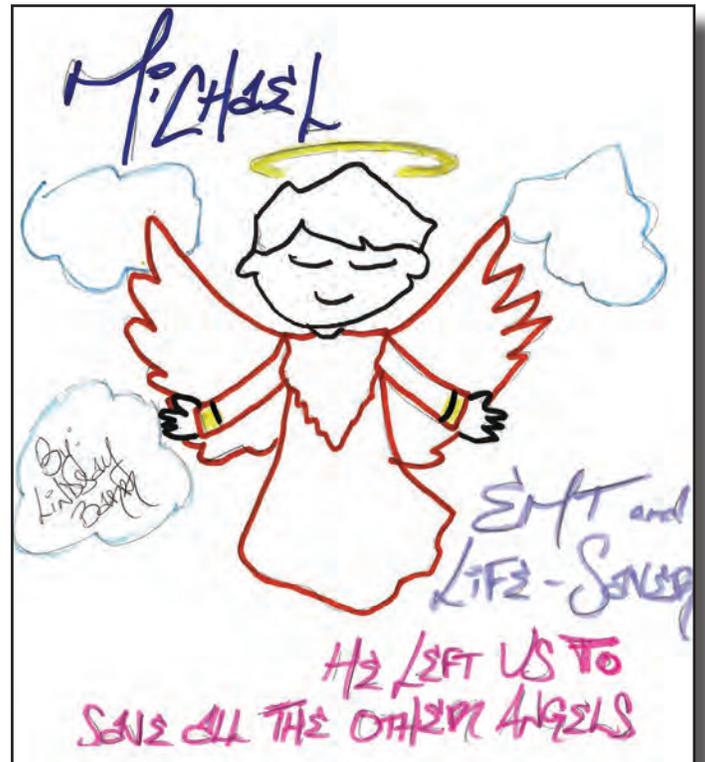


By Mark Critchlaw

By Lindsay Barr



By Ryan Devine

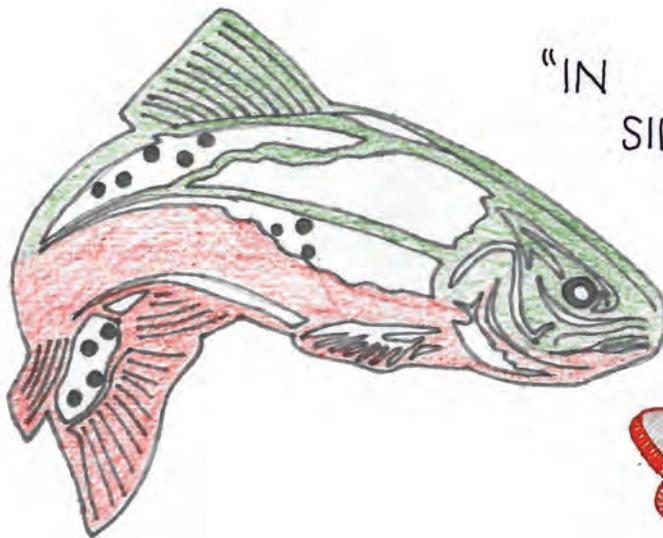
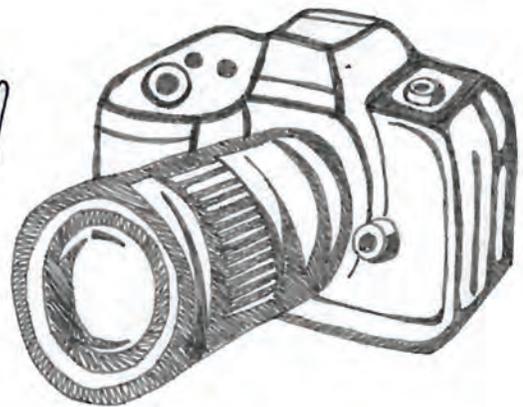


CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

As participants work hard to win the battle against substance use disorder and to maintain their recovery, they recognize that they will because there were other times in their lives when they were a winner. At some time in their past they did something very special, very positive that made them feel really good about themselves and about other people in their lives

In these writings the participants express that special moment when they experienced that wonderful and unforgettable feeling of achieving something they did not think possible and sharing those feelings with the special people in their lives. These memories provide powerful inspiration for their recovery - that what has been can be again!

Zachary



"IN
SILENCE
EVERYTHING
BECOMES
REAL"



By Anonymous

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Kimberly Alworth

The very first time I ever had a “moment of winning” was when I was in fourth or fifth grade and I was one of a few kids selected to have a picture I made in art class displayed in an art walk. The display contained artwork from kids all over the state and only a few from each county were selected, and I was one of them.

I remember feeling so happy and proud of myself for it. I’ve been drawing since I could hold a pencil in my hand and was always very artistic. This was a picture of two tulip flowers that was done with pastels, and for my age at the time it was pretty darn good, if I do say so myself.

What made me feel even more amazing about the whole thing is when the display was done and I received my picture back, my Mom went out and had it framed. It still sits in my house to this day. It made me proud of something for the first time in my life and I will never forget it. It also inspired me to keep up with my artistic skills over the years, and even though I didn’t follow a career in art like I originally wanted to, I still continue to draw to this very day. Honestly, I would love to get involved in Tattooing someday so maybe my career in art isn’t completely lost yet.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Bart Atkinson

One day when I was proud was about four years ago. I was working for a company that renovated retail stores at the Woodbury Commons. I had been working with them for a few years and making pretty good money but there was no more room for advancement and no health benefits in sight. One day a guy came on my job site and my boss had left and I was pretty much in charge for the moment. He said he was with the local carpenters union and he asked me if I was interested in becoming a member. I told him yes because I had heard over the years that they pay well and there are benefits involved. So I went to meet with him after work to find out the scoop. I did some research into what aspects of construction they were responsible for before the interview and though I was pretty well rounded I wasn’t well versed in all of them. When he asked me what I could do I ran down the list of what I researched and he seemed really impressed. He was ready to sign me on as a second year apprentice which would have been a pay cut from what I was making but there would be benefits and potential to work towards a full journeyman book which would increase my income substantially. I shook his hand and agreed to it, but told him I needed two weeks for my old job. He respected that. Later on that evening he called me back and said that he was so impressed with the interview that he wanted to start me on a trial period as a full journeyman and if I could hack it, then they would let me skip the apprenticeship. I was ready for the challenge. So when I started I felt pretty confident that I could hang with any of these guys, but I soon learned how green I actually was. Fortunately, they paired me up with a real good guy who I got along with very well and he really showed me how to work safely and efficiently. I picked up on a lot very quickly and when my trial period was up they let me start as a full book journeyman.

I was so proud of myself when all of this happened not only because I acquired a career, but all the years I spent learning construction finally paid off and I was given a real shot at a really good job. I still have my book and pay my dues but I haven’t been active since December of last year. Hopefully once things loosen up a bit with drug court I can seek out some union employment and get back toward working for my future instead of just living paycheck to paycheck like I am now.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

One very special moment in my life was seeing my twin daughters be born. It was the best moment in my life. Seeing those two beautiful faces enter this world was amazing and it literally gave me all the motivation to succeed in Drug Court. Seeing them showed me there was more to life than the way I was living my life. So those two little girls give me the strength and hope to maintain a sober life.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: David Benton

I spoke to children about drugs and how they ruin your life. It was in Daytop Mendham, I was 16. It was summer, it was midday at high point high school and I remember it felt so good because I spoke to one of my little sister’s class. On another occasion I also did a recovery show for HBO, it was awesome. I was with one other person from another Daytop, I felt so blessed to be chosen at a time when I was so strong in my recovery. I had so much fun in New York. I had hoped to change a couple kids’ perspectives on drugs and how they will ruin your life if you let them. During my time in Daytop I felt like a winner, I felt like life was going great.

I feel that again now. I feel like I’m a winner for the simple fact I’m not letting drugs or negativity control my life. Life is great when you’re winning and beating addiction.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

One thing I've done is that I made the decision to go back to school. I've been thinking about it for a long time but unable to commit to it. I was physically and mentally ready so I did it. I'm 44 years old and haven't been to school in twenty-five years. This summer I just felt ready. A lot of my friends and family were very helpful and supportive. Without the support of them I probably would not have done it. I'm very proud of this. I'm trying my best finally.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

I feel like I'm winning every day I wake up clean and sober, but if I had to narrow it down to one moment, I'd say speaking at a detox. This particular detox I have been to 11 times. Not proud of that, but it happened.

I had a little over 1 year clean the first time I went, and walking in to see every staff member know me by name on sight was a little depressing. At the same time being on the other side of those chairs, and giving back to a facility that attempted to help me so much felt really amazing. I didn't share my whole story the first time, but I explained how I'd sat in those chairs numerous times, and if I can do it, they can too.

The second time I spoke there the panel I went with kind of put me on the spot, and I shared my whole story. Seeing a room full of people actually listening to me, and paying attention (which is a lot more than I gave the speakers when I was there) made me feel like my message was getting through.

As good as it felt speaking to them, and having my message heard it was in all reality a selfish endeavor. Sharing my story didn't help me nearly as much seeing other addicts in withdrawal, and remembering how I felt sitting in those chairs. It kept it green for me because I had sat there so many times before.

I walked out of that hospital saying goodbye to the nurses and counselors who genuinely were glad to see me doing well, and I've never felt better about my decision to get clean before. I felt amazing knowing I was giving back to a program and a facility that had given me so much. I felt like a winner every time I shared there.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Thomas Brodhecker

Capturing a moment of winning for me is a great one because in recovery it is easy for me to lose sight of it all. Sitting here thinking it's hard for me to think of one big thing or moment for me to capture. One moment in particular was when I was about six years old. I grew up very close with my family and my parents. My father had an excavation business and his dad has a farm. So from a very young age I was a hands on type of kid. I see pictures of when I was still a baby and my car seat was strapped in tractors, excavators and dump trucks with my family. I lost my dad when I was 18 due to a machine accident but he taught me everything I know.

I can remember back when I was in kindergarten and my dad use to bring me to the job site before school. I can remember the one day we went and looked at a job and it was me, my dad and his workers. There was a pear tree so we got the idea of us picking the pears and me bringing them to school, so he put me in the bucket of his excavator and lifted me up in the bucket. It was early fall and the ground was wet and muddy, but I picked a 5-gallon bucket worth and was going to bring them to school for all my friends and classmates. So I walk into school my bucket of pears and I get to class and the teachers stop me. I didn't realize because I was so proud of myself for bringing the pears in that I didn't see all the mud I tracked in school and the mess I was leaving. So the teachers had to take my shoes and wash them in the sink while I gave out the pears to all my friends. That feeling was amazing. That was my first time when I really got to feel what it felt like to give back to the people around me.

Later on that year, me and my dad were on another job and like I said in the beginning I learned how to run machines at a young age. My dad told this one story for years where we were digging test holes with a machine. It was right after winter and normally my dad would let me dig 1 or 2 and then let me play with my bb gun when the inspector got there. But on this day, he said, "Tommy I want you to dig them all now." Keep in mind I was 6 years old and when I was running the machine you couldn't even see me. My dad met with the inspector and told him to check this out, "I got this new program in my machines that makes it so I can run them through my cell phone." So he had his flip phone out and was acting like he was running it. The inspector was like, "No way." So he went to check and was blown away when he saw me.

Those moments in my life made me feel like I was on top of the world I was doing things that grown men had trouble doing and doing them at a young age and doing them well. My father took the time to teach me and had faith and trust in me which in time, gave me faith and trust in myself and made me realize I can do anything I put my mind to and accomplish a lot, which in turn made me into the man I am today.

I remember these times and sit here writing this with a tear in my eye, not a tear of pain or hurt anymore like it used to be, but a tear of happiness, a tear of joy. I now have that because I was able to work on myself through this journey of recovery, and the gift I have now is giving what was so freely given to me back to others. Then they too, can have a life beyond their wildest dreams. P.S. - Thanks dad for all the memories. I know you're with me every step if the way.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

At the age of 19, I started working as a plumber's apprentice. I worked for 5 different master plumbers over 8 years. When I finally completed 5 years on the books, I was able to take the NJ Master Plumbers exam.

I had taken a class for 6 months, which I did with a fellow coworker, who was also my childhood friend, we went to class in a church basement in Franklin Twp. (Somerset County) where we learned the code book and business and law rules inside and out.

Upon taking 2 exams (plumbing and business law) which took 4 hours, I was uncertain how I did on my business test.

A month later I received a letter from NJ Division of Consumer Affairs saying I had passed both 86% on plumbing and 82% on business and was awarded a plumbing license #10145, and have been in business for myself since 1995. It is an awesome feeling being my own boss. It has not been easy. But now being on Drug Court has actually made a big difference. I find life is less stressful without drugs.

My only drawback is I am not computer literate and do not know properly how to type. But I will be bartering my skills with a single mother who just bought a home that needs a lot of work, so hopefully she will be able to type my next assignment.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

The day I proposed to my girlfriend is my second most positive thing that I have done, my first is becoming sober. This took place last year and we were home. I had the ring in my truck and I was pretty nervous to say the least. We had talked about getting married before and I knew she would say yes but I was still very nervous. We were in our room when I said I would be right back, and I went to get the ring. Upon coming back in the house I asked her 3 year old daughter to say will you marry me. She said yes!

This is the most positive thing I have done, because she helps me through any issues that I have and she supports my recovery. I know that with her by my side I can accomplish anything I set my mind to. She really is the best thing that has happened to me.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

There has been many times in my life that I can think of where I was winning. I believe moments of winning are extremely important in life and in my recovery. Recognizing my achievements is a key factor in my recovery. Being able to think back to certain times in my life that I can appreciate can be very uplifting. It also helps me stay in a very positive frame of mind. Moments when I did something special, something positive, that made me feel good about myself help me maintain my recovery. So thinking back to a moment or moments in my life where I was winning helps me maintain a positive mindset, helps me in maintaining my sobriety and stay focused in my recovery. One of the most recent moments of winning that I can think of is when I completed my long-term treatment program. I did 5 months at Integrity House in Newark, NJ. I never ever thought that I would be able to complete a 6-month program. I thought that I already knew everything and I didn't need treatment! And now that I have completed the program, I have realized that I definitely did not know everything and I actually did need treatment. I learned a lot about myself while I was there. Things about my attitudes and my behaviors that I never even knew existed.

Besides completing the program, I also met a lot of great people! The staff there was great but the other women there were the best. I learned so much from all of them I actually am still in contact with many of the women that I met there. I do consider them friends, but most importantly, I consider them part of my network and part of my support system. Staying connected with them also keeps me in a positive mindset. These women really changed my life for the best and I will always be grateful for them and also for the program.

Learning about myself (the good and the bad) was an experience that I never thought I would have. I learned how to work with others but also how to work by myself. I learned about behaviors that I never knew I had and also how to change my behaviors. It did take a sanction in the Morris County Jail to give me a little wake up call. I most certainly learned from my mistakes (there was quite a few of them). I am grateful that I did make mistakes because

if I didn't, I wouldn't have been able to learn from them. Learning from my mistakes has made me who I am today and I am extremely proud of who I am today!

In conclusion, moments of winning are extremely important in my life and in my recovery. Being able to look back on important and memorable events and times give me the drive to keep going. Of course there are always plenty of moments of winning still out there. Being positive is something that I believe I am doing on an almost daily basis. And completing Integrity House was a big part of why my recovery is as strong as it is right now.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

My biggest accomplishment was actually recently. Me and my girlfriend found our own place and are moving into it on the 15th of this month. I'm 22 years old, and this is my first time going out on my own. This accomplishment was both physical and mental, because without my recovery and mental stability I would never be able to accomplish this goal.

Ever since I got clean I have wanted to move out of my house, not only because of the toxic environment I'm stuck in right now, but because I think that adding on this responsibility is something I really need in my life. I have overcome many obstacles in the past 14 months, and a year ago I didn't think that this would be possible. The moment this became real was when my girlfriend called me and told me that the guy that lived there before left early, and that we could go in there and start painting and putting new flooring down. I am so excited to be doing this with the person who is most important to me.

All this being said, I am so proud of myself. Without a job, setting goals, and my sobriety, I would have never be able to do this. I couldn't even get out of bed when I was using, I literally spent all of my time in front of the television screen wasting my life away. Today I feel so much better about myself and the person I have becomes. I have never had such an optimistic view on life. I'm so excited to see what the future holds! I think this will be my last assignment in this county, so I just wanted to say thank you to the drug court team for everything they have done to help me change my life. I wouldn't have been able to do it without the push you guys gave me in the right direction, and for that I will be forever grateful! Thank you all so much!

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Amanda Conklin

I can remember a time, probably the best time in my life. Long before any drugs played a role when I was winning. My kids were both under the age of two and I had just started putting myself through college. A miraculous opportunity presented to go into business for myself and I took it. I was given a lease to a storefront property with time to spare on paying any rent. A real chance to get things going. Taking knowledge I'd learned from family decided to open an antique store. With very little, if any startup money, I had access to a box truck. With the truck and the store to fill I had work. Meeting people along the way and sharing my amazing story I made many friends and lots of support in what I was doing. Somehow I managed to hold a marriage with two toddlers, keep a great GPA and begin making money in what I was doing. I consider that my greatest win to date.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Ed Cimasko

I have accomplished things in my life that have definitely made me proud, but when it really comes down to it I'd have to say my first year in sobriety. I believe the first year is the toughest in many ways. People sometimes get caught up in proving people wrong and then once they do they are themselves empty and fall back to bad habits. I was that guy. Get sober for periods (months) to show my parents, friends, girlfriends that I can do it. This time I did it for me. I wanted to prove to myself I was capable of being sober. I told myself, hey if you can get sober for a year and it's so terrible then go get high. That one year wasn't easy. I had ups and downs but I stayed with it. I pushed myself. I used resources. Most importantly I shut up and I listened. I took advice. When that one year hit, I didn't even celebrate. I was already focused on one year and one day, so on and so on. My sober date is May 26th 2016 and I still live by this concept. Yes, I celebrate each year with my wife and family but deep down I am not impressed. I stay focused. What's better than 3 years sober? Three years and one day is. I take pride in that one year most importantly though because it showed me that I am capable of living without opiates. I don't say this to just say it, I honestly thought I couldn't live without an opiate in my system.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

In this assignment I was asked to write about “capturing a moment of winning.” I feel my biggest accomplishment in my life would be when I got my blue cord pinned on me. I have been told three times in my life, a 30 year span that someone was proud of me. This was the first time ever, next was actually by my drug court probation officer, and the last time was my father again when I hit two years clean.

I remember it like it was yesterday it was late august at fort Benning GA. It was a very hot day and the heat index was close to 118 degrees. I was in my dress blues with sweat pouring down my face. I wouldn't dare try and swipe it off. They broke formation up with the appropriate spacing. Who we had chosen to pin our blue cords on us filed into formation. I chose my father. I spent my whole life trying to impress him and never could. It always seemed I was two steps behind what he expected of me, yet he made the 15 hour drive to be there on that hot summer day at sand hill. They called my name and gave my dad the okay and for the first time he clipped my blue cord to my right shoulder and said he was proud of me. It was hard to keep my composure, which to be honest I may have let out a smirk.

The blue cord signifies that you are infantry, you are one of a kind. The backbone to the army. We are the only ones with any identifying marks on our dress uniform. We have cross rifles, a light sky blue ring around our collar pins and our beautiful cord on our right shoulder. I mean they had to go with sky blue for one simple reason. Why is the sky blue? Don't try and get all scientific here, there is an obvious answer. God loves the infantry.

I spent 16 weeks on sand hill preparing for that moment. Eight of those weeks were absolute hell, 30 seconds to eat your meal and the time started before you sat down. Four hours of mandatory sleep time and mind you it did not have to be all at once, 20 minutes here and there. Hundreds of formations, countless miles ran, thousands of pushups. I was in the best shape of my life. I was unstoppable. Which all wrapped into the final FTX the final step of training that separated the boys from the men. Five days of no sleep, battle drills, and quick thinking. It was a fully simulated war zone in the middle of nowhere. Food was scarce, if you got 20 mins of sleep a day it was in a hole you dug in the ground. It was 112 degrees all day with downpours every night. Which was wrapped up to a 26 mile ruck march in full battle rattle. I had ruined my summer boots during the beginning of the FTX. I finished with a brand new never worn pair of winter boots. My feet literally were a blister. The end of the ruck march the final two miles are straight up a mountain side they call honor hill. At the top of the hill they had a bonfire setup blasting rock music I will never forget the song I heard when I passed through the archway, it was bodies by drowning pool. That is where my SDS gave me my cross rifles, when he pinned them to me he punched them into my collar, I still have the scar. I was infantry. I passes to be the best of the best.

In my book, that was a win. I think back to these moments a lot in my recovery. Unfortunately as a felon, I can never go back to wearing a uniform. I do utilize the training I have undergone a lot to keep up my motivation to keep going. The military changed me, some things for the better. Some things to be judged at a later date. However I make the best of it. Thank you.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

A winning moment in my life was when I was 16, I gave birth to my son. It was the most positive, remembered experience in my life. I never knew I could love another human being as much as I love him! Losing him when I got started in my addiction hurt, but I knew it was for the best for the both of us. Since I've been clean and sober as of September of this year, I got my custody of him back and the greatest most loving moment of my life has been completed.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Alexa Demarest

Our topic this week was to think of a time where we accomplished something. What stands out most to me is this time getting clean, being under so much pressure getting used to the drug court schedule and maintaining a job, probation, and outpatient. I let it overwhelm me, but I knew I was better than that and I was capable of more than that. A full-time minimum wage 4 am to 3:30 job, then an hour away to group was too much to do. I knew I needed a change. No job was worth that much stress but I still had bills to pay. That's when I had the idea of starting a business so that I can make my own schedule, and I did a really good job. I started a cleaning business and now I'm making more then I was with a quarter of the hours. Now I have time for more meetings and all my drug court obligations. I'm very proud of myself for making my situation work.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Daniel Devine

From the beginning of my recovery I felt that I came out of the gate running. I felt great, had tons of energy and positivity. I was and always am focused on getting the most out of this second chance. I'm an athlete, so one day I came across a Facebook post about tryouts for a semi-pro football team "The Sussex Stags", I was hooked.

I haven't played football since 2001, that's 18 years! That wasn't going to stop me. I had about three and a half months to get in the best shape possible. I went to the gym multiple times a week to run and lift weights. I started to eat healthier and throw the football around with my brother. I trained and trained and trained. I was the most determined I've probably have been in a long time. I wanted to prove to my friends and family that I could still do it. Most importantly, I wanted to prove it to myself.

So tryout day was upon me and I felt ready. Of course I had butterflies in my stomach but who doesn't when you have to prove yourself and show people what you can do. There were about 25 guys there, 99% being much younger than myself, but that didn't deter me. Each and every station I went to, I did my best. I jumped the highest I could, ran the fastest I could, and caught every pass I could. When it was over and I was walking off the field, I was tired, but I felt great.

The wait to find out if I made the team took weeks, but felt like months. The day I got the call that I made it, I couldn't believe I wasn't dreaming. I immediately told my Father and Grandfather. Seeing and hearing how proud they were of me brought tears to my eyes. Still does actually. They were the two people who got me into sports and never missed a game. Just seeing them that proud of me again after screwing up and hitting bottom, made my heart jump. After hitting rock bottom, I never thought I'd be proud of myself again. Let alone someone else being proud of me. Making the team proved to me and others that I'm back and you can do anything you want to as long as you're all in. Doing this during my early recovery really gave me the boost of confidence I needed to push forward at full steam and tackle my recovery. This moment in my life was one of the proudest I've ever felt about myself.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

When I was in Integrity halfway house we use to get extra food trays at night and we would go out at like 10 pm in Newark and feed the homeless. I was 32 years old and I was sober. The time of year was winter to summer and it was very sad to see these people and how they lived so we would even buy blankets and sometimes clothes for them.

There were other people with me at all times, these parts of Newark were dangerous, especially at night. Some people were homeless because of their drug addiction and it was very powerful to see where I could be if I decided to keep using.

These people honestly did give me something and they didn't even know it, they gave me power and hope for myself. I knew that I never wanted to go back to that lifestyle ever again. We had done this positive activity because we cared and knew we could so easily be them. We had been them and we had gotten help and you have to pass it on. You have to give in your sobriety in order to keep it!

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Justin Fastiggi

I celebrated my first sober birthday in 17 years. It started off by working a 10 hour day and then I went to my sponsor's house where I'd normally go on a Thursday for a meeting he does at his house. We had pizza, soda and cake and then it followed up with a meeting. I turned 34 this year. This accomplishment was both physical and mental. This was in the middle of the summer, the weather was great and it started outside throughout the day and ended up inside at my sponsor's house. Yes there were about 15 of us at his house. Seeing someone in AA celebrate a sober birthday always helps someone out that's new and still struggling to stay clean because seeing someone else staying in and having fun with friends lets them see you don't have to go out drinking to have fun on your birthday. Yes the group helped me by sharing how they felt when it came around to each person to share. I didn't build anything but I made a positive memory that night. It involved people singing happy birthday to me while I was on FaceTime with my son which was amazing!! It was a couple small gifts by family and tons of good memories by friends and family. I told the group about my gratitude that night for my family and friends that are in my life now. My sponsor did this because he felt I deserved to have cake with everyone. If it wasn't a Thursday I would have probably been home just having cake with my brother and parents. I felt amazing about having this happen. It had been so long since I had a sober birthday with no chaos or drama and was able to see my son as well. I was grateful to have a job, great friends I call family now, and the rest of my blood family in my life who are proud of me. I'm so grateful for what God has blessed me with and I don't ever want to go back to the way I was living.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By Anonymous

When I was younger at the age of 11-12, I played little league baseball for Par-Troy West. I had two main positions that my coach had me playing – shortstop and pitcher. I really enjoyed them both, but if I had to choose just one, it would be pitching. The main reason I liked to pitch was because I felt in total control of the game and I was also pretty good at it.

This memory that I am writing about today took place many years ago. My team had made it to the championship game and my coach chose me to start it as pitcher. When my coach first told me I would be pitching the championship game, I was both nervous and excited. Excited because I wanted to prove to everyone I could do a great job like I had done many times in the past, but also a bit nervous because it was the final game of the season and I didn't want to let my team and coach down by having a bad day.

In the days leading up to the big game, I remember practicing outside in the back yard over and over with my grandfather, as we had done many times before. This will always be a special memory to me that I will never forget, since he is not here with me anymore. He passed away in June 2018 and I miss him very much. He was like a 2nd father to me growing up.

The day of the big game I remember having my parents bring me to the field two hours early just to get some more practice time in. My coach and teammates arrived a short time after and we all started to warm up and get ready for the big game. That day I had my whole family there to support me and it felt great. The game started like any other. We were the home team so it was up to us to start at defense, meaning I would be the first to take the mound.

I remember blocking out all negative thoughts and just trying to be 100% positive for the entire game. I threw the first pitch, "Strike!" said the umpire. After that the rest came natural. I ended up pitching four out of the six innings and only giving up one run with six strikeouts. Luckily, my team backed me up and played a great offensive game. We ended up scoring four runs and the final score was 4-2; Par-Troy West. I remember the feeling of pure joy and satisfaction when we got that last out to end the game. Everyone, including my family was so proud of me. I felt great! This is a special memory in my life that I will never forget!

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

When the news came that I was going to be a father it was the most indescribable feeling I ever had. I was an immature guy who didn't have responsibilities in order. Now I had another human I was going to have to take care of. I immediately felt like I was a different person I was in shock.

It was not until the night of my son being born for it to all hit me. I was in hospital with my fiancé and the doctor. All of a sudden the doctor said I need you and it was to help deliver my son with him. At that moment, I realized my life was going to change! I was a father!

My son no more than a few hours old held my hand and I was the biggest person in the world. Only for me to have to change everything I knew it was scary and hard. I struggled in the beginning but managed! I had my hard times with being the man I needed to. Then a few months later I got sober and started to be the amazing father that I always wanted to be! I was going to be the best and hardest working dad for my son, he is my world and in all I do, I always have him in my first thoughts. Now my son is almost 2 and I have a daughter on the way. Life is amazing, it is all possible and to anyone reading this you can do it! One day at a time.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Cory Freeman

Something that I did that was special to me was getting an apartment with my girlfriend. I was 30 years old when I got my first apartment. The accomplishment was both physical and mental. We moved in in April. My girlfriend was with me because we got it together. Our realtor helped us a lot with filling out all the paperwork. It made me feel happy that I was able to work hard and save money. It also made me happy because it's nice having a place to call your own. It's a lot of responsibility but it made me feel like a winner because it was me and my girlfriend and 3 other people who were trying to get the apartment and we got it because we both worked hard for it.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

When I was about nine or ten years old I started skateboarding as soon as I started I knew it was something I loved. Skateboarding has brought a lot of fun into my life. It's helped me meet a whole community of people that I would have otherwise not even knew existed. Although skateboarding has brought a lot of fun into my life there's been lots of trial and error that went with it throughout the years.

When I first started I needed to learn the basics one of them was learning how to drop in on a quarter pipe. I was at Randolph skatepark one day at the age of either nine or ten. My mom would always bring me and my friends there to skate. I remember being with my friend Jared. He is still a good friend that I have today.

At the Randolph skatepark they have a small probably about 3 ft halfpipe. Jared and I were trying all day just to drop in. After a few hours of falling and getting back up to try again we both finally got it. This is a memory of mine that carries a lot of weight with it because it makes me realize when I'm not landing a trick or just having an off day at the skatepark that everything good takes time. I still go to Randolph skatepark to this day and skate the halfpipe that I learned how to drop in on so many years ago.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Bryan Halke

A winning moment for me was my dad telling me he is proud of me.

When I was young, my father was really into dirt bikes and quads. I always thought he was so cool when he would ride his dirt bike around the yard, he use to go racing and come home with trophies. I idolized him as a kid and wanted to be like him.

When I was 14, my mother sent me to live with my father. I was so upset over it he bought me my first quad. From that day I was determined to get good at riding it.

Every day after school I would come home and practice for hours and hours. Eventually I asked my dad if he wanted to go riding, and he said yes. But instead of taking his race bike he took a slower older bike we had laying around saying I was too slow for him to take his race bike out. Needless to say I couldn't keep up with him at all...

After a year of riding and practicing almost every day, a couple of his friends came over and were looking at my quad saying how slow they thought it was. Later that night my dad came in my room and said "I'm going riding with the boys tomorrow, you're going too" and closed the door. I couldn't sleep all night I knew in my head that I was going to finally show him that I am a good ATV rider.

We went at 9 am my dad and his friends had had their bikes ready. As soon as we left I realized I still am not good enough to keep up with him. But I stayed with his friends and managed to pass one of them. When we got back and his friends left he told me "I'm proud of you, you turned out to be a good rider after all." (The single greatest compliment I've ever received) with a giant smile on my face I said, "but dad I couldn't keep up with you" he looked at me and replied "don't feel bad, nobody can."

This accomplishment was mental and physical from the years of training I did to achieve this goal. What I learned from this is don't try and compare yourself to others just try and be a better version of you.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

One of the times that was special to me where I felt accomplished would have to be full completing my eagle in boy scouts because it is a long process, from the time I technically started in grade school to finishing eagle in high school requiring motivation, determination, drive and willingness plus time devoting. I was also shorted a year as I was part of the cut off for the time being able to start school. So I was 18 when I finished boy scouts and most of it got done at 17, but had till they were 18 as that is the last year you are allowed to participate as a boy scout unless you choose to become a troop leader.

It requires a good deal of both mental and physical action to even come close to it. We did the ceremonies at the VFW and had our celebration for all those completing it together. Was in November and sort of warm because I remember being overly hot. We all helped each other all the time throughout the time in the troop. We did an uncountable amount of building & making of things the entire time. I especially remember wilderness survival when I had to find to build a shelter out on my own in the wilderness miles from anything without anything besides the clothes on my body and survive for 3 nights.

It gave me a positive feeling and attitude of accomplishment, the percentage that actually complete it was around 5% as most would just end running out of time due to the age cut off and only make it to life or star ranking. Nothing for nothing it taught me a great deal of useful tools and ways to do things. Very memorable experience!

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

by: Elizabeth Headley

When it comes to my children, I have a lot of proud winning moments. The one I will pick is this one...

My son who is a senior in high school now, was in 6th grade at the time, had a "bring your parent to school day." I thought for sure he was going to ask his father. We were divorced at the time and my ex has an awesome career. Instead my son asked me!!! I was shocked! It was so awesome... he picked out my clothes and introduced me to everyone. I knew I was his entire world at that very moment. It was only supposed to be a half day and he asked me to finish the day with him.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Jason Helewa

A moment of winning for me is when I started my journey in recovery this time around. I have never made it as long as I have now. When I first started drug court I didn't think I was going to make it. My first thought about getting to my long term program was to run. I was scared and I thought I wasn't ready. I completed the program which was a first for me also. I came home and started my life and built a beautiful family. I work hard to stay where I'm at in life. I'm employed and provide for my family. Winning to me doesn't get any better than that.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Henry Henderson

If there was ever a moment in my life where I felt I had a sense of accomplishment it was when I graduated high school. I was 18 years old and hadn't done much of anything. Most people in my family never finished high school so for me it was an actual achievement. Seeing the look on my families face when it happened was priceless because nobody thought I was going to finish. I had gotten honor roll up until I was about a sophomore. Once I started getting into my addiction I started failing classes and getting terrible grades and I didn't even think I was going to graduate. Luckily I got in trouble with drugs in school and had to go to an IOP in order to graduate. Having that time to have a clear mind gave me the opportunity to get my act together for the time being.

The accomplishment was definitely mental because the sense of satisfaction I had was overwhelming and seeing my family be happy was an even better feeling. It was nice to finish off with all the friends that I had started school with since first grade. It felt as if we were a team and we all accomplished something together. Most people who knew me and my friends didn't think we would make it to graduation.

I had other accomplishments in high school but nothing compared to the fact that I had actually finished something that I started. I always had a knack for starting something and never finishing it. It felt great to prove the people that had doubted me including family that they were wrong and I was able to rise up and do what they hadn't. To me something that feels great is when people are proud of what you achieved but more so when you're proud of what you have done.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Brandon Henkelman

I graduated from Lincoln Tech with a certification for electrical. It took place at Mahwah NJ. I was 28 when I graduated. The accomplishment was all the above was never so excited in my life and felt awesome about it. It was sunny 10 in the morning beautiful warm day in the summertime, just my other graduating buddies. I was by myself but with a team of fellow friends. I did not help anyone just some of my graduating buddies with homework and in house work. My teacher helped me and some of my friends I went to school with. I started a foundation of graduating and completing my certification. I can now make anything with low voltage. It doesn't involve any of arts etc. And my director gave me my certification of authorization of completion. I did this positive activity to better my life and make more money and to mean something so great on my life. I felt amazing and overcome with emotions that I, Brandon can actually complete this task of graduating with a certification for low level voltage meaning I did this. I know I can overcome anything as long as I put my mind to it

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Dario Hernandez

A winning moment in my life was when I was in high school wood shop. We had this insane project to build an Adirondack chair or a long board. I chose the long board. It took me 3 1/2 weeks to even get properly prepared. Then to form the board another week. Then to let it rest and set. 1 week. In total it took 2 1/2 months. I ended up getting 5 offers to buy my long board so I started making them for customers and it was honestly so encouraging.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Marion Ingala

My life is recovery. Feeling like a winner is a new experience for me. There were more years that I felt like I was a lost cause and more days where I felt like I was losing. My luck started changing as of recently. Deciding to do the next right thing was a choice I made when I entered rehab for the third time in three years. I thought I could do it my way and fought hard to do so. I didn't want to surrender but now that I have, I have never felt so good in my life. Today I am an honest person I have integrity. Today my kids look up to me and know they can depend on me. Today my mother is proud. Today I can be a friend that lends a helping hand without expecting anything in return. I learned you have to analyze yourself and look at your intentions and motives. If your motives aren't good you need to change your way of thinking. That was a challenge for me in the beginning it is not easy being one way for most your life and making a conscious decision to turn your life around and be a new person. The old me I can relate to but will never return too. I am a role model today, for other people in recovery for my children, their friends, and my siblings. My mother recently told me she trusts me. The last time I heard her say that was about ten years ago. It took work, it took effort, it took courage but the feeling I have now it was worth it. I am by no means perfect. I am not where I want to be in life yet, but I am sober and as long as I am sober and working a program I can achieve what I want. It is such a good feeling to look back and see how far I've come, it's even better when people who knew me back then can see the changes in me. The change I work so hard for each and every day. My family helped me so much to be the person I am today, they never gave up, never stopped believing in me. My mother always had a bright side to everything she just wanted her daughter back. She supported me mentally and spiritually and that was more than enough for me. I didn't make this change by myself I had the help of family a few friends because when you get sober you find out who your friends really are, my children and drug court. Drug court plays a huge part in my sobriety because with an officer like Bill and a drug court team like mine, success is possible, and I am living proof it is. Helping people along the way that struggle or feel as though they can't get a day clean or even someone that just needs to vent needs someone to care, it's so rewarding to be that person to help another in need whether it's recovery related or not.

It's an honor to be there for people the way people have been there for me. It plays a big role in recovery, giving back what was so freely given to me has a whole new meaning when you are living it. So feeling like a winner isn't something that comes and goes now because every day that I am sober and I am trying, I win no matter what, no matter how bad my day is going, and I am so grateful for that.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Miranda Kardos

That moment for me was when I had my children. The most rewarding moment of my life. At 24 years old I had back to back babies. My babies are 14 months and 2 months. Having them I felt like I was winning, from carrying them for 9 months to birthing them. It definitely was not easy having back to back pregnancies, it took a lot out of me. My second pregnancy was harder than the first one with a complication at the end. Resulting in having to be induced and have my son early, but I won that moment and had a healthy little boy. Having my children is by far my greatest achievement and helped me become who I am today. I made someone else a father and myself a mother. Every day that I'm living, I'm living for them. Every day I feel like I'm winning at mom life. Every day is a moment I want to capture. The life I have today is me winning.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By Mike Kane

Probably the first day I went to work, I felt accomplished and I knew it was something I didn't want to stop doing. At the time I was a life guard and I helped many kids I can't even remember now what I did exactly but I was there for years and really enjoyed it. Through my life I've always helped people no matter where I was or what I was doing.

I don't harp on it and tell my story that much because I've always been taught that character and integrity was doing the right thing when no one was looking so I can't really think of specific moments. But I feel accomplished every day when I go to work and on my days off I do things for my family that makes me feel great.

I used to be very involved with Antioch at my church and was a leader for a while and I remember touching a lot of kid's hearts and giving them a sense of empowerment. Also showing them they're not alone. All my life I've helped people. And I won't stop now.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Jennifer Krip

I take pride in my job. I love the work I do. I have been doing the same job since I was 17. I do medical coding and auditing. I had a close friend that was in a very bad place in life. Her marriage was suffering, she was behind in her bills and mortgage and couldn't find a decent job. She really had no skills. I felt so bad for her. I prayed things would work out for her.

One morning I woke up and decided I was going to help her in every way I possibly could. I worked from home and she was my neighbor. We each had 2 boys and 1 girl all the same age. I had her come to my house every day and observe my work. After I was finished, every day I taught her how to do my job. It took about six months. I wouldn't refer anyone unless I felt they could do the job. I signed her up to take an assessment. She passed!!! I set her up at a local Hospital to work per diem onsite for a while so she could decide for sure if this was what she wanted to do. She excelled.

I surprised her a few months later with a laptop and I had set her up for an interview with UMDNJ. She was hired on the spot! I was so proud of her and myself. I felt great.

To this day, she is still with UMDNJ it has been about 13 years. She works remotely and is doing great. I am so happy I was able to help her and her family. I believe I changed her life. I wouldn't have changed a thing. If I could I would do anything to help someone better themselves. It makes me a better person. Just seeing how she and her family have overcome such hard times, knowing that I had a little bit to do with their success just always brings a smile to myself.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

A moment of winning for me was when I turned 18, I thought I had my life together. I had a great job with full benefits, I had the girl of my dreams, and I had the stable living situation with all amenities. I know happiness isn't revolving around objects, but I was comfortable, so comfortable in fact that I let loose on some of the reins and started experimenting with drugs gradually working up to the harder substances. It wasn't long before I lost my fiancé, my dog, and soon after my place of residency. Just to think back how stupid I was to let it all go over some plastic wax with powder. Thinking back to then, when everything could be so easy when I wasn't in trouble, when I actually had good people surrounding me, friends and family that would support me no matter what happen to even losing them opens my eyes - everything can change in the blink of an eye. I want to get back to that moment of winning, because I'm having moments of clarity. Every day and I'm getting smarter and wiser enough to put things back into perspective on what I have to do to take back that positive moment.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

My life has gone through ups and downs but most recently I was incarcerated and going through the toughest times of my life. At age 29 I was in heavy drug addiction and doing crimes that were not believable. So my road to success began in jail when I decided to get a job in the cafeteria. When I went to an interview and got a manager job getting paid more than I was before I went into jail.

That was one of the best feelings of accomplishments I have ever felt because I was determined to get this job and with God's help I was able to achieve. I have not stopped winning after that I have continued to remain sober for 14 months now. Also, receiving the one-year plaque from the Judge was extremely proud day for me. It almost made me feel like when I graduated high school. That feeling has made me go to CCM so I can finish my degree so I can add notches to my belt of being accomplished and feeling great about myself. I want to just continue to replicate that feeling and keep on achieving goals in my life that I have set. I always understand times are going to be hard but I'm in a better place in my life, I can handle hardships of life with the support of God, my sponsor and family.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Michael Losey

There have been many times in my life where I was able to make great accomplishments where I could not contain my happiness. Whether it was graduating fire school, EMT school or my GED the list could go on for hours of things that I've done that made me feel so happy and unstoppable. For a 'group' experience we as firefighters were put in unpredictable and dangerous environments to save people's properties or more importantly their lives. As an EMT on my squad we legitimately would bring people back to life and in that instance we both were winners.

The most recent example I have of winning was on a chilled, sunny Sunday morning in a group with 25 other

people. I was at the New Jersey Forest Fire Service headquarters preparing for the beginning of my training of a lifetime career and success. I was overwhelmed with emotions of happiness and joy. It was like a dream that I was living in but it most definitely was not a dream because the cold I felt made it a reality. Everyone there had signed up to become part of a brand new family. One major task we knew we would eventually take on would be to put out fires nationwide while doing a job not many would think of. It has always been a dream of mine and now it was coming true.

The only other instance I can think of that beat out this feeling is that time I'm able to spend with my family and my two little girls. Soon, this feeling of constant winning, unbeknownst to me at the time, was about to come crashing down. I had received a phone call from the District Warden advising me that I had been pulled from the class due to my record and people who had known me from my past not willing to see all the changes I've made to be there. Truth be told I was absolutely devastated and had not felt that low about myself or negativity for a very long time. The feeling of something in my life was over in a way that I could not control. It had meant so much to me even though I had only been there a short time they took a great part of my 'new world'.

However, it's like the old saying goes, there is always light at the end of the tunnel, I believe that. I was told that once my record is expunged I am more than welcome to come back to class and be hired. To me that is my light at the end and my higher power at work for me. If I had completed class I would not be able to be here for my family during some very terrible times we are going through. I would not be here when the person I consider my better half needed me the most. This whole experience I look at like a test that I have now passed. I was able to prove to myself that I have what it takes. All the physical and mental abilities to do this job. It is a test of power and faith although this time turned out to be a loss. This is like a bumpy road leading to a great victory. One day I know I will follow through and complete this class, be all that I can be and fulfill my dream calling. One day I will lay it all on the line doing what I love and passing this true test of patience.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Sarah Lund

When I was in high school I was a competitive dancer, I won 2nd place overall for my Lyrical Solo at a dance competition against a couple hundred other people. It was a huge achievement for me, one of the proudest moments of my life. I used to practice for hours a week, at one point I was in 13 different classes a week; dancing was my life. I won a trophy that day, but I also won self-esteem and confidence that day. My hard work had finally started paying off, and I felt on top of the world when I heard my name called for 2nd place overall.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Tina Andro-Mahboub

For me it's hard to think of a winning time in my life when I've spent most of my life losing. If I had to choose a moment that I did feel like a winner though, it would have been the moment I realized that I might actually be able to have a different type of life. I didn't know what that life was going to look like but I knew it was possible and would be better than my life now. This moment happened around the end of the year of 2005. Before that time I assumed that I could never be anything else than what I was, a loser junkie who would do anything not to be sick. I thought that the life I was living was going to be my life forever or really until it killed me. I use to pray to God every night as I was walking to my area to go trick for him to not change the person I was inside, not to make me an angry, hateful, evil person in my heart because that could have easily happened. But I never asked him to change the situation I was in or the life I was living because I knew it was never going to happen. I honestly believed that the life I was living was never going to ever change and that I deserved the way I was living so I just accepted it would be my life. I'll explain just a little of what my life was like when I thought it was forever going to be this way. I lived in a city where no white girl from Sussex County has any business being there in the first place. But I lived there most of the time alone sometimes with a "boyfriend". I would walk the streets over and over until I couldn't walk anymore and fall asleep anywhere I could like in abandoned buildings, bathrooms in buildings that I could sneak into, or even just on the sidewalk. When I wasn't doing this I was getting into cars or going to random men's houses to make money to get heroin with. I would sometimes, if I was lucky, go to the motel that charged ten dollars an hour and rent a room for an hour to sleep and shower. I would only stay an hour because I either had not a lot of money or didn't want to spend the money because drugs were more important. I did things I thought I would never do over and over. And as the years went on, I didn't even know who I was anymore. I had lost my soul to a white powder and a lifestyle and my soul was gone forever. This was what I had thought. I could never go back to being that innocent, happy, "normal" little girl I once was as a child and teenager. I've experienced so much pain on so many levels that it's not

even possible to explain unless you've been in hell also. I sold my body to people I wouldn't have even spoken to before drugs, I was raped, beaten, robbed, and degraded more times than I can count. This was my life... day after day... year after year only getting worse as I got older.

But then it happened, a little thought that there might be hope. I honestly don't know where it came from or why I all of a sudden thought I could have something else or a different life was possible. But it happened and it grew in my mind from a thought of maybe someday before I die, to why not soon? So what I did was reach out to someone in my family who I thought might be willing to help. Before this little thought I was way too embarrassed to talk to anyone that I had loved and I didn't want to hurt them anymore than I already had so I just disappeared from their lives believing they were better off without me. But that teeny tiny feeling of "just maybe" made me be able to reach out to my mother for the first time in many years. I still till this day don't even remember how I was able to reach out to her after all these years because I didn't remember her phone number or even know where she was living at the time. But somehow I was able to find her and I reached out to her and she told me she had been searching for me for years and from that first phone call we started talking every night. She found me a place to live and paid my rent for me and even though it was just a room to rent it was a castle to me. She helped me with money sometimes so I didn't have to go out and trick and the nights I did go out and trick she made me call her every night when I was done and stayed on the phone with me until I was back home so she knew I was safe. Just knowing that I had one person on my side who loved me no matter what I had done, changed my life forever. And that little tiny thought of "maybe"? Grew bigger and bigger each day and it grew into hope, hope that I could change, hope of some type of normal life without all this pain was possible for me. I knew it wasn't going to be easy but any life had to be better than the one I was living. So, I finally broke down and asked for help and to my surprise I received it.

I'm not going to say that my life is all fixed now because it's obviously not and I know now that I am an addict for life, but I also know that addiction doesn't have to rule my life forever or ever again. And even now with being in drug court and having relapsed after over a decade of being clean, I know that life could always be worse and I still have that hope. That hope has grown from a tiny thought and has spread to my heart and spread even further to the soul I once thought I had lost forever.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Eric Manno

I was 25 years old and it was a nice summer morning in July. I was out in the sea on a fishing trip in Belmar, NJ with my mom and her boyfriend and my Aunt Lisa. It was 7:30 and I wasn't even thinking I might win the pool for catching the biggest fish that day. It just felt great to be out on the boat, because I love to go fishing.

Then it happened, I felt the tug and reeled in the biggest fish I ever caught. Other people on the trip helped me get it in the boat. Someone gave me \$105 as the winner of the pool! I gave my mom half the money. It was such a great feeling, coming back on the boat. Winning just topped it off. I will always remember that day and maybe I will win again going out.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By Anonymous

When I was younger I used to compete in rodeo and barrel races on horses. I was 12 when I won a series of "reserve" championship titles which is basically 2nd place or a draw between the top two competitors.

I had been riding horses for a few years leading up to that point in Colt's Neck, NJ with my younger sister Kaleigh and the help of my grandfather and father. I grew to love the sport and was offered a chance to train competitively. I excelled. The stable where I rode supported me and I rode for them. The relationship between my horse and I was pure trust. I loved it and I enjoyed winning.

Yet competition was not my calling and I soon gave it up. Looking back I think what might have been if I stuck with it.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Kirsten Miller

When I was eight years old and in girl scouts I exceeded my cookie selling goal. I was so young so this was like winning a gold medal! I was beyond ecstatic. This was a huge accomplishment. I set the goal for myself as a young child and I exceeded the expectations. I won a prize for accomplishing this and I cherished this prize, which was a stuffed animal, for years to come.

Growing up in a group of young women being lead by a respected adult has taught me so many important life lessons. It showed me leadership, patience, respect, and most importantly to help others.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

When I was a junior in high school, I heard about a tour that my high school was hosting. It was a tour of the Art Institute of Philadelphia, which is a very good school, located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The year was 1996. I was 16 years old, and I knew that my parents would not be able to afford my tuition for college. My art class teacher was telling me and another student about a scholarship that people could compete for, and they would get their tuition paid for. I was always drawing, and my father was an artist, and my siblings and I are all blessed with natural talent. I practiced drawing every single day for years. I thought that art school would be an incredible experience, and a perfect fit for the profession that I would be working for the rest of my life. I was curious and eager to find out more about this school and scholarship.

It was a 2 day long tour, we left Friday after school, and came back the following Sunday afternoon. The school was in the middle of Philadelphia, and is surrounded by interesting people and interesting things to do, at all hours. I have always been independent, and what better place to learn how to be more independent than a big city? I was told about the scholarship program while I was on the tour, and I had seen some truly gifted students who would undoubtedly be big artists one day, but I still had doubts about being the one to beat out the competition and win. I was anxious about the idea of being alone in a strange city, far away from home. Although I was anxious, I was not scared to go off on my own way.

I drew a sketch of an African tribal warrior, and I wanted it to be as realistic as possible. I did it over and over, until I thought it was as good as it could have been. I showed my art teacher my portfolio so she could tell me what I was lacking, and I had been painting, sculpting, drawing and working with all kinds of mediums that I never really had any experience with. I was satisfied with my work.

To my surprise, I had done a very good job, and my teacher said that I could relax and just draw for fun, and not to worry about my portfolio. I went about my business, and shifted my focus on my grades so I could meet the academic requirements for the scholarship. I remember being nervous about my GPA, but I was always a good student, so I didn't have much to worry about in that area. That relieved me, because I had been working hard.

Time went by, and I actually forgot about the scholarship. My grades were great, and my parents were ecstatic that I was focused and finding success in school. It made me feel great about myself too, because I had no worries at the time, and my parents were giving me more freedom since I was being responsible, and doing really well in school.

I came to school one morning, and my teacher was absolutely brimming with excitement. She made an announcement to the class that I had been chosen as the winner of the contest, and that I had won the scholarship! I was surprised and proud of my accomplishment. My friends all congratulated me, and I felt incredibly proud of myself. I couldn't wait to tell my parents.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Christopher Panten

The first time I really thought in life, wow I really like a winner was when I was 19 and was at the 10th week of my army career and was graduating boot camp. This was such a great moment in my life. I felt as though I conquered life in a way and that I could take on anything life throws at me. Anyway, I was at Fort Sill Oklahoma and I can remember the day perfectly, it was the summer of 2013 and it felt like it had to be about 100 degrees outside. All I remember is sweating through my dress blues. Being away from home was a brand new thing for me. Being thrown into a mix between people I had never met.

Overall the accomplishment felt both physical and mental. First off, it was physical the rigors of basic training are not for the faint of heart. If you are not fully committed to what you have signed up for you will fail due to the physical toll it takes on your body. I lost over 30 pounds in the whole 10 weeks I was there and that is not a lot of time to lose that much weight. We were constantly doing pushups, sit ups and running until the sun goes down. It was hard in the beginning because we were put into red phase where it is all physical.

Second, it was mental. We were constantly being tested on the velocity, range, bullet caliber of every gun that the Army ever used. If you failed to produce the knowledge when drilled by the drill Sergeants they brought you to the side and smoked you (meaning make you do pushups or sit ups till you can't). It was something that made me proud of who I was. Everything I did while I was there consisted of team exercise even to go to the bathroom you had to bring a fellow soldier. If your team members are not up to par in there unit it will put the whole unit in jeopardy of being killed or being taken by the enemy. Teamwork was key in the eye of the Army doing anything solo was not in there vocabulary.

Every week we were always pushing each other and helping each other if a soldier was down. We would talk every night after training for the day and figure what people were struggling with whether it was a relationship back home or soldiers just missing their families in general. It was tough for some people but for me it was what I wanted to do since I was a young boy. It built character for some of us. Some people joined to escape the poverty or the violence in their area and some even joined to leave the gang they were forced into. It turned us into men.

At the end of all the training, during the last week of basic training our Drill Sergeants turned from incredibly nasty yelling balls of fury, to a more down to earth real human. It felt nice that they were talking to us like humans. They talk us what it was like to be in the real Army and all the places they have been to. Graduation was one of those days I will never forget in my life. But I will never forget what brought me to the point all the blood sweat and tears were all worth it in the end. If I had to do it again I would do it in a heartbeat. The relationships I made with my fellow soldiers will last a lifetime and that is something of winning in my eye.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

A moment of winning for me was definitely realizing I was powerless over drugs and alcohol in my life was unmanageable. Shortly after realizing all this and getting onto drug court they brought me into the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous. Getting into Alcoholics Anonymous and becoming a part of the fellowship they suggest you take speaking commitments. I took that very seriously and decided to take the sunrise speaking commitment and hope to pass on my newly found knowledge, experience, strength and hope. Going to the speaking commitment one time while I was speaking, I called the attention of one young man. He must've been about 18 years old and he just looked at me with desperation and was truly intended on listening to what I had to say. I feel like I truly change that kid's outlook, I think he might've felt stuck and thought there's no way out. Then I told him my story and let him know the depths in which I was stuck and I found a way out so he knew there was hope. That there is a way to recover and hopefully I showed him the way. I truly feel blessed to be able to do this today and it makes me feel so good inside. That was definitely a moment of winning for me.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Zach Pedersen

A moment that comes to mind when I think about an accomplishment is when I joined the 1000 lb. club. That consists of totaling 1000 lbs. with your squat, deadlift and bench-press combined. I was 22 years old. I liked the idea because it was a show of strength and not many people could do it. Through consistency, I was able to increase all my lifts to over 1000. I felt really good about it. After, my goal changed to a higher amount of which I subsequently got and have repeated again. I did this because working out is something I enjoy and I am pleased with my success.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

There was one special time in my life that I will always remember. It was for my daughter's school, at the time she was in preschool and at that time at first I was very scared because it was the first time that I was a mother with her kids starting school. Through the whole year I did the best I could to make sure she was always doing the right thing and was able to enjoy school and I guess something I never noticed is that the teachers saw how much effort I put into it for my daughter. At the end of the year, I got an award for GREATEST MOTHER! I was filled with joy that moment was the most amazing feeling I have ever felt.

To be a mother that at first was so scared and always thinking she wasn't doing good enough and always thinking that everything she did was wrong and then to get something like that was a very special time for me. To honor me, the school took me out to breakfast with the board of education and there I was given a dozen roses and thanked for being such a wonderful and helpful mother. If I could say there were a lot of joyful times in my life but this was one of the greatest gifts I could have ever received.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Maria Rizzo

I grew up riding horses since I was seven years old, from 7-25 I rode consistently 6 days a week doing one lesson with my trainer one day a week. I ended up owning two horses, "Splashy" and "Saint" I rode them competitively for years.

I remember my first “First Place” ribbon. It was before I owned my horses so I rode a horse named “Star”. I remember I did my very best that day. I did everything perfectly when it came to the end and time for ribbons, I was so shocked I got First Place. I remember being not only so proud of myself, but also proud of my horse. I remember when I got my ribbon I patted Star and told him he was a good boy and put the ribbon on his bridle. My mom told me I was the only one who congratulated my horse. I was around 12 years old and was so proud of myself! It was one of my best days as a younger person.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

When I was 14 I moved to my dad’s house in North Carolina. He had a small business where he did sales and repairs on ATVs and motorcycles. I would go to school and then go to his shop to hang out and work with him. I loved it. I have always had a desire and passion for motorsports.

Some of his customers raced four wheelers and dirt bikes. I grew up riding but I had never raced. I told my father I would like to give it a try. He said sure. He later bought me a four wheeler that had some work done to it, nothing crazy, to make it raceable.

About a week later we went to a track to practice with some of his friends that raced. I did really well. I was a natural.

So we went and signed up for my first race. I was so nervous but yet determined to give it my absolute best. It had rained hard that week and the track was really muddy. I believe I finished in about 8th place which didn’t seem great, but to me and my dad it was amazing for my first time. At that point, me and my dad were hooked so we decided right there that we were going to build real race quads from the ground up and I would train and we together were going to take this as far as we could.

Fast track a few years and we had invested over 200 grand in machines, the motorhome, and the works. I was now a professional at the age of 17 and at that time I was 10th in the nation. We had some really hard and devastating times in those years with engine failures or I would make stupid mistakes and lose races but they were all amazing times spent with my father doing something we both loved. I didn’t smoke, drink or eat anything that was bad for my body. I was truly 100% dedicated to being the best I could be.

I had well over 300 trophies and plaques. I was so driven by this passion to do my best and always pushing myself to be better. Of course I had some terrible accidents that set me back but we always pushed and made it out better than before.

The better I got the more stress and money came with it. We traveled the country from coast to coast. I had to drop out of school due to all the traveling. My dad was killing himself to afford all of this. It was not easy for either of us.

Me and my father eventually had a big falling out and I moved back to New Jersey. But not without becoming 8th in the nation and learning and making the best memories a son could have with his father. This period of my life taught me a lot about myself and how hard work and dedication always pays in the end.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

by Anonymous

Coming from jail this last time, I knew that I was given a second chance and was determined to do something about it. Getting my own trucking company has always been a dream of mine, however; I needed to receive my CDL first. I found work with a friend, saved up the money, and made a date for my test. Unfortunately, I failed the first two times and was starting to lose focus on my wants.

Thankfully I have supportive family and friends who wouldn’t let me quit and with my third try I was able to get my CDL license. Now I am at a job that I love getting the experience that I need to make my trucking company a reality.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

Growing up I have always been very athletic. I loved playing sports as early as 1st grade. Football was my absolute favorite sport to play, but as I got older I really wasn’t big enough to really excel. That’s when I discovered wrestling. After going to my first practice, I fell in love with the sport. My coaches always told me I was made for this sport. Being smaller I really was able to maneuver and be a lot more agile than my other team mates. I used my tools to vision myself as one of the best in my years in the sport. I went to the state championships 5 times and was able to win 3 times. This was a wonderful time in my life. I worked hard and I made my vision come true.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By Anonymous

The time in my life that was most positive and rewarding was when I established myself at a company and was promoted multiple times. Ultimately receiving the job of Project Manager. I had been clean, at that time, for 3 years and had worked hard for that position. It started out right when I got out of prison. I did almost 2 years in prison and upon my release, I had quickly secured a job for this company as a delivery driver transporting doors and door hardware to NYC and major construction companies in the Tri State area. I eventually became very efficient at this and took on more responsibilities. I then started to manage their whole warehouse by myself, upon this promotion I spent half my time in the warehouse and the other half making connections with my direct supervisor and owner. Eventually I told them I want a future in this company and I want to do more. They slowly but steadily trained me to become a project manager for the company. I went from a simple delivery driver to having my own office. This memory stuck to me I was honest from the beginning with my boss about my drug history, and criminal background, and knowing this he gave me a chance. During these three years I shocked everyone around me. My family was proud and RELIED on me. It was one of the greatest feelings I've ever felt. And this memory that I hold on to now, that I will work hard for to just get back. I hope to one day become the man I once was and to show that I can manage my life and fight this disease.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

Maintaining my recovery is not a problem. What is a struggle, is developing new memories with friends and family on top of the already made ones while I was in the prime of addiction. In most of my memories, whether positive or negative, drinking played a major part. People came and went, died and got sick, babies were born but drinking stayed constant.

At this point in my recovery I no longer want to spend reliving the drunk me but creating and securing the sober me. Creating memories that shows the real me and not the man behind the cup, these last couple of months, I've been doing just that and it feels amazing.

I promised my granddaughter, Lauren, a Halloween costume this year and she wanted so badly to be Uma character from the Descendants. I'm pretty sure she knew I didn't know what she was talking about when I asked her what she wanted to be this Halloween. A few times we planned to go to Wal-Mart to get a costume life happened and we weren't able to meet. Lauren told her mother not to buy the costume because her Pop-Pop (me) would get it. After hearing that I knew I couldn't let her down. So I made sure that the next time we planned to meet happened no matter what. I was sure my daughter would say no when I called and said I was at their gate because it was a school night. To my surprised she picked up and said they were just finishing dinner and would be right out. I was happy because at least it wasn't a NO.

My daughter and grandson and granddaughter met my ride and I at the gate and we all drove to Wal-Mart. Now mind you, I never invited my knucklehead grandson or my daughter but I'm glad they were there because we were searching for this costume for a long time. We finally found the costume and it was way too small for my baby girl. I could tell my granddaughter was about to get upset and before she could her mother found the outfit in her size. Although my granddaughter had her costume, she still seemed sad while we searched for her brother's costume. I pulled her aside and asked what was wrong and she said "what about the wig Pop-Pop? I can't find it". I said to my daughter where is the wig? Her mother looked all over for the wig and couldn't find it. She tried to convince my granddaughter that she didn't need the wig because her hair was braided in color braids. My granddaughter wasn't listening. I decided to look for it and pulled it right out from behind a couple of other things. The smile she gave me warmed my body, the hug she gave me made me proud to be a part of that moment. On the way to the checkout line my grandson notice a sword set that went well with his ninja costume and asked if he was able to get 2 things. When I said yes, he yelled "Pop-Pop is so cool, look Ma". I wanted to toot my own horn at this point. I was 2 for 2. We got back to the house and my daughter made me a plate for dinner and my grandchildren tried on their costumes for me while my daughter and I talked and took pictures of us. Seeing my daughter smile at us was the icing on the cake.

My daughter called her mother to facetime us all and she said "I'm so proud of you Green!" That was the cherry on top.

In the beginning I stated that, maintaining my recovery is not a struggle, being around family and friends who were a part of that past and developing new memories on top old ones were.

Now I realize that being around my children and grandchildren is what keeps me grounded because they are going to love me no matter what. Keeping a smile on their face will be my consistency, and when I can't make them smile I'll let them know how much they are loved and appreciated by me.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

When I was younger I used to go to the Church of Latter Day Saints every Sunday. I used to go with my grandparents, my brother, my aunt, uncle and my three cousins.

I couldn't wait until I turned thirteen so I could be in young women's. Once I was in young women's I was allowed to go to young women camp. It was every summer for one week and other wards went. You made a lot of friends and learned different things. For example, how to start a fire and cook over a fire.

My last year going I was sixteen and it was my cousin Sara's first year going. She was scared and got homesick cause she has never been away from home. I made sure I checked on her every day. At night the girls that were in my tent would go with me to her tent. We would sing to her and the girls in her tent every night.

The last night of the camping all the girls get together by a big bonfire. If you wanted to you could get up and speak about your week at camp or anything you just wanted to share. I was sitting with my friends when to my surprise my cousin got up to speak. She said that she was happy that I was at camp with her. She said if it wasn't for me checking on her and singing to her every night she would have left to go home. I made being away from home easier for her. I was just being a good cousin. It made me feel good knowing that I had helped her so much.

Thinking about it now makes me realize that I'm not a bad person. I have a disease I can overcome.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

I began getting high on my drug of choice, heroin, around the age of fourteen/fifteen. My drug use prevented me from even graduating high school. After having my first son, Marcus, I went back to school and got my GED. My son was my inspiration and strived me in my sobriety and education. I wanted to better be able to financially support us both and give him a future in which he deserves.

I decided to further my education and went to Dover Business College around the age of twenty-four to complete their medical assistant course. I was a single mother raising my son and would bring him to daycare so I could attend school full-time. In the evenings after putting him to bed is when I would study.

We lived with my grandparents in Morris Plains NJ. My grandparents were a huge support system for me. They were very encouraging and never gave up hope on me. Still to this day my grandma is my "rock" and the glue that holds our family together!

I truly enjoyed learning about the medical field and was very intrigued. I even graduated on the Dean's list with a GPA of 4.0 which was a huge accomplishment for me due to the fact that I suffer from learning disabilities and am diagnosed with dyslexia.

In my last semester I had done my internship at a general practitioner's office where I got to practice hands on with patients. I was calling them in and performing a variety of tasks depending on what they were being seen for. I did everything at the office from phlebotomy, EKG's to urinalysis and hearing and vision testing etc.

Once I completed school, I had an opportunity to work for an OGBYN or a pediatric neurologist. I decided to choose neurology where I found out my real passion in helping children. I held steady employment at that establishment for several years and truly grew and flourished in skills and knowledge with my experience. I had received several increases in salary along with bonuses for my performance. My patient's parents and themselves would send me cards with their appreciation for helping them. Every day I would leave there satisfied and feeling good about being able to give back and help others. I was able to provide for Marcus and myself comfortably in a place of our own.

I hopefully see myself in the near future getting back to where I was and my ultimate goal in life would be to further my career in the medical field and work with children. Through my success I believe I found my calling in life and am looking forward to a bright future with my boys.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

A moment in my life that I'm very proud of was completing Damon house. Never in my life did I think I would be able to change my mind set enough to comply and complete an inpatient rehab. My thinking was so messed up and I didn't know what I was doing. I guess you could say accomplishing this was physical and mental because I had to retrain my mental state but also I was there physically and had to behave accordingly. It happened in 2017-2018, I was 26 years old. While I was there I learned so much about me and so much about life. I just needed to become a different person from who I was and it took a lot of selfcare to reshape my brain from my old way of thinking to my new way of thinking. Today I am a very different man than I was before I went to Damon house and I give a lot of

credit to the program because if you go there and really apply yourself to the program it is honestly a life changing experience. This process for me was a very emotional roller coaster I had to deal with a lot of emotions that I kept hidden deep down for years and I can't count the times that dealing with them brought me to tears but to be able to just talk and let out all of the feelings and emotions I had was a very positive life changing experience. By the end of the program it felt like a million pounds had been lifted off of my shoulders. Because for me addiction was such a long drawn out battle because I was so rebellious and when I finally surrendered, I felt peace.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

I have a few things that I have completed that has made myself, and others, proud. First one was getting my GED. I dropped out of high school to move to Hawaii. When I, unfortunately, came back... I got my GED. It has helped with getting jobs and will help with me starting school. At that time when I accomplished getting my GED I was excited for my future. I then made some bad decisions and made poor choices of people I hung around with and ended up with a heavy addiction, which is where my next moment of winning comes in. I voluntarily went into treatment at the Damon house. I didn't graduate but I did complete the program. For me that was an accomplishment for that moment. I maintained a year of sobriety after leaving the program. I obviously didn't learn what I needed to because I relapsed and went on a long run and stint of using again. But I have gotten to the point where I accepted that I can't use and it's led me to not wanting to use. I have volunteered myself to take on drug court after being offered probation. I have felt relief that I don't have that burden of wanting to use and I know finishing drug court (as I am confident and not cocky) will be my next moment of winning that I will capture.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

When I was 8 years old I lived in Little Falls NJ. There was a kid who died on the basketball court so in his honor they held a foul shooting contest for charity. You were split into age brackets and the winners of each bracket won trophies. Basketball was the one thing I loved and I spent all my time playing, it was all I wanted to do with my life. I ended up shooting 78 out of 100 from the foul line. I shot so good I even beat everyone in the bracket my older brother was in and he is 5 years older than me. This was something that made me feel so good about myself because it was what I wanted to do with my life.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Anonymous

It has actually been a long time since I have thought about competitions I have won. When high school came around I grew very shy of doing anything that required me to be in the spotlight or upfront and center. I even stopped doing one of my favorite things which was Halloween costume competitions! I grew up in Clifton, NJ and every year our big park, Nash Park, had a giant Halloween parade. That parade was my favorite thing of the whole year and I would always partake in the costume contests as I was a kid. My Mom and I would always round up and make the best and unique costumes for me to enter in. I used to love having my name called up and winning contests like that. I can remember the excitement and adrenaline and the nonstop smiles all day. I would walk around in all of my glory wearing those first place, second place, or third place prize ribbons. I moved to Sussex County my freshman year of high school and that's when my overwhelming fear of public speaking or being in the spotlight began. I stopped playing all sports or doing anything that required me to be in front of a crowd. I just never felt at home and so out of place in the new area that the fear completely took over me. I still get really big into Halloween to this day and still make my own costumes and go all out for it. But I haven't thought of those contests in a really long time and that was really fun to look back on. Working my program I am slowly losing my fear of being in the spotlight and maybe one day I can get back into those competitions because it's definitely something I love to do.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By: Melissa Zabriskie

I grew up in New Jersey my whole life until I was 16 and my father got a better job offer. So, off we went to New Hampshire in 1999. I was supposed to be starting my junior year of high school but when we went to register I was advanced to a senior at my new school. It was a huge adjustment starting a new life in a new state and in a new school. Things started to become rushed. I had to take the SAT's and start applying to colleges. I graduated high school in 3 years at the young age of 17. Because things were so rushed from skipping a grade, I didn't start college

until the spring. I started school at a local college because of all the changes I just thought it be best to start slow and then I could transfer schools. I ended up staying there and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration in December of 2004. I walked in graduation in May of 2005 on a rainy day but a very exciting day. It was a huge accomplishment to finish school as quickly as I did. My family was very proud and they were all there to cheer me on.

After graduation, I decided to move back to New Jersey where the rest of my family still lived to look for a job. It was a very proud moment for me graduating college and having a degree but it was a tough road looking for a job. Interview after interview until I got a Bookkeeping job. I stayed in the accounting field at a couple different places over the years. One day I hope to get a chance to go back to school to pursue my Masters Degree in the same field.

CAPTURING A MOMENT OF WINNING

By Anonymous

I've always been rather close to canines in general. I've had and raised dogs my entire life after all, but some of the times I've directly felt like a winner were also directly to my canine companions. I could list many experiences where I felt like a winner but these two stick out for me. The first story doesn't nearly lead into the other but I couldn't pick between them so you'll have to bear with me a bit.

My first story begins in Highland Lakes, NJ in the house I used to rent there. I was twenty eight and had decided to breed my boxers (dogs) on top of the fish and lizards I was keeping. My dogs bred sooner than expected, leaving me entirely unprepared. Fortunately I had a spare room so when I woke to squeaking hamster like puppies in my bed I had to rush to locate and contain them and the mother. I had work that day and was sure she had more than the three pups I found in my house so call my friend Mark to come over to watch them until I could come home.

This turned out to be a wise decision since Hera went on to have another six pups one of which was a still birth but Mark's quick reactions saved that puppies life. Some of my fondest memories came from caring for those nine puppies, and my efforts went on to be rewarded when my vet informed me they were the healthiest litter they had ever seen and by the significant sum of money I received from selling them to friends and family. Unfortunately shortly after the sale my breeding pair were murdered by a ... I'll refrain from cursing... but sicko who was living in my house (after the pups were gone he moved out). I didn't find out it was him till years later.

Anyway this did not deter me from keeping and caring for dogs. When I was thirty three I was performing community service at Fr John's animal shelter by walking and playing with their dogs. After finding out my background with dogs I was given more responsibilities. They had me almost exclusively caring for bigger "scariest" breeds like bulldogs and pitbulls and had me partially plan their promotional picnic that year. I suggested and helped run the doggie obstacle course do to my experience with dog training. My finest moment there was still to come though.

You see they received this pair of older female terriers (they were sisters) and one of them had a debilitating back injury. Apparently, her back had been broken and was set poorly. This poor dog was forever cursed to look down due to the hunch in her back from the bad bone setting and her legs no longer worked properly. She would often fall over mid-walk and would be needed to be picked up since her back stopped her from being able to do it herself. Her sister by comparison was incredibly healthy and before arriving at Father Johns had taken to caring for her hobbled sister.

Now unfortunately since the two of them were kept individually the healthier sister would smell her sister and cry endlessly to be with her. It was heartbreaking! I employed them to keep the sisters together but they refused and adopted family after adopted family would refuse to adopt them for obvious reasons. Something had to be done about it. I took it upon myself to utilize my spare time to start an adoption campaign for the sisters on my Facebook. Inside a month I got both sisters adopted by a friend's mother. Finally I could relax knowing they would be happy in their new home, and more importantly together. The family keeps me informed on their new special needs. Fur babies and Father Johns sent out a small pamphlet to those that had attended their fund raiser that I ran for them. Of course they didn't name me but it was enough to know I saved what remained of two dogs lives. Though that didn't stop them from "losing my hours" I needed to report to probation BUT I found a new shelter I plan to continue my community service at.

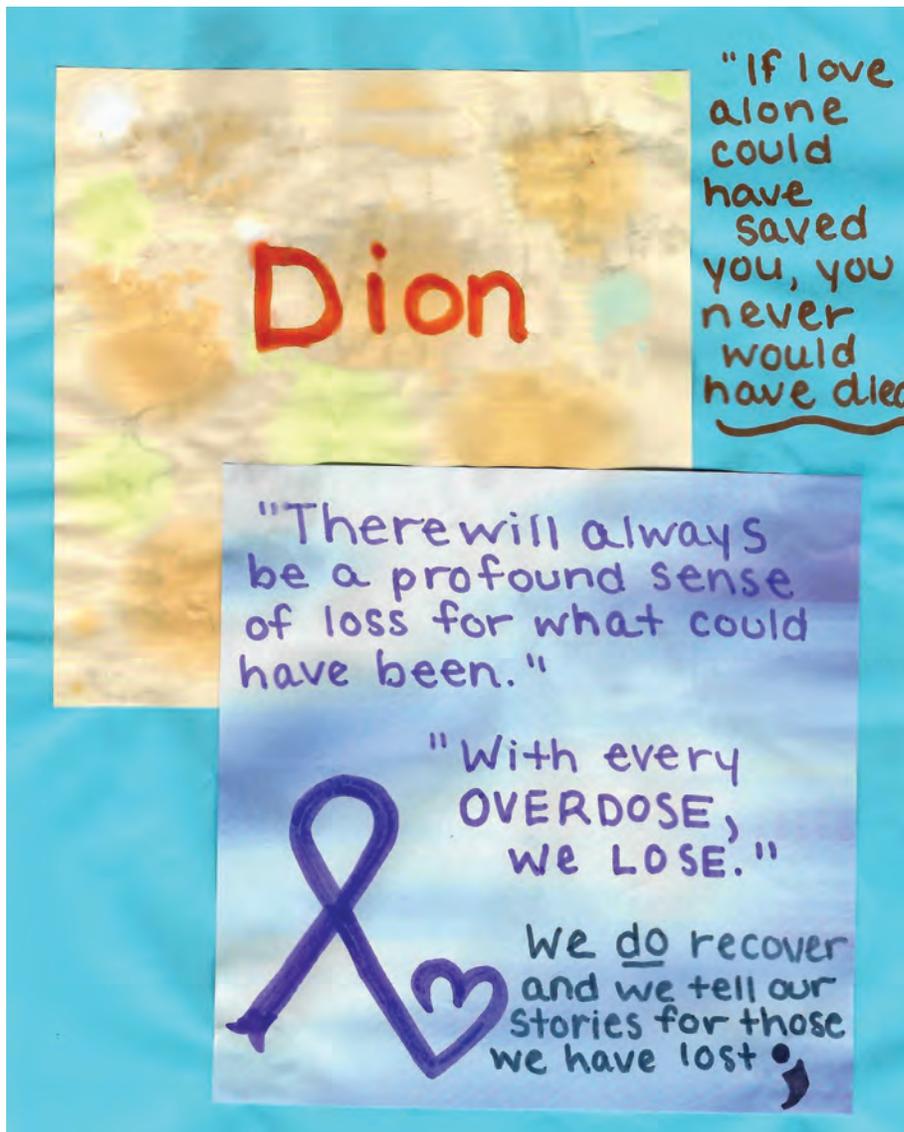
Anyway those are two of my stories that made me feel like a winner. I hope you to some extent enjoyed these joyous but ultimately sad stories I've had. They were a joy to write and relive, though briefly. I find I'm at my best when exposed to animals and will keep animal care and possibly breeding in my life now and in the future like I always have.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

From Victor Frankel's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, the question posed was, "How does one rise above one's worst circumstances?"

Frankel, a psychiatrist who was confined to a Nazi concentration camp during the Holocaust, survived by practicing what he later termed "the last of the human freedoms" - the ability to choose. Frankel asserted that in the worst of circumstances such as victims of the holocaust were forced to endure - the only thing that enabled him to survive was his realization that no matter what he was subjected to, he always retained the ability to choose his response, and in so doing, he always had the final say, not his captors.

On the following pages, the participants react to Frankel's assertion and also express their views on the question, "How do you think enduring difficult circumstances and rising above them can make you a stronger person?"



By Anonymous

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By: Kimberly Alworth

“As long as you have the ability to choose your response, you always have the final say” I agree with this. I believe that you always have the ability to choose how you respond to something, it’s a matter of being able to stop, process, and think about it to respond properly. Some people can’t stop and think things through before responding, I used to be like that. Luckily, now, after calming my mind and finding peace in myself, I have the ability to think and process things before reacting or responding to something.

During my addiction, when I didn’t have money to get any more drugs and I would be sick for several days and just starting to feel a little better, I would get a call from someone asking me to bring them to get drugs and they would give me gas money and some of the drugs for it. I had the choice to either push through the sickness for another day or two and finally be clean and break out of the drug cycle, or give and take the drive with them to pick up drugs and stop being sick. Until I was forced into staying clean by being in jail, I would always end up caving in and getting the immediate relief of getting the drugs into my veins again.

I think the more you experience, positive or negative, makes you a stronger person, as long as you learn from each of these experiences. Going through difficult circumstances can teach you how to overcome other ones in the future which definitely builds character and strength.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By: Bart Atkinson

The Power of choice is a strong topic of discussion. Frankel describes it as the last of the human freedoms. I’m not sure I believe this to be true. I believe that we as a spoiled developed nation as we are, we take most of our freedoms for granted. On the other hand the power of choice is among one of the most important things that we take for granted. There are a lot of places in this world where civilizations don’t have the same options that we do and their choices are limited by their resources and knowledge of possibility but their daily lives are rich in culture and self-awareness. Here we have so much knowledge at our fingertips but such a small amount of knowledge of self. We spend so much time trying to live our lives vicariously thru TV shows and pop stars that we don’t spend enough time living in the moments of our own lives. While Time is passing us by, our lives slip thru the cracks of our fingers like grains of sand.

In reference to addiction, these ideals seem condescending. If addiction is a disease then we really don’t have any choice about it. People don’t choose to have tuberculosis or malaria, it’s contracted thru no fault of the parties affected. All of us drug addicts chose to get high. We chose to have that first drink or take the first hit. Even if our lives were so bad that we needed to use in order to avoid a reality so bleak. That was a choice we made. No one chooses to contract Hepatitis. If we knew that was going to happen we would have used that condom or chose abstinence. Everyone in this day and age of endless knowledge and technology knows what heroin leads to. It’s hardly glorified at all, but we still chose to do that first bag or take that first pill so by these ideas addiction is a choice not a disease. I know that’s not a popular opinion in the recovery field but it’s worth a thought.

Although addiction is a horrible path to choose there are some upsides to it I suppose. From my experience the first few times I chose to get clean especially in my 20’s I felt many years younger for quite some time after the initial horrible withdrawal symptoms. My mind felt fresh my body felt more energy and my sex drive was stronger. Granted I probably didn’t beat myself up as much as some people do during addiction. I’ve also found that my experiences with different substances that I abused gave me an interesting outlook on life and humanity. I’m more compassionate towards those struggling and my ego had been humbled after years of bad decisions and wasted opportunities. Lastly I have found that most addicts that make it into long term recovery are capable of a lot of great things when they apply the same energy that they used to get high to their passions and goals. Those things in mind we can take a lot of good out of addiction if we can makes the right choices and focus our energy on the right path.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By: Lindsay Barr

The power of choice is a deep concept. If the power or will to choose is lost, the alternative is to reap the consequences of the poor choices of others. A good choice is never made during a period of anger. A harsh reaction is hardly a choice. Without a moment to assess the situation and consider all options, a reasonable choice is less likely to be made. I agree with Frankel. As it relates to my life, as long as I’m in the system, all the decisions made regarding my life are not my own. But if I go back to the very beginning, if I made the right choices, I would never have put myself in the position to be detained and then monitored by the legal system. I chose to burglarize cars and

a home. I chose to drive under the influence. My poor choices led me to losing my initial power of choice.

At what I determined to be the end of active addiction, I turned myself in. I was to either continue running from the law and basically everyone else, and suffer the tormenting emotional and mental consequences of life on the run or start the long, grueling process of getting clean. Neither option sounded too appealing, but when I narrowed it down, the long term benefits of getting clean were far greater than those of continuing to use. I could continue to rack up guilt and shame in the streets, or I could slowly work toward getting better and healthier, but have to face all the wreckage of my past first. I deeply feared detox for both the physical and spiritual harm it would do to me, yet a prolonged life on drugs and alcohol kept me in continuous pain that I wasn't even completely conscious of. Ultimately, I decided on a life that would eventually help me get and stay better even though it was the tougher choice. If it's worth keeping, it's never obtained too easily.

I've brought myself to one of the deepest of bottoms. What I experienced on the way down was gruesome. What I became on that trip downward was nothing short of the devil. As I look back on it, I truly hate who I was. I feel I owe an apology to every single person who ever met me while I was active in addiction. Being that I went that far down, climbing back up took strength and conditioning. Those years in addiction were the most difficult circumstances of my life. Having lost all my values through that lifestyle made me realize how great a life with values can be. I've made it a point to restore all the values I once knew and then some. My belief is that morals and values along with faith, create a strong person; that is how life becomes a stable one. A well-built piece of architecture is deemed so by its foundation, its base. All that I've come to know has made me amazed with myself. A strong, confident person is not afraid to share with others their route to success. They want others to gain and know what they know. God did not assign me this trial for me not to share my experience with others. I didn't endure this and get thrown into this fire to stay quiet about it. There is no way I went through all of this for nothing, or even only for my own benefits. My reference of fire has me thinking of the biblical story of Daniel and King Nebuchadnezzar. The King wound up wanting to destroy Daniel and his friends for remaining obedient to their own God, whom these boys considered to be the only, instead of worshipping the King himself (as the King demanded). Daniel was thrown into the fire by the King's men, but instead of being destroyed by the fiery flames, Daniel was purified by the fire—something the King did not foresee. The heat was even increased by seven times to ensure his death, yet he did not die! When I am able to relate my life to the lives of biblical characters, my faith in God is increased. This all being said, I'm certain my overcoming of difficulties is meant to help others who are enduring the same difficulties as me.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

by: Desiree Bennett

The belief that as long as you have the ability to choose your response, you will have the final say is extremely accurate in my opinion. In life, things happen to us on a daily basis. Every action has a reaction. If something bad happens to us, and we choose to be angry and protest, then the same anger will resonate from everyone involved. If we choose to be calm and react in a manner in which we can try to have a more positive outcome, typically the outcome is more in your favor.

During early recovery I was asked by DCPD to sign papers terminating my legal rights to my son. Now I had a choice to either sign the papers or go to court and fight. But if I lost in court, then they would come after me for the rights of my other two children. This outcome could have gone one of two ways. At first I was so angry! I was yelling at anyone I could and making empty angry threats to people that did not deserve it. I was being so stubborn saying that I would never sign those papers! After a little bit of time I realized that I was the one in the wrong. I put myself in the situation and it was my fault that this was happening. Instead of being angry and possibly losing my other children, I decided to stop being angry and I owned up to my actions and signed the papers.

I have been faced with so many different choices to make during addiction and especially during recovery. We all have bad things happen in our lives, it's just how we choose to deal with them. If I was still being enabled by people and protected then I would probably still be out running the streets. I am very grateful that I am faced with difficult circumstances and decisions to make. I am able to choose how my life is going to turn out

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By: Amanda Conklin

Having free will is what allows us to have power and control over our own destiny. As great as it is to have the ability of individual expression it does not come with a price. I believe that having the ability of choice gives us control and power in our lives assuming that we are in a healthy mental and spiritual state. I also believe that we often forfeit that power and become a slave negativity by being in active addiction.

My own experiences prove to me how truly amazing it is to fully utilize our gift of choice. The more I thought about this concept the more evident it became now that I'm sober. My response to various situations would have been so different then they had been at the time of my using. The most profound example I choose to share is very serious and sad, still baffling me to this day.

A few years ago I lost my little brother to suicide. His own addiction had led him to take his life. At this time I was heavily under the influence of heroin, in the grips of my addiction. Since he was my very best friend you can imagine the devastation I felt. Completely heartbroken, I had a choice to make. Either continue down the path I was on, only using my loss and sadness as further reasoning for my own addiction or face going through the grief and pain of this loss, using it as a wakeup call to save my own life. At the time it didn't seem like much of a choice. I was a slave to my drug. I continued to use and spiraled completely out of control justifying my actions with my loss and sadness. Although I wish it weren't like this, it's exactly what happened.

Looking back, I now know that I could have risen above my addiction then by making better choices had I been able to. There is one way this experience has made me stronger. I'm aware of the power of my choices and choose to use my experience to help others that may be able to relate to what I went through.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By: Anonymous

In this assignment I am asked to answer specific questions regarding Victor Frankel's book, Man's search for meaning. The first question is asking what I think about Frankel's belief that "as long as you have the ability to choose your response, you always have the final say?" Well in all honesty I believe that would have to do with the perspective in which it was used. In my use it would be towards my addiction in which it would be true. Every decision and response you make can define a different possible outcome.

In the second question I am asked, about a time in my addiction or early recovery where I faced a difficult choice and had to choose between two evils. Immediately, my mind comes to my final charge. The vehicle I was in for my final charge when it was pulled over. I am very good with the laws and what is required of me by law enforcement agencies. I had gotten to the point even with active warrants I did not need to disclose my information and during a search of the vehicle which could have been dismissed in court, illegal drugs were found. I was to be set free and was told where the closest bus stop was. However the two other people were being charged for my drugs. I was going through withdrawals and instead of walking away I told the officers they were mine and surrendered my identification. Although those individuals got caught later, it was not due to me. I have always set forth values for myself that I had acquired in my military lifestyle.

In the third question it asks how I think enduring difficult circumstances and rising above them can make you a stronger person. Well I believe all hardships I have endured made me who I am today. It has made me compassionate, respectful, and appreciative. Had I not slept in a dug out in a snow storm, or been forced to steal pieces of bread just to eat. I would not appreciate the fully stocked fridge in my house or the fact I control the temperature in my house with the turn of the thermostat. It has also kept me humble to where if I see someone struggling I reach out and help if I can. I will never forget where I came from, what I've been through, and what I have overcome.

In conclusion, I hope this answers your questions for this assignment. I do believe I always had the ability to choose. I have told you of a time I chose the outcome although it was not ideal. Also that my past hardships definitely made me the man I am today. Thank you for reading my assignment.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By: Anonymous

The power of choice one of the questions state that " as long as you have the ability to choose your response, you always have the final say " I feel like that question could go several different ways, the way I take it is that as long as you always make the right decision the outcome of them will become more in your favor, the next question states to think about a time in my active addiction or early recovery I had to be faced with evil choices and what did I chose, I was faced with an evil choice last year when my mental health took control of me and I ended up in a mental health IOP for self-harm, yes I choose the evil to self-harm myself but I didn't choose the evil to relapse with a drug or alcohol, the last and final question states that how do you think enduring difficult circumstances and rising above them can make me a better person, since I rose above that choice I now have the medication I needed for my mental health and I also can now take the right steps in recovery for my substance and mental issues.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

by Alexa Demarest

The quote “as long as you have the ability to choose your response, you have the final say.” My impression on the topic is favoring his opinion. I actually sit back and think about how powerful that statement really is, it’s incredible. Not only being grateful to not have gone through that situation, but for such a wise man to have survived it and bring forth such a powerful message with him. Not only can choices decide which way your fate takes, but also knowing how to pick and choose your battles. All of it going with the free will of choice and by simply not engaging in a response when fully understanding consequential thinking. For me the strongest word in the quote/statement is choice. A time in my addiction where I had a difficult choice and had to choose the lesser of two evils would probably have been when I relapsed and had to choose going to rehab and leave my daughter or fight the courts. I chose rehab because even though I had to leave my child, it was still to have bettered myself. Even though jail time would have been less time, I knew I needed help. And she deserved to have her mother. Difficult situations still made me a stronger person in the end because of the learning experience I had. To be able to get through tough times proves how strong I really am and becomes a life lesson. All my mistakes and decisions made me who I am today

THE POWER OF CHOICE

by Daniel Devine

I agree with Frankel’s belief because everything really comes down to you. You and you alone have the choice to do what you want. It’s called free will. Everyone has it. Now sometimes it may feel like you don’t have the final say, but you do.

When I was in my addiction I came to a crossroads where I could either con my family out of money or sell drugs. I decided to sell drugs because I just couldn’t bring myself to lying to my family about what I needed money for. I thought it was the lesser evil but honestly they both were very horrible things to do.

I believe you learn from your mistakes and it doesn’t matter what you did before the mistake, it matter what you do afterwards. For me when I failed myself and my family, I rose to the occasion and pushed myself to the limit. I had something to prove. That this slip up wasn’t going to ruin the rest of my life.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By: Ryan Devine

Frankel’s belief that “As long as you have the ability to choose your response, you always have the final say” is a very powerful notion. External influences can affect us in profound ways, and we are constantly adjusting in one way or another to environments. By empowering ourselves with the choice of determining how we respond to whatever circumstances befall us, we indeed can retain our human dignity, even in the most negative and harmful times in our lives. Addiction brings us to our knees at times in our lives, and makes us feel as if we have no choice, but if we can consciously hold onto our ability to respond to any situation in whatever manner we desire, we can hold onto our souls, we can retain what makes us human, we can keep and build the strength to overcome our addiction and choose recovery.

In my active addiction, I was faced with many difficult choices. One that comes to mind is a time when I was in the position of realizing that my habit had reached the level of being too much of a daily burden for the financial circumstances I was in. I was faced with the choice of illegally acquiring money through dubious means including stealing and deception, or attempting to start dealing heroin to support my habit. I always tried to avoid theft or conning loved ones to obtain money, although I had at several times in active addiction. This time I chose to start dealing, as it was the lesser of two evils, or so I thought. This obviously was a choice between two paths that ultimately led to the same end, but my addiction fooled me into believing that dealing was a more morally acceptable choice. Addiction clouds our minds and dulls our moral compass.

We cannot grow as human beings without facing difficulties, without being tested and ultimately passing these tests. By being in over our heads and having to dig deep within ourselves to find a way out of a negative or challenging circumstance, we learn about the abilities we possess, the gifts we can nurture, and the emotions and feelings that can empower our mind, body and spirit. Overcoming obstacles is what we must do if we are to succeed at any level in life. Coasting along and avoiding challenges is a very lonely and disappointing way for anyone to live, as that way makes it impossible to reach our potential.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

by Anonymous

As far as having the ability to choose my response to a situation giving me the final say, I mostly agree. He says regardless of the situation you always have the freedom to choose your attitude on life and he's right on that.

When I had to choose between drug court and prison, I chose the lesser of the two evils by signing on to drug court. I really had no clue as to what I was agreeing to, nor was I ready for it. I knew I didn't want to go back to prison and that I do want to live a sober life. I don't even look at it as a tough decision now. I have a positive attitude towards drug court and it really does help.

I believe rising above difficult situations makes me a stronger person because whatever the situation is, I have endured the rough parts of it and I learned what I needed to do to overcome it. Now I am more prepared when a similar situation arises.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By: Justin Fastiggi

I agree that you do have the ability to choose how you respond to any situation. They may had his body in a prison but his mind was still free and was able to choose how he responded to what they subjected him to do.

In early recovery while in a program I was faced with the decision to change my life or take the easy way and continue doing what I always knew. I knew at the end of the day that it was only me making the decision to go take the easy way out or choose to do something different. I chose to do whatever it took to change my life no matter what I was asked to do by someone who knew better than what I knew. I knew at any time that I could just say no I don't want to do this and take the easy way out but I didn't. I went through many uncomfortable situations that I could have easily avoided but I didn't. I chose life, I did not want to let anyone's actions or words affect who I was or how I reacted. Only through my connection with God was I able to choose how I react to situations today.

Going through the difficult situations made me the strong person I am today. In my past I would've avoided any uncomfortable situation that came to me. I would not have done anything to change or grow because I was comfortable with the way I was living.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

by Cory Freeman

I believe that you do have the choice to respond to situations but I don't know if that means you will always have the final say. Because some situations are out of your control. So you can respond however you choose but sometimes it won't change the outcome of your situation. Early in my recovery I was faced with either going to prison or taking drug court. At the time, I thought both of my choices sucked. All I knew about drug court was what I was hearing from people in jail. I ended up choosing drug court. It was a much better decision than going to prison. I think going through difficult things and coming out on the other side will definitely make you a strong person. You think that you will never be able to survive what you are facing but once you do, you know that you will be able to get through a lot of things in life.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By: Eric Gessner

I believe that if you have the final say in anything that you have the ability to choose the outcome. I had to choose drug court instead of still using and going to prison. Drug court is a hard program but changes your life in the outcome. So to me, that was choosing less of the 2 evils and complying with drug court. My life is much better now than it was a year ago. Learning from my bad experiences has taught me how to become a stronger person. By being a man and just doing the right thing over the bad is becoming a stronger person to me because doing the bad thing is always easier than manning up and doing the right thing for myself and my family.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By: Anonymous

I think that Frankel was a very smart and powerful man. He overcame negative thinking with positive thinking in the worst circumstances. The holocaust was one of the worst things to ever happen to the human race and he overcame it with his mind and just thinking positive.

For me under any negative circumstances it is hard to think positive. One of my recent big negative moment was when I got a DWI on drug court and got sent to jail. I was so down and out but talking to my father helped me stay positive. He helped me a lot because even when everything looks terrible he was thinking of the next chapter of my life and how to guide me to make it positive. I thought positive about having to go to a program because I knew

I needed it. The entire time I was in treatment I tried to stay positive by staying in the moment but also thinking about what great things my future holds. I can definitely relate to Frankel because I've had a bunch of negative life moments where I had to stay positive.

Once you realize that you can overcome negative circumstances it makes you stronger because then life is good. You can enjoy things that you couldn't enjoy if you were in a negative state of mind. I think the mind is extremely powerful and if I cut out all the negative I can do great things.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By: Dario Hernandez

When Frankel says "As long as you have the ability to choose your response, you always have the final say" I think that he is 100% correct because let's say someone says something to hurt me, as long as I respond in a positive manner then positive outcomes will happen. I would not "put wood into the fire" and continue the problem and/or make it worse by agitating them or instigating the issue.

One tough decision I encountered in my recovery was to cut off and disown my son's mother. She is mean spirited and doesn't care how anyone else feels. At the time me and her were trying to make things work for our son but she continues to use him as a pawn in her crazy game of chess. I made this decision because she gossips, loves drama, will openly falsify info about me, hack accounts like my Facebook and start messaging people on my friends list cursing them out and stuff.

I personally think that enduring hard / difficult situations and rising above them makes me a stronger person because if you think a callus on your hand. Eventually while doing physical labor it gets worn down, sore, hurts and then it gets ripped off. But after time passes, it grows back... Yeah, I'm still a callus but its stronger, tougher to break and harder to remove. It comes back better than ever. Now think of me as that callus... being in recover has taught me to be resilient, deaf towards negativity and drug court has taught me to endure and persevere. And nothing will ever break me down again!

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By: Marion Ingala

1.) How I feel about Frankel's belief is genius. That is an excellent way to think. It clearly got him through one of the hardest times of his life. If he didn't have that outlook he might not have survived. A lot of things are mental. How you take things mentally and because he was in a good mental capacity he survived.

2.) During my active addiction I did not think the way Frankel thought. My mind was weak and I gave in every time. I was a sad lost soul who had no hope. There were many times when I wanted to stop using but mentally couldn't and wouldn't even try to talk myself out of it. A choice called the lesser of two evils that I had to make was before I got sentenced to drug court. I didn't know whether I wanted to go to prison or actually put an effort in to try and save my life, because I was still focused on the drinking and drugging and both of those options weren't ideal for me.

3.) Well what doesn't kill you makes you stronger is what they say and that is something I firmly believe in. Every obstacle you overcome makes you a stronger and better person. Mentally challenging yourself can be tough, but if you remember you control your environment and the choices around you it's not as bad.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

by Miranda Kardos

"As long as you have the ability to choose your response, you always have the final say." This quote definitely relates to recovery. In recovery I always have the say if I'll get clean or not. When I was at my rock bottom, at that point in my life I was able and ready to get clean. I have the final say against using, against peer pressure, and whether or not I want to be clean, and today I say that I want to be clean and stay clean. In my early recovery I had two options, continue using and die or take drug court and let drug court help me. I chose the better. I chose to take drug court and take all the tools I needed to get clean. I chose to follow the rules and do what I had to do. I chose to live. My entire addiction made me the person I am today. My addiction brought me to terrible places and eventually I was able to rise above my addiction and get clean, which made me a stronger person. Today I'm strong enough to say no to my drug of choice, today I'm able to make a better decision than in my past. Today I'm free from drugs, and that makes me one strong person.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

by Anonymous

The psychiatrist Victor Frankel's belief that as long as you have the ability to choose you always have the final say. This has been used by many gurus throughout life and history. I still have yet to master this thought process. In my active addiction I chose to deal drugs to get money because if I got a normal job I would lose my SSI. I knew that dealing drugs was wrong and I knew that working would have placed me in jeopardy for losing my main income. I ended up in jail and got into recovery. Life is still hard for me. Slowly I'm learning that there's always light at the end of the tunnel just have to endure troubles to face a better future.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By: Jennifer Krip

As far as Frankel's belief that "as long as you have the ability to choose your response, you always have the final say", I believe in that 100%.

A time when I had a difficult choice and had to decide between the lesser of two evils would be when I was on PTI and showed positive drug screens. I chose to fight it and go in front of the judge. When I went in front of the judge, I was not given a chance to speak. I was sent directly to jail. I was later sentenced to drug court.

I later found out I was being date raped (hence the positive drug screens). I was told I had to go to a rehab. I lost my job that I have been doing since I was 17. I also temporarily lost custody of my kids. I didn't know how to handle anything. I made a horrible decision to try to commit suicide. I tried and failed two times within a month. After hospitalization for that, I was admitted to a rehab for twenty eight days.

After rehab I believe I made the best decision and decided to continue treatment. I have been consistently getting intensive treatment for PTSD due to the rapes. For the first time in my life, treatment is working for me. I am mentally and physically doing very well.

I do believe that enduring extremely difficult circumstances, I am doing my best. I feel that I am rising above and believe I am a much stronger person than I ever imagined I could be.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

by: Anonymous

As far as always having the final say I'm not sure I one hundred percent believe that. I think that you will have a better outcome in the long run but there can always be variables depending on the situation.

Making the choice between drug court and prison for a year was a difficult choice for me. My addict mindset thought well if I go to prison I can be home in a short amount of time. Then I thought to myself that I will not change my ways if I were to go away. I chose drug court because I knew I needed help and although I had heard that it was hard or it was a "set up" I took the plunge. Doing so has helped me not only in recovery but in life in general.

Enduring difficult circumstances gives you life experience and teaches you how to deal with situations that arise. Knowing what to do or having a plan in these situations can be very helpful.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By: Anonymous

I feel that Frankel's response is absolutely true and right on point!

For me it was in active addiction and early recovery to make a choice between continued use or go on with sobriety. I chose sobriety to save myself and to have a life with my family and kids. I wanted to live a normal life, I'm older and I spent half my life on the streets giving my soul to drugs and it was time to stop.

By striving every day to stay clean, I keep a network, stick with positive people and never get comfortable with myself or my demons. Keep fighting on a daily basis taking and doing the suggestions for my recovery and normal everyday life, including attitudes and behaviors and with that I will get and be stronger every day.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

by: Sara Lund

It is in the power of one's mind in which they have the ability to determine how any life-changing situation will go. Day to day tasks can feel like the weight of the world, or they can feel like a breeze, depending on how it is perceived.

"As long as you have the ability to choose your response, you will always have the final say."

There is a thin line between reaction, and retaliation. I, for one, have always suffered with the way I absorb

people's demeanor, the way they carry themselves, and most importantly the way they talk to me. It is like second nature for me to come back in full defense-mode, especially if I feel threatened by someone's presence.

Living in active addiction for so many years taught me to always be on high alert, to pay attention to my surroundings, and keep one eye open at all times. In some ways, these life skills can be beneficial, but in other ways it can come off as deceiving. People can take your harsh reaction as an attitude of indifference opposed to understanding where your reaction is coming from in the first place.

I am no longer at war with the world and I need to realize this in the way I respond to others. To soften my demeanor when interacting with people will get me much farther than being aggressive right from the start. If someone notices my guard is up before getting to know me it will change the way they perceive my first impression, and as anyone knows, first impressions matter more than we realize.

Being faced with the decision to rearrange my life or face serious consequences for my actions really changed my outlook on a lot of things. The way I was living was not okay, meanwhile my disease told me otherwise. I was blinded by the destruction drugs were causing, not only to my physical and mental health, but to the people who dearly love me. I was slowly killing myself, and no matter how desperately I wanted to stop, I couldn't find the strength. After being presented with the opportunity of drug court, I really sat down and thought about what I was doing and where I wanted to go from there. No breathing form of life belongs locked in a cage, and as delusional as I was at the time of being taken out of my addiction, I knew I never wanted to be in that situation, or feel the way I felt, again. I had been trying to get clean for years, and what finally made my outlook click was when I had no other escape route, when I could no longer talk my way out of the trouble I had buried myself in.

I am eternally grateful for being handed the opportunity to change my life for the better. It has not been easy; I have faced many obstacles in the numerous months I've been sober. But I know, for a fact, that I can get through anything life throws at me without the use of a substance, because at the end of the day- the high is a lie. Drugs will only sugar coat things for so long until reality comes crumbling down around me, yet again, and I'm left to clean up a bigger mess than what I started with. Just for today, I choose to live a sober life, and God willing, I will continue to do so for as long as I possibly can.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

by: Tina Mahboub-Andro

I believe the ability to be able to choose is very important. In America we are especially lucky to have choices. Some cultures don't have the basic freedom to choose how they want to live, among other things. There choices are made for them by either their families or even their governments. I also do think that Frankel's belief that "as long as you have the ability to choose your response, you always have the final say" is accurate. Once you don't have the option of choice anymore you may be forced to do things you don't want to do. It's not fun when someone forces you to do something or doesn't give you a choice to decide what you want or don't want to do. So having a choice is very important.

I have no doubt that by having the choice to get off drugs and get on methadone is my lesser of two evils. I know that being on methadone is not the best thing in the world but it does help me to live a more normal of a life. Without it I would still be addicted to heroin and putting needles in my arm, running to Newark and Paterson and doing many illegal and dangerous things. Today we are lucky as a whole to be able to choose an alternative to getting high by using things like methadone, suboxone and Vivatrol. I believe without those choices I wouldn't have been able to stop using because I was too caught up in the life. And I'm sure there are a lot of other people that feel lucky to be able to choose this option also.

I concur that enduring difficult circumstances and rising above them can make you a stronger person by giving you depth. Without struggle, you really can't appreciate the small things in life. It gives you the tools to learn how to go through things and bounce back with a new respect for life that you didn't have before the struggle. It also gives most people the ability to empathize with other people who are struggling and going through difficult circumstances.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By: Kirsten Miller

What I think about Frankel's belief is that it depends on what it's pertaining to in your life. Per say you told a company your package still hasn't arrived yet when though it was promised weeks ago and the company reply's with were sorry for your inconvenience we will refund the money and still give you your package. Well if they actually do that then yes you had the final say. However, if you just receive your money back then you in fact did not have the final say. If you're speaking about the final say within your own self, your own mind then I do believe to find his

belief true. However, it's a battle in your own mind between good and bad no matter if you're an addict or not. So your mind can sneak up on you if you're not careful and make you go down the route you said you wouldn't. In active addiction I always had to try and choose between the lesser of the two evils and at that point I really didn't care what happened to me or my life. I probably didn't even weigh out the pros and cons, I probably just acted on impulse, on my first instinct. Today in my sobriety it's more about choosing between what's better for my daughter and sacrificing so much, not only for pleasure, like going out with friends but I sacrifice self-care, meetings, showers, alone time and it takes a big toll on me mentally. Each and every time I endure a difficult situation and rise about I become mentally stronger each and every time and continue to feel I really can accomplish anything I put my mind too!

THE POWER OF CHOICE

by: Zach Pedersen

I agree that you always have a choice. No matter the decision, you can choose how you proceed. Even if the situation seems futile, you can choose how you deal with it.

A time when I was faced with a difficult choice would be when I was getting sentenced on my distribution charge. My choices were a prison term or to choose drug court. I have never done well under supervision (I have violated both probation and parole multiple times) so my initial thought was to get the lowest possible sentence I could and just take the prison time to get it over with. Unfortunately, the minimum sentence I was looking at was much higher than I expected due to my past record. Drug Court seemed like the best possible alternative.

Fortunately for me, drug court turned out to be something I am capable of accomplishing. It is not easy, as it requires multiple meetings, drug tests and court dates (sometimes weekly) but I am able to be home to continue raising my daughter. I have full custody and believe my daughter's life is significantly enriched by me being there for her.

I truly believe that dealing with harsh circumstances in life definitely makes you stronger, as well as making you more able to handle future circumstances that may be worse. When those moments happen, I will deal with them accordingly.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

by: Kassey Potsel

I'm conflicted about that point of view because it depends on the choices. During the beginning of drug court I had to make a choice: go to prison or go to rehab. And to me those were both terrible choices. But in the end I chose rehab and now I'm doing well in my recovery. Enduring difficult circumstances and rising above them makes you a stronger person because you live and you learn. You learn about your actions and their consequences. It makes you smarter.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By: Anonymous

I don't necessarily believe Frankel's believe that basically your reactions to something gives you the last say. In some situations you are forced to do something and then your reactions to it is just how the outcome comes out.

For instance... If I had two choices... One - to take drug court or two - to take prison time... Either way there are going to be rules to follow and how you react to whatever you take is just the outcome you bring into yourself. You can take drug court and be productive and get through it or you can go to prison and do your time. It's all in how you react in a positive way but it isn't your final say. You're just going with the program because someone is forcing you to do something. I don't believe it's your final say really.

I had the option to take 3 years probation. I declined and suggested drug court. In this case I did get my final say because I knew I wanted to stay clean and I wasn't going to have a problem.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

by Anonymous

How one chooses to respond is very important, especially for me. For me, in many instances there are three ways a response can go: Very upset, very level-headed and open minded, or very temperamental and angry.

In active addiction usually any response to someone approaching me about doing wrong was very temperamental and angry, because I only ever wanted to see my side. In early recovery I also opened the door to just taking everything the wrong way and becoming very upset, which was a result of gaining back real emotions, or I would also be very defensive and angry.

The best thing my program has taught me was the level headedness and open mindedness. To stay teachable, because as much as I would like to believe it, I am not always right. Learning that happy medium in between upset and angry was a huge change for me. Learning how to take a second to breathe and think of how I want to respond or react has been a true life saver. I have saved myself from a lot of trouble, and a lot of emotional stress from being upset. It's very important for me to know that no matter how much I may want to, I cannot change someone. I can only change how I react and how I let it affect me. I can either take what someone says with a grain of salt and understand how they treat me is on them, or I can let it completely destroy my day.

Today I have that choice, and to me that is a sense of freedom, to know that no one has the power to make me feel anyway about myself. I believe that is true inner happiness, which to me, is the final say.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By: Melissa Zabriskie

Frankel's belief that "as long as you have the ability to choose your response, you always have the final say" means that you can ultimately choose your own path in life. Even in the worst situation possible you have the freedom to choose your own attitude towards life.

During my active addiction, choosing to go into a patient program to change my life was an extremely difficult choice. It took quite a few programs for me to finally get away from it. As much as I did not want to go to a long-term program at the time, I can now look back and say that it was the best possible choice I could have made. I was away for 8 months between long term and a halfway house. I had tried many different ways to get sober before that but each time I went right back to using.

Rising above difficult circumstances makes you a stronger person. We always need a reason to go on, especially when the road gets slippery. You just have to hold on and remember you will get through the difficult road and there will be better times to come.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By Howard Dieterle

You always have the ability to make a choice. Your response to a bad situation and your ability to handle any situation is your inner strength and really depends on your state of mind. If you're in an angry state of mind your response will not likely be the correct one.

When I was in integrity house, I lost my significant other "Rosie" of 18 ½ years. I was devastated and living with strangers. I made a decision to stick and stay because I was really afraid of where I could wind up.

Rising above circumstances has been a lifelong job. Today being sober I no longer have to even think about the bitter ends that I faced every day.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By Anonymous

I believe Dr. Frankel's belief that as long as you have the ability to choose, you will always have the final say. Enduring difficult circumstances and difficult times will most definitely make the person stronger. We grow from these difficult times and decisions. I believe how we choose how to respond to our circumstances will most definitely determine where we find ourselves physically and our ability to choose. Difficult choices and decisions can make or break us and it's very important to look at that big picture and choose our decisions wisely. By doing so we will always survive or even better, strive for a better and more prosperous life.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

by Anonymous

In my life, as long as I have been on this earth, yes, I do have the final say. But all these years I have been choosing the wrong path. But with the new life I have been given eight months ago, I now follow direction and don't do things "my way." I do as I'm told.

Since I have been in recovery, the hardest situation I have been in was on September 18, 2019 when I started talking to my now fiancé again. I made the decision to try to put our relationship back together and so far, it has been at times an emotional roller coaster.

Through my experiences I have been able to grow and learn from my mistakes. It allows me to stop and think about situations in a different perspective.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By Anonymous

I like the saying that you'll have the ability to have the final say in what happens. Because when in the grip of addiction, you really don't have a choice when you get up but to use to get through the day just to feel normal. When in recovery you have a choice every day to keep doing the right thing and stay clean or fall back into the grip of addiction again.

In early recovery you are always faced with bad situations that could put you in bad spots that would make you decide to do the right or wrong thing. Most of the time in early recovery you could make a bad choice that could take you back into addiction because it's hard to make a good choice in addiction or early recovery. Now if you are strong enough to get through these situations it would make you stronger and make your recovery stronger and a little easier through time but you'll always have to work on it the rest of your life but if you keep trying you'll always have a choice every day when you get through a day. I like to have a choice every day to do the right thing or not. I'll always try and make good choices.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

By Anonymous

What the power of choice means to me is do I want my family or do I want to go to prison. Every day I struggle with making the right decisions, the fact that every day for over two months I have made the right decisions is absolutely amazing to me. In the last two months I have gained the respect of my family. I have built a relationship with my daughter and with my wife through the power of choice it would be extremely easy to make the wrong choice that is why I work so hard at making the right choice. I am glad I am on Drug Court and I go to Capital Care because I think they are giving me the tools I need to make the right choices. The circle of friends I am developing in AA & NA are also giving me great advice on making the right choice. If I feel I am going to make a bad choice, I call my sponsor and he lets me know where that choice would bring me. I am grateful I have so many people in my life who are not afraid to let me know about myself.

The power of choice for me is simple you can be home with your family or you can go back to prison. I am grateful to be given the power of choice.



THE POWER OF YOUR FIRST NAME

In this section enjoy the unique and creative ways in which participants used every letter in their first name to develop an acronym or statement describing their recovery.



By Jennifer Krip

THE POWER OF YOUR FIRST NAME

Adarryal – **A**ddiction doesn't **d**efine **A**darryal. Today I know **R**ight from wrong. The **R**ighteous **y**ou, **A**lways does it right. **L**earn from your losses.

A lways
L earn
A bout
N ew
A ssets

Alexa – **A** person with a heart of gold. **L**ive and **L**ove is my ultimate goal. **E**ntirely ready to live life to the fullest. **X** marks the spot and now it's time for my **A**ll-time best.

Alexis – **A**lways **L**earning from **E**xperience **X**raying my **I**nnner **S**truggles to better know how to change past behaviors and recover.

Alfred - **A**ddiction is a **L**ifelong disease **F**or all my life. I'm **R**eady to **E**ngage **D**edicate myself to my recovery.

Alysehiaa
Always
Loving
Your-
Self and
Ever
Healing
In
All
Areas

Amanda – **A**ddiction has **M**anifested in my life from a very young age. I no longer **A**nticipate **N**egativity and **D**estruction. In sobriety I've found **A**mazement and truth in myself.

A ble to deal with things without self-medicating
M aintaining my sobriety by choice
I gnoring temptations
R eally proud of myself
A mazed at my growth
H umble

Amy – **A**ll of the work I do today from **M**y recovery **Y**ields better results for tomorrow.

Andrew – I will remain **A**bstinent from all **N**arcotics, report to **D**rug Court on **M**ondays and **R**eport to probation **E**very **W**ednesday.

Anthony - **A** **N**ew way **T**o **H**ave an **O**pen-minded and positive **N**etwork this **Y**ear.

Anthony - **A**mazing **N**ot **T**aking drugs **H**as **O**nly improved my life, **N**early every **Y**ear.

Ashley - **A**ll **S**igns **H**ave **L**ead **E**ntirely to **Y**usoff.

Bartholomew – **B**efore I was **A**ddicted to drugs, I **R**eally liked to live life to the fullest. **T**ime, **H**owever, passed and I missed **O**ut on **L**ots **O**f important **M**oments. **E**nough is enough. I **W**on't be held back any more.

Brad – **B**ehaviors was the biggest change I had to make in my life. It was a **R**equirement in order to stay sober. Once I was able to have **A**cceptance with my behavior changes, I was very **D**etermined to stay clean and do the right thing

Chris:
Changing my
Habits to
Recovery
In
Steps for the better

Chris - **C**ontinuous **H**ard work **I**s **R**equired for me to live **I**n **S**erenity.

Christa - **C**hoosing a **H**igher power in **R**ecovery **I**s **S**impler **T**han I thought it would be **A**nd has changed my life

Christopher - **C**oping with **H**ow to **R**ecovery **I**s hard when you've done so many **T**hings **O**f damage. **P**ersonal inventory **H**elps **E**veryone **R**ecovery

Cory – Changing the way **O**f how I was living **R**eally helped me change my life. The last **Y**ear has been great

Crystal - Creating a **R**eal recovery means letting go of **Y**esterday. **S**tand **T**all And **L**et God in.

Daniel – Be **D**etermined and make the right **A**ctions. **S**tay away from **N**egative people and you can succeed **I**n **E**veryday **L**ife.

Daniel – As long as I **D**o **A**ll that is **N**ecessary to maintain my sobriety, I can **E**xcel in **L**ife

D – Dedicated and positive
A – Attitude towards my
R – Recovery
I – If I can do this
A – Anyone can do it
N – Never give up!

Dario
Always
Refrains from participating in anything
that leads to
Intoxicated
Outcomes

Donna – **D**esperation was the **O**nly **N**ecessary, **i**n**T**ernal, motivating factor to surrender and **A**cceptance

D – Deal with time management
A – Allow myself to ask for help
R – Realize I don't have to do this alone
R – Recognize my need for help
E – Enjoy the process
L – Let it go
L – Love myself

Darrell – My recovery is a **D**aunting task that I must stay **A**ggressive at **R**eminding myself that my life is in the balance. I must **R**emove all doubt in my ability to stay clean. I must not make **E**xcuses and continue to **L**earn about myself and take **L**essons from my past.

David – I can **D**o everything and **A**nanything in my **V**isions. I will complete **D**rug court.

My name is **Eric**. Named after Eric the red head Vikings King.

Eric – **E**njoying my life clean and sober. **R**emembering the hard places I have been through in my recovery. **I**mprovement has come to me in my life so things are getting better for me. **C**larity has come to me within time being clean.

Frank – **F**reeing up my mind from drug dependency. **R**ecovery has **A**llowed me to focus on other things. **N**ow I have more time to focus on the important things in life. Everyone should **K**now the power of their name.

Frank - My **F**amily is the **R**eason for **A**ll the **N**ecessary **K**indness

Greg - **G**oing to meetings in **R**ecovery is **E**xactly why I **E**xpress my **G**ratitude

Greg – **G**rateful for my **R**ecovery. **E**veryday I **G**row and become a better person.

Help
Out
With
All
Recovery
Directions

JaCinda – **J**udging by my **A**ctions I **C**ontinue to **I**nspire the people closest to me. **N**othing **D**ictates my life **A**nymore.

JaCinda – **J**ust for today I will **A**chieve my goals. **C**ontinuous **I**mprovement in **N**A will **D**emonstrate my desire to stay sober. Remember, **A**ctions speak louder than words.

Jacob - **J**ail **A**ltered my **C**ourse in life, I could not **O**btain my **B**achelor's

James – **J**ust because you were an **A**lcoholic doesn't **M**ean you aren't an **E**xceptional **S**oul.

J - My Journey has been hard at times
A - Addiction is part of my process
M - My Life was a mess during my addiction
E - Easy to use was an understatement
S - Sustain my sobriety and continue to grow

Jamie – Just the other day I felt **A**lone. **N**ow in **M**y life I have a great Inspiration and **E**nergy.

Jane – Today I **J**oyfully **A**spire to be my best self. **N**ever again will I **E**lect to use substances to achieve happiness.

Jeff – Just learn to **E**njoy the little things and have **F**un with my **F**amily that supports me.

Jennifer – Just had **E**nough, **N**othing mattered, I **N**ever thought I could change, but I did and it has been **F**abulous, wonderful, **E**xciting adventure. I am finally happy and **R**eady to live sober.

Just for today, I need to stay focused on my recovery.
Every day I gain confidence and self-esteem
Never giving up an
Never going back to bad habits
I can only move forward. I will never
Forget the struggles I have been through
Everyday I thank God for helping me though this
difficult time
Recovery is absolutely possible. I am living proof.

John – **J**umping **O**n the **H**ouse meeting at **N**oon

John – I have been **J**uggling with the battle of my life and addiction **O**n and off for a long time now. **H**owever, these last **N**ine months, I have been doing very well and overcoming this battle slowly but surely

Jonathan - Just **O**bserving **N**arc. **A**non is not enough. In order **T**o be successful, I must do the **H**ard work to **A**ccomplish my goals, and **N**ever stop until they are complete.

Ken – **K**en, you will overcome **E**verything that you've been through and **N**othing can stop you.

K - Keeping
A – Away from drugs
S – Staying
S – Strong for
E – Everyone
Y – You are worth it!

Kimberly – **K**eeping strong **I**n **M**y recovery has **B**een **E**xhausting, but **R**ealizing how amazing **L**ife is now, **Y**ou can see it's been worth it.

K eep it simple helped me accept my addiction
E asy does it when things get overwhelming
L ive life to the fullest because you never know
what will happen
L ove yourself because at times I didn't and today
I do
Y ou can do it is a great self-reminder to always
push forward

Kenneth – **K**eeping clean and sober **E**veryday and **N**ot **E**ntertaining **N**egative **T**houghts or cravings and being active in my sobriety will **H**elp me reach all my goals – both short term and long term.

Kevin – Today I will focus on my recovery by staying focused on my goals. I will **K**ee up on recovery and be careful not to revert back to a life of substance use and abuse. **E**very day I will remind myself of how far I've come. **V**igilance is key. I will wait to gain **I**nsight into my addiction

Kyle – **K**eeping positive thoughts and changing my surroundings. Not worrying about what happened **Y**esterday. Just **L**earning from my mistakes and learning new things **E**veryday about my addiction and what I need to change to keep myself clean and sober. So I just take it one day at a time. Not letting other people bring me back down the road.

K – Keeping
Y – Your sobriety will save your
L - Life
E – Especially nowadays with the fentanyl epidemic

Loving
A
New
Clean
Environment

Lindsay – Listen, I Normally Don't Speak About Yesterday's problems, but sharing my experience can save lives.

Life is way too short, and not worth an
Overdose and being
Under the influence of drugs

Louis - Learning to **O**vercome my addiction **U**sing Intelligent methods to **S**urvive

Make it
About
Recovery
In
All situations

Marion – Making changes aren't easy. A lot of willingness is required. Change sometimes scares people. Recognizing what changes need to be made is very important before the process can start. I am very ready and willing to start my life over drug-free. Only I can make that choice. I can't do it for anyone else but myself. Nobody has to be alone and make a change. You will always have support from the rooms.

Making new sober friends who are
Atttracted to growing in their
Recovery by being
Kind and staying sober together

Many days are hard and you may want to give up
Always think of your future and don't let tough
times get the best of you
Remember that the hard work will pay off
Keeep staying sober

My recovery hasn't been
Easy but it's been
Good
And
Negative situations are further in the past

Melissa - Making changes is Exactly how I Let things go and Is also a great way to Solve my problems. Starting now Allows me to stay Sober.

Michael – My Idea of recovery has Changed since being in treatment. Honestly today, I Always try to remain teachable and practice integrity. Although my actions may not always show Excellence and success. I always Love myself and others.

My
Impulsive
Character
Has
Always
Ended up
Landing me in trouble

Michael - My sobriety Is Contingent on Having the Ability to Evolve in Life.

Nick – Nighttime Is Coming and I need to stay sober so I don't Kill my sobriety.

Phillip
Pointlessly and
Hopelessly
I've
Lived
Life
It all changes now in
Phase 1

Randy (Pee Wee) was a good friend of mine
Out of nowhere we developed a great relationship
Behind closed doors he might have looked like a
tough guy, but
Everyone that knew him knows that he was exactly
the opposite
Real is what comes to mind when I think of him
Tremendous loss

My first name is **Ryan**. I am proud of my name because it is the one my parents gave me. Using my name I can say something about my recovery.

Ryan - Recovery did not become a part of my life until after Years of **Addiction**, but embracing it has enabled me to have a **New** lease on life and to give myself a chance at true happiness

My first name is **Sarah** and I was named after my grandma.

Sarah – Finally **Surrendering** to my **Addiction** has opened up a lot of **Room** for growth **And** improvement. **Having** another chance to better myself is an honor and privilege that many people do not have.

Sean – I was **Saved** from an **Eroding** **Addiction**. I am Newly transformed into who I was meant to be. I now try to set an example As a **New** person in Christ.

Survival
Education for
Addiction is
Necessary

Shayla – **Saved** by God after warring through **Hell**. **Addicted** to drugs, I **Yearned** for a way out. Now my life is filled with **Love** and **Appreciation**.

Taylor – Talking **About** Your addiction helps **Lessen** the urge to use. **Our** **Recovery** should always come first.

Ted – **Thankful** for **Everything** I've accomplished through sobriety and a strong network. I am **Dedicated** and determined to stay sober. Being so close to my kids has been the biggest driving force in my journey.

Tiffany (Tif)– Just for **Today** I will stay on this **Fantastic** road to recovery.

Tina – **Time** in recovery **Is** something we **Need** to be aware of. **As** **Addicts** we have wasted so much time. Now that we are in **Recovery**, we should use our time well.

Tom - Today I am writing about my name. I don't **Often** think about my name in a recovery sense. **Maybe**, I see recovery different than most, but to me it's simple my core beliefs and actions defines me not my name.

Tony - Talking to **Others** addicts about recovery reminds me to **Never** forget **Yesterday's** pain

Travis - Trying **Repeatedly** for an extended period of time I have been able to **Achieve** a **Variety** of things In life. **Splendidly** I am here

Victory
Against
Narcotics

William – Today I am **Willing** to go to any length or measure to stay sober. I am no **Longer** **Lonely**; I have a great support group. Today I live a sober, happy life. I am no longer a slave to drugs or fear. I have become a better person with the help of **Alcoholics Anonymous**. My name **Means** more to me today than it every has. This is how my name reflects hope and strength for others in recovery.

Zest
And
Courage
Have
Excelled my
Recovery
Yearly



This section of In Our Shoes is dedicated to our founder, Dr. Rebecca Convisor, who suggested that graduating participants be invited to express their thoughts about graduating Drug Court in the magazine.

GRADUATION REFLECTIONS

By Thomas Brodhecker

Hello! my name is Thomas Brodhecker I sit here today to tell you a little something about myself today. Life is good and I mean good, I don't determine wealth as how much money I have or what type of job I hold or how nice my car is. What makes me a wealthy man today is the friendships I have, the family in my life, the people I get to help in this world, and the people that I allow to help me. I am a rich man now a days. I'm a rich man on love, pride and faith. And to me that is worth more than any amount of money. But that hasn't always been the case.

For me November 25th 2016 is the day my life changed forever. It was the day I put my hands up and surrendered. And with the help of a lot of amazing people I'm so blessed to be here today. I can honestly say that with a lot of hard work and people that had more faith in me than I had in myself at times, I'm about to accomplish one of the biggest achievements of my life and that is being blessed to be on this stage as a graduate of the Sussex County Drug Court program. The people that came into my life through this road have helped me in ways that no person can ever explain. I am so overwhelmed with great feelings of happiness and love today. I love the person I am and when I look in the back on the road I traveled to get here, it has been an amazing journey. I will never forget where I came from and who got me here.

So a huge thank you to everyone and you know who you all are and I hope anyone who is reading this gets some hope out of this and knows it is possible and it made me into such an amazing person. Don't give up before the miracle happens. Please, you are worth it! At times I thought I wasn't but today I know I am. God is good an life is great! I never want to forget this feeling of accomplishment because it is so huge for me I'm at a loss for words. I can't explain how for someone who never finished things in life that graduating is one that will be one my top things of accomplishments. Thank you all!

Graduation day
The end of the beginning
Now go out and live
-Anonymous

WHAT GRADUATING DRUG COURT MEANS TO ME

By Anonymous

This is probably one of the best things I've accomplished so far. It means that I have found a way to live a clean and sober life. It means that I've made a choice to completely change my way of thinking. The things that I have gotten back in my life are amazing. My family now trusts me and they actually want me to be around. I show up when I say I'm going to show up. Graduating Drug Court means that I get to be the best mom I can be. That my daughter will never have to see me high. Graduating means that I get to be a wife one day soon, in a healthy relationship. Graduating means that I get to continue to help others that are struggling. I am very excited to continue to work on my recovery. I'm super grateful that I was given the opportunity to be a part of Drug Court, because it changed my life. Graduating Drug Court means that I get my life back and so much more than I could have ever imagined.

GRADUATION REFLECTIONS

by Dwayne Phillips

Graduation is soon approaching and I never thought I would make it to this day. I never thought I would make it through Drug Court, but I did because I wanted nothing more than to put my recovery first. I put my sobriety first in life today because without it I wouldn't have come this far in my life. Throughout Drug Court I had my ups and downs and learned so much about myself. I've learned so much about my addiction, and now have the tools to stay sober. I gained a wonderful sponsor and support network. I'm now able to help others that are struggling, and it also helps my sobriety as well. I've gained trust back with my family and I'm slowly regaining a relationship with my son. I use the steps in my everyday life. I've worked so hard to get to this day. Graduating Drug Court is a huge accomplishment for me and just because I'm graduating doesn't mean I'm going to stop putting my recovery first. I love my life today. It's not perfect, but I'm clean and sober.

WIN AND ADVANCE

by Ed Cimasko

My first true love, oh how you made me feel;
Nothing in this world meant more to me, you made me heal.
When I was sad or happy, proud or felt shame;
I always knew I could call on your name.
My family hated you, I never knew why;
My dad cursed you while my mother would cry.
My sisters would fume, my friends would all pray;
That sooner or later you'd be gone one day.
Well I'm happy to say that I received Drug Court;
Along came love, resources, and support.
For the first time I felt real love and it gave me pure joy;
I blocked out my demons who always made so much noise.
My journey is not over and I must stay on my grind;
But at least I know without drugs I can be just fine.



By Bryan Halke

As the time comes that I thought at one time I would never see. I look back at the events that happened to me.

I lost everything I've ever had, all material things. Even the trust of my dad.

I lost all hope, the streets were mine to roam. My life was a joke and I had no place to call home.

As I sat in jail once again, precious time lost. One phone call changed my mindset only \$5 it cost.

From that moment on I knew my self-worth. It took years of pain but I finally realized my place on this earth.

From that moment on I haven't drugged or drank. I have my sponsor and family to thank.

Now I can look in the mirror and like who I am. Unlike my former self who was just a shell of a man.

As my demons attempt to chase me, and think of a plan of attack. I walk with my head held high and I'll never look back.

Thank you to everyone who helped me on this journey, I appreciate every one of you.

By David Benton

Graduating Drug Court means another chapter in my new life, a sober life, a life with honesty integrity and freedom to grow without drugs and alcohol controlling my life. Drug Court taught me so many things. The probation officers and judges also the counselors helped me become a better man, a better human being someone I can now look at in the mirror and smile. My journey isn't over, it's just starting. I plan to move out by Lake George, New York shortly after I graduate and spread my wings meet some new positive people and continue to excel in my sobriety. Before drug court I had no ambition. Drug Court gave me a new life and a solid foundation. I thank all of the ladies and gentlemen of Drug Court. You will always hold a solid spot in my heart. Thank you so very much!



By Donna Wilks

After five long years on Sussex County Drug Court, it is a privilege to be able to reflect on my experience.

I entered Drug Court as a broken and damaged individual driven by fear, filled with resentment, acting on raw emotion, and with a distorted perspective that life was a battleground to be fought on a daily basis.

Drug Court did not "save my life". What it did was give me an opportunity to learn and change.

I learned how to be pushed to my limits, I learned how to react under pressure, and use the tools I learned in treatment. I finally learned to pick my battles instead of always arguing my point. I learned that my strength doesn't come from winning. It comes from struggles and hardship. Everything that I go through prepares me for the next level, and I have learned to not give up just because things get hard.

I learned that I am more than just a recovering addict. I can figure out who I want to be and define myself. Only I can change what I was viewed as. I used to be ashamed of my life and who I was in my past. Today, I use it to inspire myself and the people around me. I no longer live under a negative label, nor am I defined by my past.

I don't think personal growth and development is ever complete, so I'm going to keep on learning and evolving and becoming a better version of myself, because it is about being better as a person.

The light was out in my life. With the support from the Drug Court Team, some hard pushing, a few sanctions here and there, and belief in me...the light has been rekindled.

#hopewillneverbesilent

THANK YOU !!!!!!!!!!!

By Sophie Zimmer

To graduate Drug Court proves that everything that I have endured and accomplished over the past six years, has led me to have a strong connection for my sobriety. Through the beginning of my journey in sobriety I never would have thought my life would be like it is right now. I was filled with anger, resentments, selfishness, and so many more negative traits. I wanted everything to go my way, because of course I knew what was best for me. It wasn't until I finally surrendered to not only Drug Court but the idea that I don't have all the answers that everything started to change. I have amazing relationships with my family and friends. I am now completely self-sufficient, living on my own for the first time in my entire life. I am able to save my money and budget accordingly. I'm about to purchase my first car that isn't fifteen years old as well. All of these facts and more are the results of living a true and honest program and that I have earned the right to live a normal life. Graduation means I will finally be able to obtain student loans and finish out my schooling. Searching for a job in the field of my dreams will no longer be based on the results of my criminal record. I will finally be able to get my entire life back and everything that I deserved. It proves that I'm not just going through the motions and that I am truly changed in every way, and that things will keep getting better as long as I do that next right thing.



WHAT GRADUATING MEANS TO ME

By Henry Henderson

Graduating Drug Court to me means that I have finally been able to focus my life and attention on something where I actually completed it instead of half-assing my way through everything like I always did before being put on Drug Court. It shows that I have accomplished something in my life and the feeling is incredible. Seeing how all my hard work over the years will be paying off. Knowing I am not the same person I was three years ago relieves so much stress from my life.

Afterwards I will finally have a clean record for once and will be able to start my life of freedom from both the law and drug addiction. The feeling will be overwhelming, but I will be embracing every minute and reminding myself that I am truly blessed for a second opportunity to start my life over again. I will be able to get almost any job and not have to worry about my past being in the way. The confidence and self-dependence and discipline I have been taught has made life that much easier. The routine I follow has built my life way more than I could have ever imagined and I will continue to follow that same routine since it has helped me build the life I always wanted.

Graduating will also remind me of all the things I did to get onto Drug Court but that will be okay. I have learned how to deal with life situations that would ever make me doubt myself or be upset about certain things. It will be a huge weight off my shoulders knowing that at that moment I am actually leaving my old self in the past and will be starting my new life. The things I did in the past will never hold me back again and the person I have become refuses to let myself go back to being the way I was.

My family and loved ones would also be proud of me. They will see that I actually said I was going to get my life together and saw that I decided to stick with it. Seeing how happy my family and loved ones are now gives me a feeling of accomplishment that can't be matched by anything else. I have finally become the man my family was waiting for me to become. I can handle any situation head on now without running to drugs to fix them when in reality it was just making things even worse.

On top of everything else because I am still young, the time I've been on Drug Court will stick with me. That is when I found what being happy was all about. Having people that care about you surrounding you and supporting you every step of the way is the greatest feeling. Finishing drug court will prove to myself I can accomplish things that people said were a trap and set up for failure. It will never allow me to forget how miserable my past was and how I would never want to go back there.

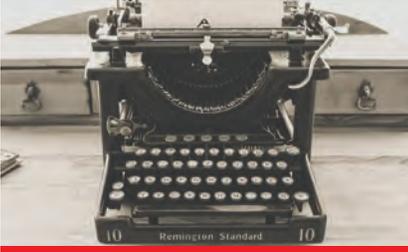
So for me graduating Drug Court is one of the biggest accomplishments in my life next to just barely graduating high school. The feelings will be mixed because I've met some good friends through the program and had a lot of good times. I will ideally be saying goodbye to the low life I used to be that didn't care about anything or anyone but himself. But it will be time for me to move on to the next chapter of my life. It will be bittersweet but at the end of the day, it will mainly be emotions of happiness and accomplishment for me.

GRADUATION REFLECTION POEM

by Anonymous

My life was crazy,
I smoked lots of pot,
heroin and crack,
Got caught by the cops.
I ran some more.
The system didn't fail,
when they caught me, they threw me in jail.
I had some time to dry out and think,
I really did not like to be in the clink.
And when I saw my public defender,
she told me I was a habitual offender.
I told her please, please, "I need to get out,"
She told me I'll get Drug Court without a doubt.
My mind was racing I was scared, I was worried about it.
They told me it was a trap, don't take it, they shouted.
So, I had to go back to my cell and think,
I'm going to take Drug Court, it's the best plan I think.
And now I'm so glad I did.
The beginning was rough; every week go to court
But all you have to do is test clean and report.
So, I did that each week. A couple years flew by.
Now I'm phase 4, across the stage I will fly.
I will go through life proud of this moment.
I will never walk backwards into a life of drugs and pain.
I won't do it again and that's on my name.





2020 Essay and Art Competition WINNERS

Essay Competition

- 1st (\$150.00) Place-Tiffany Smith
- 2nd (\$100.00) Place- Anonymous
- 3rd (\$75.00) Place-Kerri Sullivan

Art Competition

- 1st (\$150.00) Place-Tiffany Smith
- 2nd (\$100.00) Place-Tommy McCorter
- 3rd (\$75.00) Place-William Lowe

**All prizes (grocery gift certificates) donated by
Wharton Costco and an anonymous donor.**

**Rewards(pens)for all who submitted written essays and/or artwork
donated by EmbroidMe, Morristown, NJ**



The AAMCDC would like to thank all participants for their submissions!

All who submitted essays or art will receive rewards

**“No (person) is an Island entire(ly) of itself; every (person)
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main...”**

-John Donne

Essay Competition



ISOLATION VS. SOCIAL DISTANCING *by Tiffany Smith (First Place – Essay)*

From my life experience with addiction I know first how isolation differs from social distancing.

For me, using drugs started as a social thing but always resulted in isolation. Drinking and using drugs in high school was always about being at the party, trying to have fun, not deal or feel about my home problems and just trying to fit in. It was about friends, boyfriends and rebelling against my mother. It was fun and exciting.

But at the end of my career, it was about getting away from people and being alone. That way I could get high as much as I wanted, as long as I wanted and when I wanted without the judgement or having to share my drugs with others. I also didn't have to pretend that I cared about the people around me or worry about the ones I did love and left behind because when I was getting high I was numb and it was all about me. It was purely for my pleasure and had nothing to do with the people around me. They just got in the way.

Even when I was around others, I couldn't wait to be alone. I could care less about the party that used to be the best part. All I wanted to do was be alone with my drugs. Pretty soon the excitement was gone and it wasn't fun anymore. It was a fulltime job just trying to function and not be sick.

That is the progressiveness of my illness of addiction. It always starts out fun and ends up in misery. I can't just have a few drinks to be social or occasionally use a drug. I have to take it to the extreme. And the extreme is me, alone in a room, using more and more and having the party go little longer and never end.

I could never be high enough. I could never have enough drugs or money. I used to live and lived to use and in the end, I was still sad and lonely, my problems never went away; they only became worse.

A life of a drug addict just isn't a real answer. It isn't sustainable. It may start out as fun, but it's a lie. It may feel like a social lubricant at first, but for people like me, it always turns into a way to isolate. It promises comfort and joy, but it really brings sadness and pain.

I know now it is okay to be alone especially if your mentality is stable. I get recharged by spending time on my own, and that's ok. But I need to remember that I need people too. I am not meant to be isolated from the world, no human is. And I don't want to be anymore either because all that did was lead me down a dark and lonely path every relapse, things just became worse and worse nothing ever changed.

The Social Distancing recommendation which is currently mandated by our state should no way compare to the sheer isolation of addiction that I was just speaking of and no way should it lead to the comorbidities of emptiness and loneliness like isolation will nor is it meant to punish us in any way. It was put into place to protect us and our loved ones from becoming ill and even dying.

As for myself I do not mind the quarantine. I actually like being at home with my son spending time with him and catching up on my Netflix series. My situation may differ from most though. I'm glad I'm not out in the world dealing with life on life's terms at this moment. I have recently lost my grandmother, who meant the world to me and there will be a lot of changes for me and my family once these restrictions are lifted so I am grateful for all this extra time I have in her home while quarantined cherishing every moment and memory.

I truly believe that getting yourself into a routine is also beneficial in making your days go better. Especially with social media there's so many ways to stay connected to one another.

If you reside alone you can facetime a friend or family for coffee and a chat. You stay connected with people and groups who are using the media platform in positive ways. There are plenty of supportive groups you can reach out to during this pandemic no one is or should be/feel alone during this time. Join a virtual watch party of a movie or a show, host a digital dinner party with virtual cooking of the dishes being prepared and made, reading and exercise is good and healthy for your mind and body. Take nature walks and continue to attend self help (AA/NA) fellowship online when needed.

I personally am staying well connected and during this time I developed such a good rapport with our local community services such as the CARES program and both the star programs the things they did for me and how they

genuinely care for us is remarkable. I never thought in a million years I would call a probation officer so many times per week to chat and open up to either but she has listened to me and got me through alot. I am very grateful for her and everyone I mentioned. Like most addicts i suffer from trust issues so it was uncomfortable and new for me but i am glad i have people like that who just want me to succeed. Plus I still stay in touch with my old willow tree counselor. Having and building such a strong support system through this time has helped tremendously and I plan to continue to utilize these services and build a healthy, stable and sober life.

If you are not alone and have a family at home try new activities you can do together have game night, bake,cook or plant a garden. Try new hobbies you are interested in but never had the time like sewing, take online classes. The list can go on and on. There is no need to feel alone.

I read that schools, gyms, yoga studios and local zoos and museums are offering opportunities to enjoy what they offer digitally and what's even better some attractions are available for free. If you have nice and friendly neighbors, enjoy a safe distance, hang out and bbq. Let the kids play outside and draw with chalk or have a scavenger hunt. There are so many ideas or my favorite "Netflix and chill" I've gotten into so many series I didn't even know existed. So for anyone who's struggling please reach out and pick up the phone, try something new. Insanity would be doing the same thing but expecting different results. Dont be insane you are not alone!



SOCIAL DISTANCING VS. ISOLATION *by Anonymous (Second Place Essay)*

Recent experiences have taught me that the difference between social distancing and isolation is that isolation is a more negative, self-imposed psychological blockade whereas social distancing is maintaining physical barriers for positive motivations.

During my days of active addiction, the further down I was dragged by my disease, the deeper I slipped into isolation. I stopped communication with friends and family due to shame and a need to hide my harmful lifestyle. My days were spent in dark, enclosed rooms and I no longer ventured out to see friends, enjoy nature, or work a job.

In contrast, during this period of social distancing due to the COVID pandemic, my sobriety and a positive attitude has allowed me to flourish. I have the opportunity to work at a medical facility where I can help others continue to receive health care. It feels satisfying being able to help maintain management of their medical conditions during this health crisis.

Additionally, I am still attending recovery meetings via Zoom. I also lead meditations and feel fulfilled when I'm able to help others become grounded and reduce their anxiety amidst these difficult times. These virtual meetings provide the opportunity to transcend physical boundaries and maintain an uplifting feeling of connectedness. I derive comfort in being able to give and receive support and in hearing that we are all sharing common experiences.

Another important way I am staying connected is via facebook video with my spiritual center. Even though I am no longer able to attend services in person, the center still holds regular service online. Maintaining my connection to my higher power has been one of the most important ways I am staying healthy and content during these times of change and uncertainty.

All in all, I find it important to maintain as much of my regular schedule as I can. I continue to go to work, attend virtual meetings and spiritual services, maintain contact with network and family, and enjoy my hobbies. As the weather becomes increasingly warmer and nicer, I greatly appreciate my hobby of running outside and relish this natural way to release endorphins. I can enjoy the outdoors, fresh air, and nature while still maintaining proper social distancing. This outdoor, physical exercise elevates my mood, attitude, and physical health.

One can always find a positive aspect in any situation and social distancing has enriched my life in valuable ways. I have been able to use the time I am saving from traveling to do more virtual recovery and spiritual activities. I have access to meetings and events around the world. The pandemic has also revealed human compassion, camaraderie and unification from making masks for hospitals to allowing the elderly to shop first at the grocery store. I personally have been able to learn more patience as lines get longer in stores and as it becomes more difficult to reach health, dental, and consumer services as places become short staffed.

I also value the people in my life more, as COVID has peeled back feelings of invincibility and exposed the undeniable fact of mortality. People are passing away not just from the disease of COVID 19 but also that of addiction. I keep in regular contact with my friends and family via phone calls and facetime.

Overall, even though I have lost some physical freedoms, mobility, and much of physical contact, I have gained a newfound appreciation and gratitude for my relationships, jobs, hobbies, spirituality, and life itself.



SOCIAL DISTANCING VS. ISOLATION *by Kerrie Sullilvan (Third Place Essay)*

Many people in this day and age merge together the words Isolation, Self-Isolation and Depression. All of which are a far cry from the topic of Social Distancing.

We, as addicts, used to isolate ourselves from the world around us. We wouldn't answer phone calls from family or friends; heck we barely would answer the phone in general mostly for a fear of being found out. And OMG, God forbid it was our probation officer, we would hide like they could see us thru some magic camera. Our silence would speak mounds to the people who knew us best. We wouldn't go out in public or participate in any family functions; mostly out of embarrassment and shame. We woke every morning with one job to do and that job was finding a way to function for the day and make it to the next. We often would do these chores on our own. "When you're socially awkward, you're isolated more than usual, and when you're isolated more than usual, your creativity is less compromised by what has already been said and done." (-Criss Jami, Killosophy) Meaning that we as addicts work better alone than with others. Our success at accomplishing the days task was done more swiftly without having to tote someone along. And let's be honest, we also wouldn't have to share our days success. Stuck in our own minds, thinking to little or even at times too much would lead us into a depressed state of mind. I think a good way to say would be to "Never go into your own head unescorted." It would inevitably lead to bad decisions and bad choices. The worst loneliness in the world is not to be comfortable with yourself.

Now, as Grateful Recovering Addicts, we learn that "We don't heal in isolation, but in community." (S. Kelley Harrell, Gift of the Dreamtime) We can finally understand that in isolation we learn nothing of recovery, that we cannot do this alone. We need the support of others around us, others who have walked our beaten path, others who have found a way out of our common self-destruction and new beginnings of a better journey. If we choose to Self-Isolate, it is just because we have become comfortable in our own skin. We can share ourselves with the world or not but no longer be judged. Bohumil Hrabal, who wrote the book *Too Loud a Solitude* said it like this. "I can be by myself because I'm never lonely; I'm simply alone, living in my heavily populated solitude, a harum-scarum of infinity and eternity, and Infinity and Eternity seem to take a liking to the likes of me." We now know that self-isolation is needed at times to be at peace with ourselves. Sometimes people just can't see how beautiful the darkness can be. Its not a bad thing by far. Self-Isolation is needed to find time to self-reflect and mediate, it gives us time to get to know ourselves again, to find the good in us that we may have lost along the way. Helen Keller said it like this "Alone we can do so little but together we can do so much more." Therefore, we need to have time for healthy self-isolation periods while also being comfortable to share ourselves and our stories with others in need of encouragement. We need to show them that "There is a great big beautiful tomorrow shinning at the end of every day." (The Sherman Brothers)

Now this leads me to the final question of what does social distancing mean to the recovering addict. In this chaotic time of the current health crisis, it can be difficult on the newcomer of recovery, when the company of a support network is needed most, we need to learn how to distance ourselves physically while not interrupting our path to recovery. We learn how to reach out via phone, facetime, Skype or internet and to not be uncomfortable just asking for help. Reach out to your network you met before this crisis, talk to your counselors or therapists, call a friend or family member who probably knows you better than you know yourself right now. There are so many groups on Face Book now having zoom meetings and just reaching out to each other via posts and of course if you have a sponsor, give them a shout. We need to remember that we have all been there. We do not share the same story but we can share the path home. "Going nowhere isn't about turning your back on the world; it's about stepping out now and then so you can see the world more clearly and love it more dearly." (Pico Lyer) It's okay, not to be ok, to be afraid at times, remember there are people who love you and are happy to help you stay focused. You have to remind yourself that your past does not define you, you have the ability to choose who you want to become.

Some of my favorite quotes that help me daily:

"That which does not kills us makes us stronger" -Friedrich Neitzsche

"If you're going thru Hell, just keep on going" -Winston Churchill

"Everything will be okay at the end, if it's not okay, it's not the end" -John Lennon

And of course, my favorite, "Don't judge me by my past, I don't live there anymore." I do not remember who told me this nor do I remember the writer but I've said it to several people throughout my days in recovery. It helps me

remember my past however in the infinite words of AA, nor do I wish to shut the door on it. You need to remember where you came from and how hard you have worked for where you are now. How much better your life is today. And in the definition of Social Distancing I leave you with this:

Don't stand so close to me. ---The Police
Can't touch this. ---MC Hammer
It's the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine. ---R.E.M.
Bored in the house and I'm in the house bored. --- Curtis Roach

My life is now filled with some amazing people and I thank them for being a part of my recovery journey.
I am a Grateful Recovering Addict

SOCIAL DISTANCING VS. ISOLATION

by Henry Henderson

With everything going on in the world right now, it is safe to assume that most of the population has never experienced anything like this and are discovering ways to combat the situation and some are sulking. It may be tough for addicts in these times but I have realized it is also weighing heavy on the minds of normal people as well. At the end of the day though, the only way we will get through this is by everyone banding together and helping each other. Between half the world trying to fix the problem and half the world at grocery stores acting like its black Friday at best buy. In these times its best to just try and find peace with yourself and not to let anyone else bother you with their negativity.

Back when I was using this time would have definitely had isolation written all over it. I would have just gotten high and wasted my life away in my room while falling even deeper into a black hole. I would have took full advantage of the fact that society as a whole didn't have anything to do and I would have rode this out for months. Now that I am clean I can fully explain the difference between isolation and social distancing. Isolation is where you would just sit there a sulk in the situation where as social distancing is still living your life but being cautious for the benefit of yourself and others. Isolation is cutting yourself off from the world and falling into a depressive state whether you know that or not. Social distancing is practicing safety and realizing that things can still be accomplished.

Although we aren't suppose to gather in parties and go outside I have still found that you can continue to work a program. Attending online meetings is a great way to keep us all connected and you can still contact your sponsor via the phone. The online meetings are definitely not the same as going in person but it is a great help towards the problem going on. Back in the day if this were to happen people would only be able to keep contact through the phone and it would cost more to have more than one person on the call. As someone with multiple years clean the virtual meetings aren't so bad but it can be challenging for a newcomer since the entire service aspect is basically taken out of the equation. You can help people in need of items and necessities and have people call you personally when dealing with a problem.

It is very easy for someone to start isolating in these times. While staying cooped up in your house is justified, its just another way for you to reflect on your life and feel down in the dumps, This time could also be used beneficially to work on yourself and have that extra time everybody needs to get some things down and organized in their life. This is a difficult time for everybody right now but at the end of the day, just like sobriety the choice is ours on whether we want to waste away the time or get up and be productive in our lives. One thing AA has taught me is life will not change if nothing is done about it and life is what you make of it. So in these times you can spend time with your loved ones at home and still get things done or you can sit inside and get nothing done, the choice is yours. I am still working so my life hasn't changed at all aside from having to maintain my network and meetings virtually. If we just hang in a little bit longer we will get through this together and things will eventually go back to normal. Always forget that as long as there is life to be lived we are still blessed everyday we wake up.

SOCIAL DISTANCING VS. ISOLATION

by Justin Hoyt

This pandemic that is going on has caused a lot of chaos within a short period of time. It is a very serious matter that has affected all of us in many ways. It has made me realize that social distancing is necessary to keep the community safe. It has made me more humble and to realize that I have taken a lot of things for granted, for example playing basketball at the park. Being alone during this social distancing gives me time to reflect on how many changes I have made to make myself a better person. Self isolation is something I have struggled with in the past, and I was

able to overcome it with the help of my peers, family, and network. While in active addiction, I would constantly self isolate. Social distancing has given me a lot of time to reflect on my actions and where they have gotten me. I realize that I am a more positive person now and in a much better place than I was. It is very important to keep in touch with my family, friends, and network during this difficult time. I have kept in touch through phone calls, social media, and only seeing close family members when necessary. I understand that in order to keep everyone around me safe and stop the spread of this virus, that we all have to stay away from each other for the time being. Once this is all over, hopefully everything can go back to normal and make people realize that they shouldn't take things for granted. Self isolation is not good for me because it could make me fall into depression like it has in the past. While in active addiction, I would constantly be alone and depressed. Going to meetings and being around positive people has made me realize that it's not good for me to be alone all the time. Being around other people helps to keep me busy and out of my negative thoughts. With this pandemic going on, I am forced to isolate myself from all the people I am normally around. I am in a better place now than I was in the past, so I feel I am able to overcome social distancing and come out a more positive person. This social distancing is not going to stop me from moving forward in my recovery and working on myself as a person. I am still able to be there for others during this time by being available over the phone and video calls. Even though I can't see anyone in person, it is still possible to help people when they are in need. It has made me realize that it is still possible to keep on track during social distancing. I am extremely confident that I am able to make it through social distancing and know that it'll only make me a stronger person.

SOCIAL DISTANCING VS. ISOLATION

by Lori Laning

Today is challenging for me because I have a mindset of an addict. So today, I have to be more careful than most. It's easy, it's very easy to isolate myself, locked away from the world and people, close doors, protect myself. But definitely not healthy. I will definitely become depressed, sad, lonely, even sick in my head.

So today I know it's more important to keep connected with the world. So I get up, go to work, put on that face mask to protect myself – I hate them. But I don't want to be in bed for days isolated. I decorate my yard and home, watch a good movie, listen to music and jump in meetings with my house mates. Maybe catch a sunrise or sunset, sit on the porch watching the birds and squirrels fight over food. I talk to my family and friends on face-time and keep my appointments with Ms. Wilson and the doctors. But most important I talk to my sponsor to start my day. I vent on her, cry to her, laugh with her, complain about a step I can't get through – whatever works so I don't go backwards.

I go to work every day, taking a risk, but as long as I keep myself protected and ask God to walk with me, then I'm not isolating, just protecting myself and keeping my distance, but still able to help others while keeping myself safe.

SOCIAL DISTANCING VS. ISOLATION

by Jeffrey Mahr

"You will never amount to anything, you might as well go and use, prove everyone right that you will never amount to anything." These are thoughts that regularly occur in my mind as a person who suffers from alcoholism during isolation. Isolation is the deliberate distancing from all social interactions with other human beings. Social distancing is keeping six feet away from other's on purpose in order to prevent the spread of disease and infection. While the ladder is done in an effort to save one's life, isolation can kill the alcoholic or addict.

I think it is very difficult to maintain a healthy social distancing practice while being a person who suffers from alcoholism. During these times we are supposed to stay home as much as possible and only go out if we absolutely have to. These practices can create a feeling of isolation if I am not actively doing things to keep my mind and body occupied. The more I sit alone with my thoughts and let my mind wander, I can go to a very dark place very quickly. The black cloud of self pity and negative self talk can come on as quick as an impulsive decision. When these thoughts occur and take over all others, my want to escape these unrealistic bedevilements in my mind can be strong. Without a strong reliance on a power greater than myself, my fate is basically written, another trip down disappointment lane, at best. Thus starting the cycle of impending doom and a vacation to county jail or rehab is on the horizon.

I myself chose to be strong today, to put my reliance on God and make those grey clouds disappear. Social distancing can be very frightful for an unwilling participant in a twelve step fellowship. I am taking this time to strengthen my prayer and meditation, develop much healthier ways of life. Unlike times in my past, I am not wasting this time away, on the contrary I am using it wisely. My family and I take regular walks as well as daily exercise to keep the mind quiet. My wife and I come up with new tasks daily for our five year old daughter to keep a smile on her face. I am able to get in touch with my inner child as I have reunited with my love for hip hop music. I absolutely have relit the flame of passion for beats and rhyme in my life.

Our family keeps in daily contact with loved ones via the phone and see each other on the weekends as we have been doing this since this all started. While being responsible members of society today, my family has been able to stay healthy and relatively happy thru these difficult times. I have used this time wisely to enhance my spiritual way of life and call upon my creator for direction in time of doubt. Although far from perfect, the days of self implosion and disaster are not in the forecast for the foreseeable future.

SOCIAL DISTANCING VS. ISOLATION

by Christopher Rubin

The Absolute Truth About Social Distancing

I'm 48 years old and I have seen a lot of changes in these years. This is based on 22 years in prison with over 800 days in solitary confinement, work, family, friends, and society. Trust me there is a big difference between isolation and social distancing.

First off, I have specifically spent a lot of time isolating myself. I found that my personality allowed me to shut off from the outside world. My thoughts on this was simple, I was filled with hate and directed it at everyone else, when in reality I hated myself. This was a mindset I carried until recently.

Being released from prison after so long, institutionalization was my reality, and freedom was just a word because no matter where I was, I was not free from myself. One of my main problems was diplomacy. I had no idea how to deal with other people, however; this is an art I'm beginning to learn due to this social distancing reform.

Some people might find this social distancing reform as a curse, where as I find it as a blessing. I have learned how to really communicate. Who would have thought that you don't have to be directly in someone's face invading their personal space to get your point across? Me, that's who! Subsequently, I've learned how to build foundations and relationships on faith-thanks Mindy.

This is nothing like isolation. I have spent a total of 840 days in the hole and that is isolation. Enough to drive anyone insane. Social distancing is a breath of fresh air compared to this. It allows me to center myself and reflect on the right things to do and how to react to people correctly with wisdom and tact. It has given me positive communication skills that allows me, someone who was definitely not equipped for public communication to speak and interact with anyone.

In closing this is just my opinion. I base this on no facts. I didn't write this essay to win any prize. This is for self-growth and if I happen to help someone with this than that is a reward worth more than any prize that could be given. Social distancing, hmmm, I'm with it!

SOCIAL DISTANCING VS. ISOLATION

by KT

Social distancing to me means staying at least 6 feet away from people you do not live with and do not know. Do not go to places with a lot of people, no gatherings. When the outbreak started I was very upset that I had to attend IOP at the Willow Tree, when Governor Murphy said there was no gatherings of 10 or even 5 people. I was very upset and worried, and did not want to attend. I didn't really care if I was to get sick but then I was risking bringing it home to my family. That was my major issue and concern. I reached out to Bill expressing my concerns and even to Christine, who works with Ms. Buck to let them know I was very concerned about attending IOP with a group of people in a small room. Finally a week or 2 later, Willow Tree decided to do live meeting via zoom app I then was much more relieved and happy to be doing my IOP safely in my house. A lot of people can be symptomatic, they can be sick and have no symptoms, and then still pass it along to others, that's the scary part of this epidemic.

Isolation to me means being alone, by yourself, like in jail, solitaire confinement known as the hole. Isolation is more like quarantine. Putting yourself out the way of other people, if someone came down with symptoms of the virus they would then put themselves in solitaire. Like the people who work in hospitals they have been coming home and living in the basement or attic of their houses, away from the others in the family to protect everyone else.

During this time I have still been able to see my family, just through the phone on video apps. I have been doing my AA meetings on zoom where my sponsor is also the world maybe shutdown right now but that doesn't mean you have to be in isolation or secluded from some of your normal activities. I have been fishing also it seems like the only thing I can do with good social distancing so that is good for me because we all know I love to fish.

This current situation is scary and definitely sucks but it's not as bad as jail. And you just have to be extra smart and careful when doing things.

SOCIAL DISTANCING VS. ISOLATION

by Zakery Leeman

Social distancing, something that has not really affected my life too much since the Corona spread. I still continue to work 55 to 60 hours per week maintaining my regularly scheduled online meetings as well as seeing my sponsor weekly. I recently got a promotion at my job and I'm in charge of managing and instructing a team and leading them as their forman. I just paid \$1600 in order to get my license back I just have to complete a class once the DMV re opens and I will have my license, I have enough money saved for vehicle and I'm super ecstatic about it. Honestly things are going great and couldn't be better every day is a new day and there's always Room for improvement.

But for people that are not working and going insane from boredom and what other things they have free time with. I would recommend having a schedule throughout the day, like wake up early, have coffee shower, watch the news to stay updated on what's going on. Call your sponsor attend more meetings. Or even take up a hobby become a movie buff lol or just relax meditate or take out your aggression with some video games, as I do, lol. Do things that you are passionate about. It is social distancing but you can always think of something to do - meet up with a friend and go on a hike, get outside try to enjoy some sunlight. As addicts and human beings in general we are very CO-dependent creatures. We need communication we crave it. We want contact and Crave acceptance in a way. But just because we're stuck home doesn't mean we can't communicate in few alone there are people out there that care and they are therefore us if we are doing the right thing.

SOCIAL DISTANCING VS. ISOLATION

by Anonymous

The difference between social distancing and isolation is very important to realize. When I was using, I lived my life in isolation. I would sit in my room for hours on end not really communicating with anyone. While social distancing is very different. Social Distancing has been defined as the practice of maintaining a greater than usual physical distance. That means although I have to maintain physical difference, I am totally able to communicate with people. When I'm isolating, I am very much so stuck in my head and unwilling to let anyone in.

While don't get me wrong I'm not perfect, I definitely have had times throughout this pandemic where all I wanted to do was lay in bed and not be bothered. I have set personal goals for myself in order to maintain communication with my support network. I make sure that I attend at least three zoom AA meetings a week just to make sure I stay involved in the recovery community. Another thing I do is I make sure to reach out to a few people each day and chat for a little while. Then I go for a walk around town a few times a week just to get out of the house and out of my head.

Knowing the difference between isolating and social distancing is crucial to maintaining sobriety. Although social distancing can definitely feel lonely at times because we're unable to be physically with our loved ones, we are still able to communicate. And I feel it is so important to take full advantage of all of the countless ways to connect with people. Isolation for me 99.9% chance ends up with me relapsing. We don't have to go through this alone.

Artwork Competition



Tiffany Smith
1st Place Artwork Winner



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ISOLATION

40 THINGS TO DO WHILE Social Distancing

TheSoccerMomBlog.com

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. READ A BOOK | 14. I-ON-1 TIME WITH KIDS | 27. FAMILY SCRAPBOOK |
| 2. CALL A FRIEND | 15. BALANCE BUDGET | 28. DRESS UP |
| 3. EXERCISE MORE | 16. START A SIDE HUSTLE | 29. DANCE PARTY |
| 4. CONNECT WITH SPOUSE | 17. MOVIE NIGHT | 30. LEARN NEW SKILL |
| 5. VIRTUAL GIRL'S NIGHT | 18. FAMILY GAME NIGHT | 31. FINISH LAUNDRY |
| 6. LEARN A LANGUAGE | 19. WRITE A LETTER | 32. WRITE A BOOK |
| 7. FAMILY DINNER | 20. READ THE BIBLE | 33. NEW TV SERIES |
| 8. JOURNAL | 21. ARTS & CRAFTS | 34. PAINT |
| 9. SPRING CLEAN | 22. MANI/PEDI | 35. REARRANGE FURNITURE |
| 10. DECLUTTER | 23. TAKE A BATH | 36. BUILD A FORT |
| 11. PLANT A GARDEN | 24. SKYPE WITH FAMILY | 37. GO FOR A WALK |
| 12. COOK DINNER | 25. SING KARAOKE | 38. CELEBRATE HOLIDAYS |
| 13. FIX THINGS | 26. DO A PUZZLE | 39. COLORING |
| | | 40. BAKING |

STAY HOME Stay Positive **BE KIND**



SOCIAL DISTANCING VS. ISOLATION *by Tommy Corter (Artwork Winner Second Place)*



Social distancing has benefited me in many ways. At first with coven 19 and the stay at home order I thought I was going to go crazy. I am a very active and social person. I find it hard to stay at one place for a long period of time. When it all first started I was in a long term program, and it didn't bother me much because I was surrounded by people. When I was released from the program and came home and saw everyone wearing masks and having to stay home I got stir crazy. I found myself looking for excuses to go out as much as I can. But as time passed I realized I was still surrounded by people. This time however it

was the people that meant the most to me in life. I was able to spend more time with my wife daughter and grandparents. I wasn't alone. For the first time in forever I was sitting down to family dinners every night. We had movie nights and fun playing outside. I am lucky due to living on a farm with a lot of property so there is always something to do and still be able to keep distance. I slowly came around to realizing a slower way of life was far more enjoyable. I enjoy spending nights with my family on our porch just getting fresh air, and you know what I'm not alone or isolated. I have done over 12 years locked up and 3 of those years was in lock down isolation, of all people I know what real isolation is. this my

friend is not isolation. You might think this stay at home order is crap but I look at it as a refresh and reminder of all things that matter in my life. I finally feel at home with myself and I like it. I just hope not to return to my old ways when things go back to normal. I do not look at social distancing as isolation at all. I could use this once a year in my life. Its peaceful. There are so many activities you can do with your close family, me and my daughter went and planted tons of flowers around our property for example. It gave us something to do watering them daily and stuff to look forward to. I will enclose some photos of what I feel real isolation is and also photos of what I look forward to.



Social Distancing vs. Isolation *by William Lowe (Art Work Winner – 3rd Place)*

The teaching's of A.A. and relapse prevention has shown me how to identify the difference between isolation and social distancing. Isolation to me can be a form of depression. Isolation is avoiding others (not answering phone calls, not answering text messages and or any other forms of communication.) Isolation is also not caring for your self and others. Social distancing is keeping a 6 foot rule while interacting with others. Social distancing does not mean hide in your house and not have any interaction with others.

I believe that being socially distant from one another is what is going to help slow the covid19 pandemic. This does not mean you cannot go out of your way to help others in a time of need. I as an essential employee and first responder have been able to help others in ways that most people could not imagine or understand. A.A. has thought me that any time the hand of A.A. is put out for help I will help. As a sponsor I receive phone calls at all hours of the day from my sponsors. I also receive calls threw out the night from work having to go tow and clean up accidents to keep the road ways open for the EMS crews. I also tow ambulances and other EMS, Fire apparatuses. I have a great opportunity to help the whole community out by doing so. The proof that this can mold be done I myself at personally been able to get myself back into school for my CDL and I've also have been able to achieve more certifications while this pandemic is going on. I do this all while practicing social distancing by wearing my personal protective equipment such as a mask and rubber gloves. I also practice by keeping a 6-foot rule from others while interacting.

In conclusion this is what I have found to be different between isolation and social distancing. Social distancing maybe the new part of life. This new part of life does not have to affect our mental state and drive us into a depression. There are other great ways to help in the community by serving those for working a recovery program and those who are not.





ARTISTIC ADDENDUM

Creative Positive Expression Program gives Drug Court participants tools, outlets to aid recovery

by **Rebecca Conviser, DLitt**

The Creative Positive Expression Program brings creative writing and art experiences into the Drug Court process. It is a volunteer-based program functioning in the New Jersey's Vicinage 10 Drug Court. The goal of the program is to give Drug Courts, treatment providers, interns and volunteers, additional tools to help Drug Court participants overcome the disease of substance use disorder. We've created a textbook for volunteer and intern training purposes with over 200 assignments. A formal training course for volunteers is given at County College of Morris, where all proceeds from the sale of the textbook are donated to the Alumni Association of the Morris County Drug Court.



REBECCA CONVISER is a Drug Court volunteer who created and founded the Positive Creative Expression Program, including, *The Jail Cell*, a community presentation to help prevent substance use disorder, and the magazine, *In Our Shoes*, published three times a year, with the writings and art work of Drug Court participants.

The program has three components: (1) Creative writing and art assignments, (2) the literary and art magazine, *In Our Shoes*, and (3) *The Jail Cell*, a substance use disease prevention presentation.

First, Creative Positive Expression assignments, distributed to Drug Court participants, focus on the positive aspects of recovery. The assignments consist of original writing and artwork. Participants also receive guidance on how to speak publicly about sobriety and recovery with loved ones, during job interviews, within the community, and at *Jail Cell* presentations to schools, courthouse visitors, and civic organizations.

Second, the literary and art magazine, *In Our Shoes*, showcases the writing and artwork of Drug Court participants. The magazine is published by the Alumni Association of the Morris County Drug

Court and distributed to Drug Court participants, their families, and others in the community during the spring and fall Drug Court graduations and the winter holiday season. County College of Morris and Sussex Technical High School print the magazine at no cost to the Drug Court program. To date, there have been 15 editions of the full-size magazine and four editions of the half-size holiday version. All creative writing and artwork are published only with the written consent of Drug Court participants.

Third, *The Jail Cell*, is a substance use disorder prevention presentation. Drug Court participants in the upper phases and Drug Court graduates make substance use disorder prevention speeches to school groups that visit the courthouse, at local schools, community organizations and other public gather-

ings. A floor mat has been crafted to resemble the full-scale floor plan of a generic, 8x10, two to three-person jail cell. It is used as a prop during the presentation. The speakers provide a firm understanding of how the disease of substance use disorder starts, the terrible consequences of this disease, how to seek help if there is a problem, and how to avoid ever becoming a substance user. Participants from the audience are asked to stand in the jail cell to bring to life the reality of being incarcerated.

To date, the jail cell program has been presented to over 10,000 students at 12 schools.

Following are examples of writing and art assignments completed by Drug Court participants, as published in editions of the Drug Court magazine, *In Our Shoes*.

Dear Drug Court Team,

I will start by saying that I wasn't always a supporter of Drug Court. I listened to what others said about it and it was usually not positive things. Well as most things in my life go, I had to have my own experience to realize that all the gossip and negative chatter was only because the individuals involved were not as ready and willing as I was.

So, my participation thus far has been to the utmost of my ability because I gave this program what I give my recovery and that is everything that I have.

I do not wish to short change myself today because I realize I deserve and am worth so much more. But I never could have gotten there if it hadn't been for Drug Court. The kind of hopeless addict I was, I had to be contrived into stopping. For me that was by way of the County Jail and it was the best thing that ever happened to me. On my sentence date, the judge said, "One day you will thank me for this, young lady." never thought, after a year and a half of sobriety, and being promoted to manager at my job, I would be doing just that.

I thank God for intervening in my life when I did not have the ability myself. Most of all, the Drug Court team, and everyone that works with them and, of course, the Honorable Judge Minkowitz for always caring and never giving up on us.

Thank you!

Sincerely, L.R.

Dear Attorney,

I am writing to you to thank you for getting me into the Drug Court program and for giving me a second chance at early adult hood. Furthermore, I apologize for my lackadaisical efforts at staying clean during such a crucial point in my life. Looking back, I can only learn from my mistakes and use that knowledge to improve my future. And do the right thing on a daily basis. You helped me get that second chance that I desperately needed. Without any drugs in my system, I feel one hundred percent better and I know it will only get better as time passes.

Sincerely, Anonymous

Job and Volunteer Interviews and Drug Court

by Anonymous

Prior to my sentencing to drug court, I never told any employers or volunteer persons of my disease and addiction. I was ashamed and thought that it would never land me the position. This action of lying or not being honest stayed with me whether I landed the job or not, and settled in my heart. I continued to criticize myself for being a failure, being an addict and not having the will-power to do the right thing.

Since my enrollment in a Drug Court, I have completely changed my outlook and decisions with employers during interviews. I have been upfront and honest with each interview and volunteer organization of my recovery and new



An example of *The Jail Cell* presentation given at schools. The presenters are demonstrating the size of a typical jail cell. Photo courtesy of Rebecca Conviser

life of sobriety. The feedback has been unbelievable. I have noticed that by being honest and upfront, the interview conversation became less stressful and more personal as I have told the interviewer something very personal about myself and let them into my new life.

I have recently had interviewers tell me that they are proud of me, that they too know people in recovery and that they appreciate my honesty. Most recently, I was offered a job in which I was honest with my interviewer and they were even willing to work with my weekly drug court schedule. They offered different hours of employment to meet the rules and demands of drug court. This proves to me that people really do care and understand. They are willing to help as long as they see truth, dedication and accountability in the individual.

For me, this new approach to interviewing has been a huge success. I no longer have to lie and hide my real life. I can be honest and upfront and not ashamed of what I may say to a potential employer. Overall, since my enrollment to drug court, I have not had one bad interview experience in which I was honest about my disease and weekly schedule with the court system. I plan to continue this approach and to share my experience with others who may be in a similar position.

The Mirror

by E.R.L.

Only because God performs miracles, I will celebrate two years clean and sober. I haven't been clean or sober most of my life. I started so young and never stopped. At first, I never wanted to (stop). Then I just couldn't.

One afternoon, my sponsor and I were walking back from the store. And she started talking about this glass works place that we were passing by. She was telling me how neat it was and how we should plan to do it upon my two-year anniversary. I've passed this way more than 100 times on my way to meetings and my checks. I'm thinking this lady has really lost it. Why in the hell does she want to take me to a window replacement place to celebrate my recovery?

I have to admit, when I was drinking and getting high, the sound of breaking glass was my favorite sound in the whole world. It seemed to do something therapeutic to the boiling rage that lived inside of me. I used to go to the abandoned mental institution with my little cousins in Philadelphia, where all the locals got wasted and had bad parties. I used to love to get drunk and take out all my pent-up anger and bash out the thousands of windows in the dark empty buildings.

I let my sponsor take me down the steps into what I truly believed was a window replacement store. In fact the basement store turned out to be an art studio where beautiful things are made out of broken pieces of glass. She asked the staff member if she could show me around the place where these little miracles are created. I am truly amazed at this whole concept. I mean really!

People break glass every single day. They're careful to stay away from it, sweep it up, and get rid of it in the trash. Here, I am watching people, even kids, taking all of these, broken, jagged, mis-fitted pieces of glass and making them into beautiful works of art. I'm so psyched about doing this.

I got to see awesome things that other people have made. Even the whole front of the registration counter was made pretty by all this broken glass.

My sponsor took me to the area where you can pick out what you want to make and pay by the piece. You can pretty much make anything you'd like. They have vases, ashtrays, cup holders, etc. I saw a mirror where the frame was decorated with the glass pieces. It was fairly inexpensive but it's not about the money. I knew as soon as I saw it. That was the piece I wanted to make. My poor sponsor kept trying to make me look at other things to make. But there really wasn't any changing my mind. I'm making the mirror.

I'm finally not afraid to look in it any more. I'm not scared of who I'll see and want to smash it. That girl in the

mirror, I'm just getting to know her. But she's not my enemy any more. Sometimes I even like to see her smile. It's pretty. I'm ready to make my mirror now.



Wasted Time

by R.P.

The time that I've wasted is my biggest regret
Spent in these places I will never forget
Just sitting and thinking about things that I've done
The crying, the laughing, the hurt, and the fun.
Now it's just me and my hard-driven guilt
Behind a wall of emptiness that I allowed to be built
I'm trapped in my body just wanted to run
Back to my youth with its laughter and fun.
But the chase is over and there's no place to hide
Everything is going including my pride
With reality suddenly right in my face
I'm scared, alone, and stuck in this place
Now memories of the past flash through my head
And the pain is obvious by the tears that I shed
I ask myself why and where I went wrong
I guess I was weak when I should have been strong
Living for the drugs and the winds I had grown
My feelings were lost afraid to be shown
As I look at my past it's so easy to see
The fear that I had afraid to be me
I'd pretend to be rugged so fast and so cool
When I was actually lost like a blinded old fool
I'm getting too old for this tiresome game
Of acting real hard with no sense of shame
It's time that I change and get on with my life
Fulfilling my dreams for a family and wife
What my future will hold, I really don't know
But the years that I've wasted are starting to show
I just live for the day when I'll get a new start
And the dreams I still hold keep in my heart
I know I can make it, at least have to try
Because I was headed toward DEATH AND I DON'T WANT
TO DIE.

Leadership

by C.R.

A good leader is confident, compassionate, doesn't fold under pressure and can take constructive criticism well. They know how to use all their and others resources beneficially. When they don't have an answer to a problem, they call on other leaders to help. A good leader will encourage other leaders to become involved. Supporting each other will make both leaders better stronger leaders. My most challenging leadership role is being a father and spouse. I am in the position of sole caretaker for my six-month-old son. I want my son to become a leader so I must set positive leadership and be a good role model. I make the decisions for him. I need to pick appropriate baby sitters, doctors, new foods, medications, etc. I've had to maintain sobriety in order to be a good role model. My spouse has looked to me to be the leader while she works on getting a good recovery. The challenge of fatherhood, being in a relationship, and recovery isn't a challenge that can be resolved. But becoming the leader of my own life has made the hard situation much easier.



My Favorite Flower

by V.P.

Sunflowers are my favorite flower because ever since I was little, my mom was my best friend and I always admired them and for a few years we grew them in our own yard. We used to live near Augusta, where the farms grow acres and acres of sunflowers each summer and by August there is a beautiful sea of yellow happiness that spreads for hundreds

of feet along Route 15. Yellow is also my most favorite color and for me represents warmth, happiness, and serenity. I had none of those when I was an active alcoholic/addict. Today it is what I strive for. My mom sadly passed away from her fourth battle with cancer in December of 2014. My brother, who also passed in July 2016, had a sunflower with her initials tattooed on his chest, and it was gorgeous. I am not fond of tattoos for myself, I usually love them only on others, but in loving memory of both of them I plan to get a sunflower tattoo in their honor. When I see a sunflower I have a bittersweet feeling. Since doing my ninth step and making amends to both my mom and brother, I have more fondness and sadness when I look at them. I cannot wait to one day take my little boy, Braiden, to see these amazing fields of his mama's favorite flower and share with him the memories of both of these wonderful people in my life. They are now my angel's heaven and will continue to look upon me in my journey. I will continue to trudge the road to happy destiny with them, and God securely by my side. Amen.

The program began with the efforts of one volunteer, and now has regular interns and two other trained and vetted volunteers, all gifted writers themselves. Eulena Horne, the program coordinator, PharmD, editor of the magazine, *In Our Shoes*, curriculum planner, and training and development coordinator; Barbara Ward, manager of volunteers, and master creator of many innovative assignments; and Ken Musgrove. Credit must also be given to the first executive director of the alumni association, Charles C. Johnson.

The main reason for all of us to engage in positive creative expression is to help ourselves. Our lives are constantly changing. We need to be able to communicate with ourselves in order to plan our future and continue to build self-esteem. ☺

Congratulations to all the Graduates

We wish you well in your recovery journey!

Eric and Christine Wilusen



The Alumni Association

An Integral Part of the Process

by Charles C. Johnson, Jr.

Why Drug Court Alumni Associations?

Drug Court alumni associations were formed to provide the much-needed support for Drug Court graduates. Alumni associations exist to support the Drug Court's goals and to strengthen the ties between alumni, the community and the Drug Court. Recovery is a lifelong condition that can only be maintained with a great deal of support, especially in the early stages.

After Drug Court graduation, participants tend to lose touch with the people they met during one of the most challenging times of their lives. Alumni associations are a great way to help them stay connected with those who shared the difficult, yet triumphant journey toward sobriety and recovery. They also help to instill confidence and self-respect. Alumni associations provide Drug Court graduates with an opportunity to obtain support for sober living, and a chance to engage in the services that are vital to ongoing recovery. They are a way to offer accountability to graduates after the completion of the program.

History of the Alumni Association of the Morris County Drug Court (AAMCDC)

In 2008, a Morris County Drug Court participant, about to graduate, asked a very poignant question and made a very frightened statement, "What happens after Drug Court? I feel like I'm going to fall off a cliff!" In response to the void left by the absence of Drug Court supervision, the Alumni Association of the Morris County Drug Court (AAMCDC) was founded, one of the first organizations of its kind in New Jersey. The AAMCDC is a tax-exempt organization under 501(c) (3).

The AAMCDC was created to provide solidarity and lifelong support of substance-free living for individuals in the Drug Court program and for individuals who've completed the Drug Court program. Its primary functions are: provide continuing recovery support; educate Drug Court participants and their loved ones about the Drug Court process to help them successfully complete the program; function as a vehicle to gain increased community awareness and support; and inform AAMCDC members and current Drug Court participants about changes in substance use laws and expungement procedures.

In the 11 years of the AAMCDC's existence two especially compelling success stories come to mind:

John (not his real name because he wants to maintain his anonymity) is a poster child for Drug Court and the AAMCDC. He was sentenced into Drug Court in 2002 and successfully completed the program in 2006. He was one of the charter members of the AAMCDC. John was the first president of the organization. He continues his involvement in the AAMCDC. Below are his thoughts on Drug Court and his AAMCDC experiences.

"So, the Drug Court experience was an important turning point in my recovery life. Previously, I had been in and out of treatment centers since the age of 29, and although there was some success, I wasn't able to achieve long-term sobriety until I entered the Drug Court program. Drug Court provided the necessary accountability and treatment experience that I needed. After graduating Drug Court, I was honored to be able to be one of the founding members of the AAMCDC along with Charles Johnson, my mentor. Early on, through an event hosted by the National Association of Drug Court professionals (NADCP), we were given the opportunity to visit Washington, D.C., to lobby Congress for Drug Court funding and to attend alumni workshops. Subsequently we became one of the first counties in New Jersey to form an alumni association.

"The continuing support I received from the alumni association has helped me in remaining clean and sober, enabling me to start my own sober living program called the Milestone House. In operation for over 10 years now, with three houses that can hold up to 65 residents, Milestone House is certified by the New Jersey Alliance of Recovery Residences (NJARR) and has a waiver from the state of New Jersey to provide sober living services.

"About six years ago, I also had the



CHARLES JOHNSON, former Morris/Sussex County Drug Court Coordinator, is the founder and executive director of the Alumni Association of the Morris County Drug Court which has a 501(c) (3) status and provides support to Morris County Drug Court participants and graduates.

opportunity to open Excel Treatment Center, an outpatient treatment center that works closely with the community. This center is on the forefront of treatment and has now included medication-assisted treatment (MAT) to help clients who need an alternative to the 12-step approach.

"Both Excel Treatment Center and the Milestone House work with the residents who have legal issues. Attorneys, courts and probation officers in New Jersey refer clients to us, where we provide the extra support they need in recovery.

About Alumni Associations

The first Drug Court alumni association was started in 1993 in the state of Nevada,¹ according to the Administration of the Courts (AOC). In New Jersey there are 21 counties with Drug Courts.² Ten of those counties have alumni associations, and one county is in the process of finalizing one. No verifiable data exists on the number of similar alumni associations within the U.S.

“Our recovery community has really blossomed over the past two years and for me it has all been about community and getting the support from my peers in recovery.”—“John,” a 2006 Drug Court graduate and AAMCDC charter member

“Most recently, I’ve been able to open a new recovery coffeehouse called the Good Bean that promotes recovery and serves great coffee to residents and the community.

“Our recovery community has really blossomed over the past two years and for me it has all been about community and getting the support from my peers in recovery. That is what I believe the AAMCDC has also provided and continues to provide for Drug Court graduates—a community and a chance for addicts to support each other. It says in one of the Drug Court literature pieces that the ‘therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel.’ I continue to support the AAMCDC!”

Another success story is that of Mary (not her real name because she wants to maintain her anonymity), who was sentenced into Drug Court in 2012 and graduated in 2014. Mary was employed as a nurse in a cardiologist’s office prior to her involvement with Drug Court. She had surgery and became addicted to opioid pain killers. Although not a requirement while in the early phases of Drug Court, she regularly attended meetings and events of the AAMCDC. She has been the treasurer of the AAMCDC since graduating from Drug Court. She has been an asset to the organization, making a positive and long-lasting contribution. Here are some of her thoughts regarding Drug Court and the AAMCDC:

“I was scared to death when I was sentenced to Drug Court. I had support from my family, and from every person from Drug Court. That helped me understand that I could not do this

alone. I took the advice given to me, because I was ready to surrender to the process, and it all worked. I completed Drug Court in 18 months, I did everything they told me to do, and I can say without a doubt Drug Court saved my life. I am currently a certified alcohol and drug counselor (CADC), and I am the liaison for Morris County Drug Court with Integrity House, truly a gift from God, and I will continue to give back what was so freely given to me. God willing, I will be celebrating 10 years clean in May 2020. Thank you, Drug Court.”

And Anthony Justo has also forged a path to recovery that he attributes to his experience with the program.

“Drug Court was an experience that served me unlike anything else that I have ever undergone. At the age of 22, I had no concept of self-respect, integrity, or discipline. Lacking in all of these it was impossible to build any type of life for myself.

Commencing my Drug Court sentence it was explained to me that I would have a curfew, that I would have to be responsible for bringing myself to the court house two times per week. That I would have to gain employment if I expected to move through the phases. That I would be required to acquire my GED. That there were many appointments that I would have to keep such as IOP. All of these were non-negotiable and failure to comply would lead to incarceration. These all seemed very tedious and overwhelming.

I received a profuse amount of assistance from people around me to keep me in on track. This all facilitated a series of

changes in my every day behaviors that led me to where I am now. I was able to go back to school and get my GED. I was able to obtain a certification as a peer specialist. I started going to a 12-step fellowship and formed a connection with a high power.

I regained many of my family. I connected with a great group of friends. An amazing woman was placed in my life and we married. Our daughter was born December 2018. We purchased a home in July 2019.

Currently, I work as Certified Peer Recovery Specialist at CARES Recovery Center in Rockaway. I am the associate director for the Morris County Drug Court Alumni Association. I have the opportunity on daily basis to help others to find recovery. I have found my purpose in life.

Much of this would not have been possible if it were not for the opportunity that Drug Court afforded me. It started with the little stuff like calling in every night for curfew that I was able to develop the discipline, respect and integrity necessary to build a worthwhile life. Some of the most pivotal points of my life only happened because of Drug Court and I will forever be grateful.”

Functions

The AAMCDC complements and aids the Morris County Drug Court in many positive and productive ways. There is no right way to operate a Drug Court alumni group. A group’s characteristics will potentially depend upon the size, location and resources of the Drug Court itself.

The AAMCDC currently meets the third Wednesday of the month at 6 p.m.

at the Administration and Records Building, Room 526 (next to the Knox Room), 5th floor, 10 Court Street in Morristown, NJ.

Participant Handbook

At present, the current Morris County Drug Court Participant Handbook requires all phase four participants to attend one meeting per month as a part of their Drug Court obligation. However, all participants, regardless of their phase in the program, are encouraged to attend Alumni Association meetings. The Drug Court Participant Handbook provides information on participant responsibilities, rules and treatment requirements. The handbook is a guide that contains information they need to successfully complete the program. There are four phases to Drug Court. The first phase is the stabilization phase in which participants are placed in treatment according to an assessment completed by the substance abuse evaluator who determines the level of care needed based upon the severity of their drug use. The second phase is the positive-change phase in which participants begin to live out life as a sober individual with the help of a sponsor, and self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. During this phase the participants apply the principles and tools they learned during treatment.

The third phase is the relapse-prevention phase where participants are expected to apply the tools of recovery such that they know how to prevent succumbing to triggers that can cause them to relapse. Phase four is the commencement phase, which prepares them for graduation from the program. Each phase of the program is a progression where participants spend less time being supervised and achieve more independence and freedom as they learn to manage their lives in recovery. Restitution and fines are being paid and relation-

ships with family and the community are being restored.

Phase movements are not automatic. Participants must apply to be considered and the Drug Court team evaluates their applications. Every participant receives a copy of the handbook when they sign a probation participation agreement. The handbook is published by the Drug Court team.

Members of the Drug Court team are also invited to attend Alumni Association meetings. The Drug Court team provides supervision and treatment to the people who have been sentenced to Drug Court who have been charged with a nonviolent crime because of their substance use disorder. The Drug Court team consists of the following staff:

- Drug Court judge
- Drug Court prosecutor
- Drug Court public defender
- Drug Court coordinator
- Drug Court team leader
- Drug Court probation supervisor
- Drug Court probation officers
- Drug Court substance abuse evaluator
- Drug Court presentence report writer
- Drug Court clerk

Alumni association meetings are also attended by various law enforcement professionals, substance use disorder counselors, mental health counselors, community leaders and guest speakers. Activities of the group include speaking events at local schools and community organizations, an accountability panel, volunteer community service projects, social events such as picnics, an end-of-year holiday party, talent shows, and any other activity deemed appropriate.

Orientation

The AAMCDC invites family, friends and sponsors of Drug Court participants to attend an orientation. Participant involvement is mandatory, and each is required to invite at least one person

who is involved in their recovery. The goal of orientation is to educate the participants and their families about Drug Court and to garner support for the participants so they can succeed in the program. In addition, it helps increase retention rates through strengthening the support network of the Drug Court participants.

Orientation is also a good opportunity to educate people about all the available Drug Court approved substance use disorder treatment services. Drug Court treatment providers are invited to reserve tables and space at no cost to distribute information and discuss the services that they provide. The format of the program is a panel discussion. A complimentary dinner is provided to all participants and their guests.

Accountability Panel

Participants who are struggling in Drug Court may be sanctioned by the judge to face an Accountability Panel comprised of Drug Court graduates. As alumni of the same program, the panel members are uniquely suited to support, encourage and inspire current Drug Court participants, but also challenge and hold them accountable. One at a time, the sanctioned participants are called into the "hot seat" (across from the alumni panelists) to discuss their current situation. The primary goal of the panel is to improve the treatment outcomes for current participants. A secondary purpose of the panel is to begin to create an active network of Drug Court alumni and to serve as a post-graduation support system for alumni by providing a meaningful way for alumni to remain connected with the Drug Court program.

Creative Positive Expression Program

Dr. Rebecca Conviser, a vetted Drug Court volunteer, is the founder of the Creative Positive Expression Program (CPEP) which includes the Art and Writing Program, the literary and art maga-

zine, *In Our Shoes*, and the *Jail Cell*, which is a substance use prevention presentation. Dr. Rebecca (as she is known in Drug Court) earned her doctorate at the Caspersen School of Graduate Studies at Drew University in 2006.

As part of the CPEP, Drug Court participants are assigned projects in creative writing, visual art, and public speaking. The AAMCDC publishes the literary and art magazine, *In Our Shoes*, which is devoted to the original writing and artwork of Drug Court participants and Drug Court alumni. This free publication is distributed three times a year, at the spring and fall Drug Court graduations in Morris and Sussex counties and a special holiday edition in November in both counties. Participants can submit their writing and/or art for publication in the Drug Court alumni magazine under their name or anonymously.

Conviser has also written a textbook for a one-day training session and semester classes at County College of Morris that teaches volunteers how to conduct the Creative Positive Expression Program. The AAMCDC is responsible for the publication of the textbook. All proceeds from sale of the textbook are donated to the AAMCDC.

Solicitation of Community Partners

The needs of the Drug Court are special, in that they include not only individual support and performance incentives, but related items that have a serious impact such as transportation, jobs and housing. While members of the Judiciary are not permitted to solicit, the alumni association can provide the various kinds of resources and services to the Drug Court participants that the court is unable to provide. In addition to donations and service opportunities, the AAMCDC brings connections into the communities to help convey the message of the Drug Court philosophy. The AAMCDC does outreach to groups like the Association of Police Chiefs, county

bar associations, municipalities, Rotary Clubs, chambers of commerce, and other civic organizations. Support from group members who come from these networks paves the way for speaking appearances from Drug Court participants and graduates. The main goal is getting the word out to people who can play a significant role in supporting and expanding Drug Courts.

Support of Drug Court Social Events

The AAMCDC also provides funding for Drug Court social events such as the graduation, summer picnics and other holiday-focused events. Many of these events have remained in existence due to AAMCDC support.

Annual Picnic

This event brings together family, other supporters of the Drug Court and Drug Court team members to share with the participants a day of fun and social activity. Activities include softball, food, music, games and much more.

Holiday Party

The AAMCDC hosts a holiday party for the Drug Court team members and Drug Court participants in December and provides food, beverages and cookies. Toys donated by community partners are distributed to the children of the participants.

Education and Community Outreach

Drug Court Film

Thanks to the generosity of the Investor's Bank Foundation, AAMCDC produced a professional educational video about Drug Court. Through the power of individual testimonies, the video demonstrates Drug Court's positive impact on participants, their families and society.

Art and Literary Magazine

Sponsored by the AAMCDC, the outstanding writing and art in the *In Our*

Shoes magazine, mentioned above, are very positive expressions of recovery. These compositions help other people in recovery and show the public that people can and do recover from substance use disorder and become very valuable assets to society. This magazine is also an aid to teaching substance use prevention.

Substance Use Prevention, Intervention and Treatment Day

The purpose of this event is to educate the community about substance use prevention, intervention and treatment resources that are available in our area to help participants, their family members and friends. Substance use treatment providers are invited to reserve complimentary tables and space to distribute information and discuss the services that they provide. Treatment providers are given the opportunity to network and exchange knowledge about resources. Speakers who are in recovery share their personal experiences. The *Jail Cell* presentation, mentioned earlier, is also given by current participants and graduates at this event. This substance use prevention presentation is designed to be used by schools, community organizations, substance use treatment providers, faith-based congregations, corporations and more. For those who participate, there is training and an instruction manual which provide support for effective delivery.

Continued Support for Lifelong Recovery Including Sober Social Events

Community Service

The AAMCDC embodies an element of the Drug Court program wherein its members give back to the community. Community service is essential to ongoing recovery. People who learn how to give back to a community are more likely to have successful recoveries. Sponsoring, leading support group meetings,

speaking at substance use prevention programs in schools, on courthouse tours, at community centers, corporations, and other organizations are all volunteer activities that AAMCDC helps Drug Court participants connect to. In addition, helping Drug Court participants and alumni find sponsors is another avenue of support.

Financial Assistance

The AAMCDC provides ancillary funding for eligible Drug Court participants and graduates to pursue their educational, vocational, housing or personal goals. Graduates have been awarded \$1,500 for emergency housing assistance and several participant's families were awarded \$500 to assist with funeral services.

Sober Social Events

The talent show is an event which is held at the Roxbury Performing Arts Center and brings together family and other supporters of the Drug Court to share with the participants and graduates an evening of free fun and social activity. The AAMCDC recruits singers, musicians, dancers, comics, acrobats, and more to participate in talent night.

Drug Court Expungement Support

In April 2016, a new expungement law went into effect in New Jersey.³ The AAMCDC held several workshops in conjunction with law firms in Morris County to assist upcoming graduates in understanding and applying for the process.

In 2016, a free presentation by Larry Bemby, director of the New Jersey Office of the Public Defender's Statewide Drug Court Unit was held about the legal process through which an arrest record or conviction may be erased.

In 2017, Joseph S. Scura and John P. Graves conducted an expungement workshop. The workshop provided free assistance to graduates who had com-

pleted the program prior to April 2016 before applying for expungement. It included helping applicants obtain their criminal case history (CCH). If they came with all their paperwork and CCH, attorneys sat down and helped them check eligibility and made sure their forms were filled out correctly.

In April 2018, Tom Belsky, Morris County Deputy Public Defender and Elizabeth Cervenak, Morris County assistant Public Deputy Defender presented on the status of Morris County Drug Court expungements, including the process and eligibility of the graduates.

Maintenance and Funding of the AAMCDC

Attracting and maintaining new members is one of the most difficult tasks of the AAMCDC. Strategies to increase membership include conducting surveys for topics of interest to present at meetings and sending letters to graduates as part of a membership drive.

The proceeds from the sale of the textbook used to train volunteers for the CPEP are donated to the AAMCDC. Proceeds from the sale of ads for *In Our Shoes* are used to support the CPEP and other alumni activities. The AAMCDC does not charge for the *Jail Cell* substance use prevention program; however it does accept donations. There have been several generous donations from high schools. As a 501 (c) 3 organization the AAMCDC is also eligible to receive monies through grants, but to date has not pursued this form of funding to a significant extent.

Conclusion

Alumni associations help participants and graduates meet the many challenges that they face as ex-offenders suffering from substance use disorder.

Since its inception, the AAMCDC has developed several beneficial programs. The programs are valuable to the people

who are exposed to and take advantage of them. These programs enhance individuals' self-esteem and improve their communication skills in the workplace and in everyday living. People have obtained job interviews and full-time gainful employment, sometimes for the first time in their lives. Participants and graduates also learn how to have fun without using drugs or alcohol. Lives have been changed and saved because of the programs. Each of their lives and families has forever been changed because of their Drug Court and alumni association involvement.

Future of the AAMCDC

We continue to seek support opportunities and are currently seeking talent and support of Drug Court graduates. The support will help us maintain and increase the much-needed services that we provide. We are also seeking grants, expertise and assistance to facilitate the development of a much-needed *AAMCDC Drop In Center*. The center will offer resources and services that will provide a friendly environment for people who are struggling with substance use disorder. ☞

Endnotes

1. *Good Beginnings: Development and Maintenance of Drug Court Alumni Groups*. OJP Drug Court Clearinghouse and Technical Assistance Project. American University. March 2002.
2. Administration of the Courts (AOC), State of New Jersey. Memo to File. June 2019.
3. AOC-Directive #02-16 Protocol for "Drug Court expungements" (N.J.S.A. 2C:35-14(M) and expungements of arrests not resulting in conviction (N.J.S.A. (2C:52-6). May 2016.

Letter to the Editor: Thank you to Morristown community for helping drug court alumni weather pandemic isolation



By Morristown Green Contributor - April 24, 2020

By Anthony Justo

During our current COVID-19 crisis, and as a **Morris County Drug Court** alumnus, I would like to express my appreciation for the work of the **Alumni Association of the Morris County Drug Court** (AAMCDC) and other concerned organizations and citizens of Morristown.

I can state, based on personal experience, that staying connected to recovery supports during a time of social distancing is a new phenomenon to many and difficult for those who do not have access to a phone or the internet.

Support connections are critical for those recovering from drug use disorder. During our current crisis, self-isolation and lockdown orders make it impossible for many drug court participants to reach their probation officers and other supporters.

The Alumni Association of the Morris County Drug Court, through the tireless and persistent research of Executive Director **Charles Johnson**, was able to

Executive Director **Charles Johnson**, was able to procure a **donation of refurbished cell phones** that make staying connected possible for those in need. The AAMCDC is distributing those phones to the drug court participants in most need.

I am also greatly moved and appreciative for the efforts of **Pomodoro Ristorante** and **Chef Fredy's Table** who have helped drug court participants with other essentials like food. Their generosity and compassion could not have come at a more welcome time.

Members of the AAMCDC were able to drop off a box for each resident of the sober living houses in Morristown. One of the residents explained that he lost his job a couple of weeks ago and this box lowered his stress level in a big way because he does not have money for groceries.

Since then, many more boxes have been distributed. One of the recipients said that if not for this box full of food, it was unclear when his children would eat their next meal. That really brought home the magnitude of our current crisis and the importance of our helping.



Ori Kasneci, owner of Pomodoro Ristorante. Photo by Kevin Coughlin

I would like to thank everyone that played a part in this great experience. **Donna Archer, Melissa Spiotta, Flag of Morristown, Rotary Club of Morristown, Help Morris Now, Nester Bedoya** and everyone at Chef Fredy's Table, and all the customers of Pomodoro who contributed donations. Special thanks to the members of the Alumni Association of Morris County Drug Court and the Morris County probation officers who came and picked up boxes for their clients.

Most of all I would like to thank **Ori Kasneci**, the owner of Pomodoro. Without his generosity and giving spirit I would not have experienced the amazing feeling that comes with helping others in this capacity!

Anthony Justo is Associate Director of the Alumni Association of the Morris County Drug Court. Established in 2008, the nonprofit provides lifelong support and encouragement to help graduates of Drug Court maintain sobriety.



Emilio Sanchez and Nestor Bedoya of Chef Fredy's Table offer jambalaya at the Morristown Rotary's Taste of Morristown, March 6, 2017. Photo by Kevin Coughlin

Thanks To Our Supporters



By Marion Ingala



ON YOUR SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION
OF THE MORRIS COUNTY DRUG
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No. 322

Whether you are a Drug Court participant, a graduate, a supportive family member, or part of the Drug Court team, you are a role model.

The Corona virus pandemic has changed our perspective on how we view our neighbors. We now express our thanks personally and with lawn signs. But now we are also overtly grateful to every worker who helps keep open and staff our local businesses, medical facilities and government offices. We are also grateful to every person who has the courage to shelter in place, wear a mask, and maintain social distance to control the spread of the virus until we can safely return to what will be our new normal.

There is a strength necessary just to get through every day. You are each heroes because you have shown the strength necessary to be a graduate of Drug Court during these most challenging of times. You have set an example for your friends, your family, and your community. We thank you.

Mitchell H. Cobert, Esq.

Co-special Editor of February 2020 New Jersey

State Bar magazine issue titled "Drug Court"



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Probation is more than just community supervision and enforcing court orders

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- Promoting positive change in behavior through the use of evidence-based practices.
- Ensuring that individuals remain accountable to their families and communities.
- Working with the community and staff while responding pro-actively to change.

What is probation?

Probation is an alternative to incarceration that allows certain clients to stay in the community under the supervision of a probation officer. Probation is a part of the New Jersey court system. Probation is not parole. Parole monitors those released from state prison after they serve most of their sentences.

The probation division also includes a child support enforcement unit that monitors child and spousal support orders.

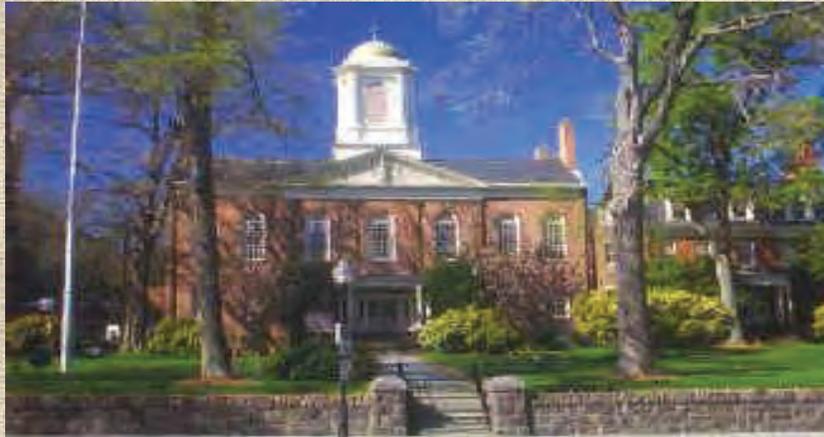
What do probation officers do?

Probation officers help clients avoid criminal activity and help them change their lives for the better. They are responsible for ensuring clients comply with court orders by monitoring the payment of fines, restitution or reimbursement, and child support. Probation supervision involves strict requirements such as regular reporting to probation officers, attending school, work, or job training programs and, when appropriate, mandatory participation in substance abuse and other treatment programs as well as community service.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE MORRIS COUNTY DRUG COURT COMMENCEES AND GRADUATES!

Morris County Drug Court

**“The Most Effective Justice Intervention for Treating
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- Defendants are sentenced to probation instead of state prison.
- FREE substance abuse treatment is provided to participants.
- Participants receive assistance obtaining employment, housing, vocational training, education, public assistance, etc.
- Many defendants are eligible to have of their entire criminal record expunged upon graduation.

For More Information Please Contact:

(862) 397-5700 x75360

www.njcourts.gov/courts/criminal/drug.html

*(Applications are available online and in the Morris County
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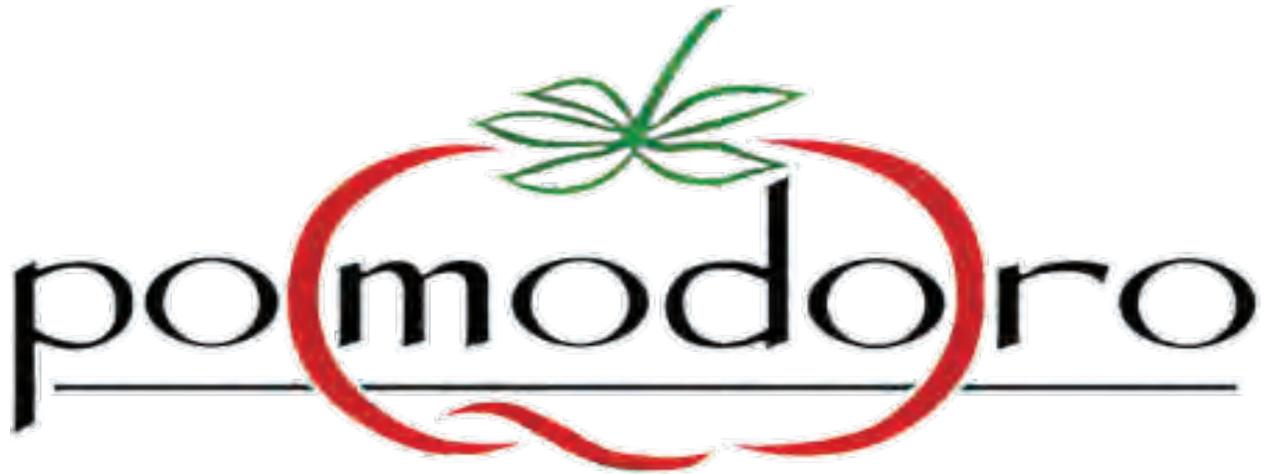


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Pomodoro would like to congratulate
all Drug Court graduates.
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Congratulations Graduates

Freeholder Kathy DeFillippo

kdefillippo@co.morris.nj.us

Congratulations to all Drug Court participants and graduates!

Thank you for sharing your life experiences through your writing and artwork. Your courage is inspiring. I wish you all the very best of luck as you continue to move forward in your journey!

The Law Office of
Cara A. Parmigiani, LLC



*All our Best Wishes
in your
Drug Court Recovery
and on your
hard won successes.*

*Bernie & Ellen
Schoenfeld*



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Wishing the
participants of Drug
Court all the Best as
You Continue Life in
Recovery.

Eulena Horne

*Congratulations
to the
2020 Drug Court
Graduates!*

Chris & Matt Schuette



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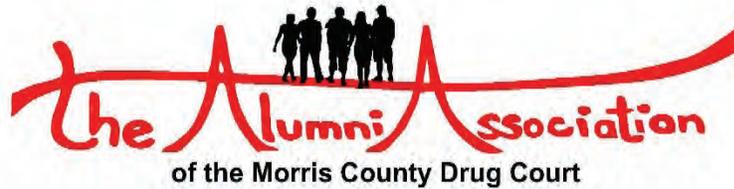
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NCADD-NJ, Inc., is a private nonprofit organization affiliated with the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc.



CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATES



**On behalf of the Alumni Association
of the Morris County Drug Court,
we wish you well in your future
endeavors, and remember.....**

Drug Court Works!

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President

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