

**Essays On
Major Mental
Illness with A Co-
Occurring
Substance Use
Disorder or What
Came First:
The Chicken or
The White Horse**

by Marc D. Goldfinger

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*"Marc D. Goldfinger beats the hell out of most writers working today."-----
Sara Gran, author of Dope, published by G. P. Putnam's Sons, a member of
Penguin Group Inc.*

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Disorder or What Came First:
The Chicken or The White Horse**

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*For those of us who made it back, for those of us
who did not return, and especially for those who
loved us no matter what.*

**Dedication to Spare Change News
1151 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138
because they helped to bring me back
from the dark, lonely streets of
homelessness and heroin addiction.**

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*"Their eyes stay open. Nothing can carry them
into the sleep they want. Over and over I prepare
the potion to take the sisters into the other world.*

They can't get enough of oblivion."-----
-----from the poem Snow White published in the book *RESURRECTION*
by Nicole Cooley, 1996

*"I hope for a happy exit and I hope never to come back."-----last entry
in the diary of Frida Kahlo, 1954*

An Introduction of Sorts To My Life and This Book

by Marc D. Goldfinger

In March of 1993 my wife and I were drifting from place to place, hopeless and hooked on heroin, looking for money anyway we could make it. I hadn't worked an honest job since March of 1989, when I was escorted off the grounds of my last full-time job, because I had fallen apart emotionally and was hopelessly hooked on methadone, heroin, using benzodiazapene to boost the highs of both of them.

They call the mix of major mental illness and drug addiction "Double Trouble" in some quarters. What came first, the chicken or the egg? For me, it was major mental illness, not addiction that came first. I had been seeing psychiatrists and social workers since I was 7 years old and was constantly in trouble in school. At various times I was diagnosed with Major Depression, Severe Panic Disorder, ADHD and PTSD because of traumatic events that occurred during my life, both in childhood and as an adult.

I found myself totally disabled by my multiple disabilities. I was begging for money at Porter Square with a cup when I saw someone calling out "Spare Change, Spare Change, buy a copy of the homeless newspaper and help the homeless help themselves." It was a woman and I walked up to her and asked her what she was doing.

She explained to me that I could go to the *Spare Change News* office, sign up as a vendor and get ten copies free to sell, then turn that money around and buy the paper at ten cents apiece, making 90 cents on each sale. Since then, because of printing costs and the price of paper, the price has gone up to a quarter a paper for vendors but the price to the public remains at one dollar.

My wife and I went down to the office, signed up, and we began our first honest work in four years. That was in March of 1993. The first issue of the paper came out in May of 1992. When I first began selling the paper James Shearer, who currently does a regular column for the paper, was the Managing Editor.

The paper has gone through many changes since then, and so have I. When it began it came out once a month. When I started selling it I was hopelessly addicted to heroin. Soon after I started selling the paper, I began to regain a sense of empowerment about myself because I knew it was honest work. I was giving a product for the money I was receiving.

Sometimes people would say to me, "Get a job," and I would say to them, "This is a job. I'm selling a product, not begging. And if you don't believe it is hard work, try it for yourself." Sometimes people would say, "Here's a dollar, keep the paper." Politely I would ask them if they approached *The Boston Globe* vendor and said, "Here's fifty cents, keep the paper?" Some of them would smile, take the paper and read it, and in that way I would build my customer base.

In March of 1994, I kicked heroin for the first time since 1964, and stayed off, with the help of support groups, for almost four years. During that time I became the Editor of the paper in September of 1994 and, with the help of Linda Larson and Cynthia Baron, changed the release date to twice a month in November of 1995. At that time Linda was my right-hand person and Cynthia was a contributing writer for the paper.

Due to my disability I left the editorship in March of 1996 and worked part-time as a vendor and continued to write for the paper on a regular basis. In the beginning of 1997 Linda Larson became Editor of the paper and, soon after, Cynthia Baron became Assistant Editor. Linda had the longest reign as Editor of the paper ever, remaining as editor for over five years. Cynthia Baron worked diligently as Assistant Editor for longer than that.

Twice more I became Acting Editor, once for two months and once for ten months after Linda left to pursue a different path. During that time Cynthia Baron was the glue that held the paper together and we made a wonderful team. After I left again, due to a brief heroin relapse, Cynthia continued on until cancer made it impossible for her to continue.

I will always remember her courage in the face of adversity and how she didn't understand the word "quit." Although she has passed from this mortal coil, her Spirit lives on in me and in those others who loved her.

It is 12 years later since I first started as a homeless *Spare Change News* vendor. I am still associated with the paper as a writer. My life has changed in a multiple of ways. I separated from my wife in 1994. We traveled different paths but always kept in touch. She died suddenly in December of 1998.

I remarried in 2002 to a wonderful woman named Mary Esther, who has become the light of my life. I am comfortably housed today, yet I have not forgotten where I came from. I am treating all aspects of my dual diagnosis and have had my ups and downs. I am actively engaged in therapy and attend support groups regularly. I

will always be grateful to *Spare Change News* for being a major part of my life and a stepping stone towards becoming a contributing member of society.

Since I worked at the paper I went back to school and worked for a time as an addictions specialist. At this time I am just writing poetry, fiction and commentary while I focus on treating my illness. I never know what tomorrow will bring so I do the best I can to stay in today. Today is all I have. It is enough.

Out Of Despair, Hope

"Many years gone, a sect in what is now Afghanistan declared Despair a goddess, and proclaimed all empty rooms her sacred places. The sect, whose members called themselves The Unforgiven, persisted for two years, until its last adherent finally killed himself, having survived the other members by almost seven months.

Despair says little, and is patient."----Neil Gaiman, from The Sandman.

By the time you read this it will be a different day. Thank God for that. I woke up this morning and my depression kicked in so hard all I wanted to do was lay abed and suckle on the teat of Despair. One of my diagnoses is major depression. There are others.

What is one to do when the thought train of negativity is driven by a powerful locomotive of the mind which, given a full head of steam, will end in surrender to suicidality? For me, there are simple, repetitive solutions.

When I wake up in the morning I ask God for help. I thank God for keeping my addiction, I thank God for not smoking, I thank God for waking me up this morning.

Another tool in my kit of repetitive steps is the ability to begin my day over again, countless times if necessary. I have readings from various books to begin my day. One book I read from is called the 24 Hour book and it is put out by Hazeldon. It helps me deal with my addiction and my attitude towards the day, every day. Another book is called Letting Go and it helps me with my co-dependency issues. It also helps me stay in the day I am in.

One of my mind's tendencies is to wander ahead into events which are not taking place yet. It runs scenarios of how they will play out, as if they are synaptic videos, and leaves me wandering through the moment I am in totally unaware of what is really taking place around me. I have learned to stop the "projector" in mid-stream and come back to where I am. I can ask myself, "Is this where I want to be, wrapped up in my head, where I am almost always out of my mind?"

My negative thought train smashes into a wall of recovery. I step out, unharmed, smile and continue my day from an entirely new location. Now I am located "right here." I may do this as many times as necessary during the course of my day.

I have support groups which I attend regularly. Rooms full of people, not empty rooms where despair dwells. I sit and listen to others and their experiences about what takes place in their mind's eye. I share my own experiences with them. Our spirits are lifted together.

I realize this: my eyes are windows. I look out of them and see only a small part of the world. Could you imagine if I looked out the window of my kitchen and concluded, "Yes, what I see out this window is truly all the world is made up of?" My eyes are as limited as the view from my kitchen window. When you share what you see out of your windows and I share my view with you, both of our worlds widen.

When many of us share together, suddenly the world becomes more and more visible. We are animals of community for a reason. God is made up of all of our eyes put together. His/Her/It's vision is totality conceived; our vision needs to be shared so we might have a chance at survival.

Interestingly enough, the key to my survival is you. There is something about my small mind, the one that lives in my head, which is counter-productive to my life. My small mind is a skilled tool, a true gift from God, and when it is attending to the tasks it does well, it is a jewel of a tool.

However, it has side-effects. These side-effects are my thoughts about you, my thoughts about me, and my thoughts about what is right or wrong with the way you think, or I think, or the rest of the world thinks. Me-thinks I can think too much, so much that I can dig a hole with my thoughts and bury you, me, and the rest of my family of humanity.

We have all arrived at where we are today because of a succession of events which took place in our lives before we even developed our conscious thought train. Events which took place in our infancy, possibly even events which took place before that, created what I "think" is my self.

Today I will step out of the past and free myself from the burden of self, moment by moment.

What I must do is focus on what is really happening right now. I must focus, not on what I think, but on doing the next right thing. I must lift myself into the God-self which is a part of everyone and know that when I look into your eyes, I am seeing into my own.

As I finish this article I realize my outlook, for the moment, has changed. The dark lonely silence of despair has lifted. I know I am not alone.

The Junkie

The Closer You Are by the Channels is playing on the record player. Oh, did I say record? I meant CD. Everything changes so much. Except for the yen to shoot dope. It ducks and hides, like my spirit, but it is always there.

Ask the ghosts of Central Square. When the wind blows hard and cold, and it usually does, the ghosts are glued to the walls, the benches, the bathrooms of the bars and coffeehouses they died in, one shot at a time.

Here today, gone tomorrow. Clean today, using tomorrow. I walk amongst the ghosts of Central Square, slipping in between the human beings and the rats, I slide into the 1369 Coffeehouse for a fast brew.

I am a junkie. My wheels are out of true. Even when I am clean, I wobble. Even when the road is smooth I hit potholes. Even when it seems everything is okay, even when it seems things couldn't be better, the death that lives in me is peering out of my pupils wondering who the weakness is. The weakness has my name, it rhymes with dark, it sings falsetto and bass simultaneously. When it is ready to spit me out, it clears its throat and says who I am.

Who I am. I am bubbles in the water in the cooker, I am the dope cooking clear and brown, I am the air mixing with the dope in the syringe. I am smiling at you like the biggest liar in town.

Chains On Her Wrists

She had tattoos of chains around her wrists. Her feet and hands were darkened from street dirt. As I entered the Red Line train at Central Square I almost sat in the empty seat next to her when she, in junkie slow motion, sagged across it.

The disease called to me with a grotesque attraction. It was not that I thought she was pretty, desirable, or anything. The junk antennas just shot up and I knew she was one of my kind. The only difference that she was in the grip of active addiction, whereas I have left mine behind over two years ago.

Across the aisle from her sat a young woman with her daughter, a girl in her very early teens, and two other women with business suits. They looked at the hapless woman, who was probably in her late twenties, and were chuckling amongst themselves. When I stepped away and grasped the standing rail my eyes met the eyes of those sitting across from the twisted woman and they smiled at me.

I smiled back and said, "I guess she'll be needing both seats."

Mother and daughter looked at me, then at each other and chuckled softly. Other people on the train seemed amused by the situation and then the train stopped at the Kendall Square station and a husky middle-aged woman dressed in prim office-wear stepped onto the train as the young woman who had been nodding suddenly sat up and opened her eyes. Immediately the business woman sat down next to her and opened her book.

We all watched as the tattooed woman's eyes slowly slipped closed and she sagged onto the matronly elder sitting next to her. As we crossed the river it was a shake, shoulder shuffle and sag dance between the two women until we reached Park Station.

I saw the daughter staring in amazement at the pathetic condition of the woman with tattoo chains on each of her wrists and leaned over to the mother and said, "This is a result of the glamorous world of drugs."

The mother nodded at me as she realized the possibility of the situation. She turned to her daughter to explain the cause of the pitiful woman's condition. Reality is worth a thousand words. Quite possibly, when this young girl is offered drugs by

one of her peers, the memory of this pathetic creature, drug-addled and dirty, will leap to her mind. It may help her to make one of the most momentous decisions of her life. She could refuse to partake.

In The World Of The Addict

Upon my return from a wonderful weekend praying and meditating at a retreat center in Vermont I check my phone messages. One of the messages is from a friend in Gloucester, which is where I currently live, telling me that another friend of ours who was in recovery has relapsed and died of an overdose.

She says to me, "This is the first time anyone I've known in recovery has 'gone out' and died. I'm really shaken up."

I tell her, "It shakes me up too. Which is why I get nervous when people pick up (use drugs) for a night or two and then come back into recovery. I know so many who have died on that one night out or soon after relapsing."

At times I wonder why, having experienced so many gifts of recovery, my mind drifts into thought patterns which glorify drug use. Today I have a wonderful woman in my life, my health is relatively good, I have a close personal relationship with God and I have become, on some levels, a positively contributing member of society.

Then, all of a sudden, the desire to pick up a bag of heroin hits me, or maybe I think of trying that new drug called Oxycontin. Maybe, I think, I could use just a little and keep it under control. Wouldn't it be nice to just spend an evening drifting in opiate dream, carefree and without pain?

The desire to use is on me like a heavy weight. It is familiar, with the smiling face of an old friend saying, "let's hang together. It will be just like old times." Suddenly the lie seems as if it were true.

In Central Square, Cambridge, where I sell the Spare Change News, I am surrounded by people who are using. I look over to the bench at my right. There is a woman, bereft of teeth, who is polishing off a bottle of Listerine.

A short time later a man who is about my age stumbles down the street in disheveled clothing. He is talking to anyone who appears to be listening, yet it is all jumbled word salad to anyone who passes by him. He is totally detached from his

own senses. He talks to his reflection in the Fleet Bank window. He is a regular in Central Square.

I watch as a couple pass by. They are both dressed in dirty jeans and the ghosts dance in their eyes. They walk up and down the sidewalk. They wait. They sit on the bench. Then they get up and walk some more. A little later they pass by and their eyes are half-closed. He disappears into the crowd, she sits on the bench in front of me. Her head bobs up and down. At times her eyes are open but her pupil and iris are hidden; only the whites of her eyes are visible.

People I know to be junkies from my own active days gather on the street across from me. Someone walks up quickly and they gather around him or her and then they all vanish in different directions. The dope has arrived.

A junkie I really care for begs me for six dollars so he can get well. He tells me he will pay me back tomorrow but I know it is a lie. He may be conning me or he may even believe the lie himself. The delusion that lives in people like myself is so powerful that we, in the grip of active addiction, believe anything the monkey tells us.

The caretaker in me wins this time and I give him the six dollars. He kisses me and tells me he'll pay me tomorrow morning first thing. I tell him, "Either you will or you won't" knowing the odds are against it. I remember too well the feeling of dope sickness, when my guts feel as if snakes are slithering through them, the sunlight is burning my eyes and making them water, my muscles ache in every part of my body and even the cigarettes I keep smoking make me gag.

I watch as he runs across Mass Avenue to the dope man. He is desperate to make the sickness go away. He is no longer using for a good time. He is just "yening" now, attempting to keep enough heroin in his body so he is not wracked with dope sickness.

I think of what he was like when he was clean. I think of the gifts he has to offer the world. I think of his special gift. When he is clean he works as a clown. He is a source of magic for both children and adults; he shines like the sun helping us to open to ourselves and reach the blessed child within us. Yet today his inner child is being smothered by active addiction, by the lie of the opiates, by his own inner terror which tells him he cannot stop, that, for him, all hope is gone.

I remember that feeling so well.

How little we know about the call of the Sirens of Addiction. I watch the actor Robert Downey rise out of hell, fall back, rise again, fall again. The newspapers publish critical accounts of his journey.

"There he goes again," the news tabloids say.

When I look into his haunted eyes in the newspaper photographs, I see my own eyes staring back at me. The eyes of the addict.

I know, even though I have been clean for over two years, how my drug of no choice sings to me. I call it my drug of no choice because when I use it the drug takes all my choices from me.

The lie of the opiates sounds so much like the truth. If I stray far from my necessary treatment of this disease, soon I will forget that the disease is the voice of my own mind and I will begin to believe it again. The truth is, sadly, on some days I almost believe it even when I am in the midst of recovery. Then I drop to my knees and ask God to help me stay clean.

I am an anomaly, something that, to all intents and purposes, should not exist. I am a heroin addict, a junkie that does not use heroin. Today I am a power of example, proof positive that a heroin addict can stay clean. My success today is not indicative that I will stay clean tomorrow. I am always one bad thought, one bad decision away from active addiction.

I do not judge Robert Downey for I know well the demons he struggles with. As addicts we are all houses divided and without treatment and daily maintenance of our spiritual condition we are all eligible to fall back into hell.

I get off the phone with my friend in Gloucester and think of Judy, our friend who has been taken out of our lives by active addiction. I remember the last time I saw her at a meeting. I think, "If only I had known she was struggling."

But of course, I did know. We all struggle on one level or another. I think of her eyes looking into mine when she said hello.

"How are you doing?" I asked.

"Okay. Things are a little rough though," she said.

And, because I was in my own little world I said, "See you soon." And I walked away.

I won't see Judy again. Not in this material world.

It is time for me to pray.

The Edge of Relapse

October 16, 1996

The music is playing, but it is hard inside my chest. I want to dance but my footing is lost. Again I feel like using dope. I want to hurt someone or hurt myself, not in the sense of a physical attack, but with words or injecting some heroin into my sorry body.

I am taking a muscle relaxant for the spasms in my neck and I don't like it because it feels like a drug even though I take it as it is prescribed. I know that if I had to change my clean date because of this I would definitely shoot some heroin because that would be the only way to make it worth it. That is what my disease tells me.

One might think, after all this time clean, I would not go back to the way I was. I've had recurrent desires to shoot over the past week and one-half. I don't know what to do. I feel my disease wrapping around me as I struggle to put it down. Ever try to put an octopus to bed?

A dreamy song comes on the box. A *Whiter Shade of Pale* is the name of the song. After it plays a minute or two I flip it back to replay again from the beginning. I lose myself in the soul-ache of the song. "I was feeling kind of seasick, but the crowd called out for more. The ceiling flew away."

I have been feeling very close to death lately. Night after night when I lay my head on the pillow, I wonder if I will awake in the morning.

Suddenly I feel myself falling away, as if I am dying, and I jerk and leap up to catch myself so I don't disappear. I am frightened but I put my head back down. Then sleep comes. And I dream of relapsing over and over again.

In one dream: I am smoking crack and the ashes are all over the place. One guy I know comes up to me and asks me if I need a meeting. For some reason I ask him how much clean time he has.

Only two days, he says. I've been having trouble staying clean.

Yeah, me too, I say. You've got more clean time than me.

Wow, he says. Let's go get high.

I leave the house with him. I am crying for I know that all is lost and there is no coming back this time. I wake up.

In another dream: I am working at a halfway house and one of my sponsees is a client there. No one knows that he and I are shooting dope together. His girlfriend works there as a staff member.

He gets busted by another staff member and is being evicted from the house. His girlfriend and I are packing his things and pills and bags are falling out of his pockets. I am palming the drugs and slipping them into my pockets. I hope she does not catch me but I am driven by a power greater than myself. Then I wake up.

Another dream: My girlfriend has given me the rent money to take to the landlord but I was dopesick and spent it all. Two bricks of heroin and no rent money. The heroin is half gone already. I frantically call a friend to borrow the money from. I am paranoid and I feel like my girlfriend is listening to me talk. Maybe she is. I cannot speak directly so I set up a meet. I know I should go into detox but I just can't face the judgement of the people at the meetings. I sob loudly in my dream and the sound of it wakes me up.

I play *Whiter Shade of Pale* again. I sorrow deeply and I don't know what to do. I feel like running away but I know that wherever I go, I will show up.

There is a woman who sells heroin in Central Square, Cambridge. I have watched her for the last two days. She goes from one public phone to another. She motions to another man and they disappear into the subway moving quickly and gesturing in excitement. I know that only one thing makes a junkie excited. The promise of impending JUNK!

Later I see her again. She walks up to someone I know to be an active addict. He hands her a book. She hands him a book. I have never seen either of them sitting and reading.

I watch her move, slow and relaxed like a cat that is not in a hurry to do anything. Her eyelids tilt down and her hand rises up to her face and rubs her nose. My stomach twists and I know I must go away before it is too late.

My disease flexes its muscles as it closes grimy fingers around my mind. There is a small voice inside me that screams a warning. It's not as loud as it was a few weeks ago.

I am an addict with over two and one-half years clean. I have never felt this dangerous in recovery. I am only a shot away from relapse. One New York second for one New York junkie. Tic, tic, tocL Like a time-bomb, I am set to go off. "All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again." Some of us don't make it back.

There is a woman who sells heroin in Central Square. I am watching her.

I Am A Heroin Addict

I am a heroin addict. The positive side of this story is that I have been in recovery for four years. There are thousands of addicts in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, many of them clean like myself, who have benefited and entered recovery through the very systems which are now being gutted during this budget crisis.

At this very moment, in Line item 4512-0200, the language reads "that contracts shall not be awarded to those organizations providing methadone services", and there is also no provision for the mere \$585,315 for STEP, Inc.; an abstinence-based addiction recovery center that has served Boston for 30 years.

There are many addicts who are responsible contributing members of society who have been served well by STEP, Inc. and other programs across the state and now are able to give back to the world they live in because they are not crippled by the horrors and demands of active addiction.

I am not crying wolf. In February of this year I was working as an unpaid intern for CASPAR Detox in Somerville. This detox, known amongst addicts and alcoholics as "Beacon and Kent" because of its location on the corner of those two intersecting streets, has been the starting point for so many people crippled by their addiction. I know some of them.

There are graduates of CASPAR Detox who were responsible for crime waves that put them in prison over and over again, people who, because of their illness, caused their loved ones to suffer the unimaginable. Those of you out there who have family members that are driven by the craving for alcohol, cocaine or heroin know precisely the extreme sorrow of which I am speaking.

CASPAR Detox, open and serving the people of Massachusetts since 1972, has now closed its doors. 25 less beds. Leominster Detox has closed its doors because of the budget cuts. 30 less beds. Spectrum Detox has gone from 77 beds down to 35.

CASPAR Detox also had a subsidiary program called Crossroads which was a post-detox facility that taught certain skills to addicts so they might remain clean and in

remission from their disease. This is a necessary step in recovery for so many. The actual physical withdrawal from the drug is only the first step in the process of healing from this destructive disease.

Crossroads has closed because of the budget cuts.

One of the reasons I am in remission today from my heroin addiction is because of a concept called Harm Reduction. Two aspects of Harm Reduction in Massachusetts are methadone maintenance and needle exchange. Both of these programs are vital to protect and serve the people of the Commonwealth.

Programs like methadone and the needle exchanges meet the disease on its own turf and make it possible for the seemingly hopeless addict, who has been estranged from society and fears contact with the system, to be reached and given information that can help him/her reverse the terminal progression of the addiction.

I was on methadone for five years and the programs provided by the agency that served me gave me vital information without which I might never have been able to take the next step towards healing.

My heroin addiction is in remission today because of recovery programs such as STEP, Inc., CASPAR Detox, and the North Charles Center for the Addictions. One of these agencies is gone, two are threatened. Every dollar cut from treatment will come back to haunt us seven-fold as addicts are handled by the more expensive corrections systems and hospital emergency rooms.

I am still a heroin addict. Today I am drug-free. Tomorrow? Who knows? I hope, if I were to relapse, that I might be able to find help in through treatment. The system which works miracles for sick, suffering addicts is in jeopardy. If it is dismantled, we will all pay the price.

Strategies of Harm Reduction

The Cambridge Needle Exchange is getting crowded. This, in itself is a good sign. It means that Cambridge Cares About AIDS has a very successful outreach program at a time when heroin detox beds have been halved. The needle exchange is a model program that targets addicts who, because of repressive drug laws, burrow deep into the underground and are only brought into the light when arrested for committing crimes necessitated by the price of illegal drugs.

Various groups are facilitated by the needle exchange which help create an awareness of safer drug using practices. There are always dangers in the use of drugs, illegal or otherwise, and the exposure of addicts to strategies which will minimize their risk of certain secondary illnesses that vector into the world of IV drug use is called Harm Reduction.

The spread of disease in the addict population has a direct correlation to the dissemination of disease in our society because addicts are people who interact with others. Harm Reduction protects us all.

Methadone maintenance is another Harm Reduction strategy that is currently endangered by the budget cuts. I know many "methadonians" who lead useful lives and blend into the mainstream of society. Many people on maintenance are gainfully employed and, because their lives are stabilized on methadone, much like others are stabilized on psych drugs like Prozac, Zoloft or Paxil, the people who work with them have no idea what they take. They only know they are good, dependable workers who are extremely competent at their jobs.

Before their stabilization on methadone the disease of addiction had devastated their lives and they were driven to commit crimes such as shop-lifting, prostitution, burglary, forgery and even armed robbery to support their habits. Today they are medically treated for their illness and they, and the society they live in, are the better for it.

It is true that not all methadone clients are success stories. Not all public school students are success stories either but we don't throw out the public school system because it doesn't work for everyone.

Some methadone clients take other drugs to tweak the 'done. However, the routine of the clinic, as opposed to the haphazard illegal world of heroin addiction, keeps addicts in check and reduces the necessity for major criminal activity. There may be minor crimes, such as the transfer of benzodiazapenes from one addict to another, but the damage is limited. Some addicts refer to methadone maintenance as "liquid handcuffs." This expression, in itself, illustrates the crime limiting factor inherent in methadone maintenance.

I was a successful methadone client. Court mandated to the clinic, I was very resistant to their policies, yet I still attended groups which gave me information over the five year period I was on maintenance. The information gleaned from these groups, in the end, made it possible for me to conceive of a life of abstinence and recovery. True, I was one of the fringe element at the clinic who did chemistry experiments with my body and ingested other drugs to ratchet my body into various psychic states, most of them resembling stupor at best, yet I was still able to absorb principles of recovery and came out drug-free at the other end of the tunnel.

Without methadone many addicts who are still in the active stage of the disease of addiction will go back to heroin. I know I would have gone back to junk. Because of the illegality of heroin, the price is higher and the crime factor goes up. It is cheaper to maintain individuals on methadone than to incarcerate. The one fact is that methadone maintenance reduces the harm to those who are ill and the rest of society. It is a mistake to endanger a system that works.

Methadone maintenance is a positive step in the treatment of addiction. Let's not slip back to a darker period in time.

Heroin: The Road Back

Three empty glassine stamp envelopes labeled with the word “Destroyer” lay next to the cooker as I washed the blood out of the needle and syringe with water. Tears cascaded down my cheeks as the emptiness in my chest swelled up and voices in my head chattered negative information at me.

I had shot another brick of heroin into the rivers of my body within two days and the anguish of my meaningless existence wrapped around me. I thought of my children that I had not seen since 1985 and wondered where they were. I thought of my marriages destroyed by addiction with my last wife dead of an overdose. I thought of the condemned tenements and alleyways where I had spent many nights with just my needle and spoon for company.

I looked around the small, littered, roach-infested apartment that I was soon to be evicted from for non-payment of rent. The table was covered with the debris of heroin addiction, there were cigarette burns on all the rugs, on the cheap fold-out bed, and on my t-shirt and trousers.

The bleach that I never bothered to use to clean my works anymore stood on the kitchen counter and suddenly an idea came to me. I reached out and put the bottle on the table, uncapped it and poured a small amount of bleach into a cup. I put the needle into the bleach and filled the syringe. Then I lay the hype on the table and, sobbing deep belly-cries from the bottom of my ravaged soul, looped my leather belt around my arm and tightened it to raise my torn veins for just one more fix.

This would be the fix that would take me to the promised land.

Holding the belt in my teeth I poised the needle over my vein and a small drop of the liquid fell onto my arm. My eyes hallucinated smoke rising from the bleach that had fallen directly onto the target area as I moved the needle to my skin surface.

Then the thought hit me that, “As a junkie who had wrecked his life and failed miserably at everything, why I could screw up suicide. My God, what if I shot this syringe full of bleach and lived?”

Then another voice echoed into my head, one that belonged to a friend from a support group I had been attending who had said, “Why don’t you just go back into detox and try again?”

I had scoffed at his suggestion. After all, I had been to detox over and over again and each time I had started shooting dope upon release. The courts had sent me to prison and then, after more than seventeen arrests for possession of drugs, had pronounced me hopeless and mandated me to methadone maintenance. I had remained on methadone maintenance for five erratic years. One clinic after another terminated me for various violations, from selling Klonopin and Xanax to non-payment of fees to repeated dirty urine (urine filled with other drugs such as heroin or cocaine) infractions.

I had traveled from coast to coast of this country, sometimes as a fugitive from the law, other times a fugitive from myself, up and down each coast in the vain effort to escape the heroin addict that seemed to show up everywhere I arrived. I had been locked up in jails and psychiatric hospitals in South Carolina, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Oregon, Vermont, New Hampshire, and at the Canadian border for various drug-related offenses.

My last detox had been over seventeen days long and it had been a long, painful withdrawal from a habit of 80 milligrams of methadone and twenty milligrams of Klonopin daily interspersed with shots of heroin. I had come out of the detox still shaking, suffering from lack of sleep and, through some miracle, I had stayed clean while attending support groups daily, even while living in a shooting gallery apartment, for fourteen days. Then came the inevitable relapse and, within days, my habit escalated up to half a brick (a brick is fifty bags) a day. It seemed that no matter how much dope I shot; I could never get high enough to escape me.

I had been attending support groups that deal with drug addiction over and over again, in desperation, for four years. I hated the groups and when someone had declared that they had been clean for thirty days, I would stare at them in amazement. Thirty days. Could not fathom how any drug addict could stay off drugs for thirty days. Forget about the people who celebrated years off drugs. It was beyond my comprehension.

But I always felt welcomed in those support groups. It was the only place left where people had not said, "Get out and don't come back." In the support groups, when I ranted and raved about never being able to quit, when I told them they were all a bunch of losers, they just said, "Keep coming back."

And now a voice from one of those groups was echoing louder and louder in my head saying, "Why don't you just go back into detox?"

I was defeated and I knew it. The hypodermic slipped out of my hands. I dropped the end of the belt from my teeth and I could feel my shoulders sag as I picked up the phone and dialed the number of the detox for one last time.

* * *

In the detoxes, I would accuse the counselors of trying to brainwash me. In the last detox I was in, my counselor leaned over, looked me directly in the eyes, and said, “Marc, if anyone needs their brain washed, it is you!” And we both burst out laughing at that moment for the truth of her statement hit me in my solar plexus.

That was one aspect of my ‘spiritual awakening.’

Another notable event that happened in that detox was when I was on the telephone attempting to arrange counseling sessions and the agency I was conversing with put me on hold. I waited. Twenty seconds. Thirty seconds. “Frack this,” I thought and went to hang up the telephone in anger. Then, like a thought from outside myself, another idea popped into my fragile mind.

“If this was the dope man,” I thought, “would you hang up just because he put you on hold for thirty seconds?”

I chuckled, for I realized that, if it was the dope dealer, I would clutch the phone tightly to my sorry ear so long that a spider could spin a web between my ear and the instrument.

I did not hang up the phone. I waited to complete my recovery business. And that was another aspect of a spiritual awakening. At that moment I had been given an inkling of how my mind, which suddenly appeared to be the very root of my disease, worked. The negative thought tracks were worn deeper than the Grand Canyon and turning the flow of that river of thought was extremely difficult.

From that moment on I started listening to advice to the best of my ability. I was told that it didn’t matter what my mind was telling me, I should just move my feet in the right direction. I was told that, “I couldn’t think my way to a better way of living, but that I could live my way to a better way of thinking.” And, amazingly enough, I began to believe it.

When I was released from detox I kept company with another addict like myself who was attending support groups and had been drug free for ten years and I asked him how often I should go to those groups.

He smiled at me and said, “I only go on the days that I used to get high.”

I looked at him with wide eyes and said, “But I used to get high everyday!”

He laughed. And then we laughed together for he had let me supply the answer to my own question.

Gradually my life began to change. During my first summer clean, some members of a support group invited me to attend a free concert at the Hatchshell near the Charles River. I was bicycling to the event when suddenly I was gripped by fear and anxiety. I did not know these people except for within the group setting and my mind assaulted me.

“This is it. When these people really get to know you, they won’t like you because you are really a scum-bag deep inside,” was the tape my mind kept playing to me in different ways as I rode to the concert.

Finally, my fear won out and I turned the bike around and started home. I felt very alone, totally isolated, and my mind persisted in telling me that I was different from ‘those people.’

Then, a thought struck me like a bolt from the blue. The voice that I was hearing in my head was the voice of my dis-ease, the voice of my addiction. It wanted to get me alone; to isolate me, and then, like in days past, it would have its way with me. The needle and the spoon would soon be my only companions.

Despite my anxiety, I turned my bicycle around and headed towards the concert again. Was my disease done with me? Not by a long shot! Like the snake in the Garden of Eden it whispered in my head, “Well, now you’re so late that you won’t be able to find them anyway.”

This time I knew the voice for what it was and told it, “Thanks for sharing. Now sit down.”

I attended that concert, had a wonderful time, and some of those people that I partied and danced with at the concert are still in touch with me today.

As far as my addiction goes, I know that, “All it wants is all I’ve got.” And I’m not willing to give that up today.

Do I still consider myself an addict? To tell the truth, I will always have the mind of an addict. The thoughts of addiction still come, but they come less and less and, as time passes, their power diminishes.

* * *

I have been drug and alcohol free now for almost two years. Does the heroin still call to me? To be honest, at times it does. As a matter of fact, after almost four years clean, I relapsed and used heroin for another year and two months. An eternity in hell.

How did that happen? Basically, I was not faithful to my own value system. In the context of a relationship I tried to be what she wanted me to be and, when the true me had disappeared, vanished under the constant battering of a stronger, abusive personality, I picked up heroin as a substitute for death. Heroin and death are soul-sisters.

My relapse did not happen overnight. First, any spirituality, the positive feelings about myself, life and God, began to erode. My thought patterns moved into the realm of the negative. The first substance I picked up was a cigarette. At the time of my relapse I was keeping a journal. I remember writing, near the physical relapse, that "I have already relapsed. Now it is only a question of when I put the drugs into my body."

I had fled my emotional batterer and moved to another city, leaving most of my possessions behind. I was warned by a counselor not to start communications with my batterer. I ignored that advice. Soon I was convinced to return with the promise that 'things would be different.' I have a total understanding of why many women almost always return to their batterer at least once. I thought things would be different. I wanted them to be different. Just like in my heroin addiction, I would repeat the same mistake, expecting different results.

On the night I made the decision to return to the abusive relationship I had left I raided the house I was staying in for drugs. In one of the rooms I found narcotics. I proceeded to take them and a year and two months of hell began for me. It is only by the Grace of a God of my own understanding that I was able to survive and return to recovery.

Today I live in a recovery community in Gloucester called Moore's Way. I still attend support groups regularly. After all, I attended the dope man regularly in the past.

Is it possible for me to relapse again into the hell of active addiction? For this addict, it is always a possibility. That is why, today, I surround myself with people who are positive, people who love and nurture me, people who believe in me and who help me to believe in myself.

And I, in turn, help others who think, as I once did, that their addiction is a hopeless condition. I stay clean myself and I reach out to others. Just like me, some of them 'Come to believe' and stay clean and help others to stay clean.

An acquaintance of mine in the poetry scene said, "the one reason I never tried heroin is that my friends whom I did other drugs with like heroin better than anything else. They seemed to like it more than life itself."

Most of my friends from high school whom I started shooting dope with are dead today. I am one of the few heroin survivors. I am in the process of recovering my life. For me, it is a daily event.

Heroin Addiction, Overdoses and The Use Of Naloxone

At the Albany Street shelter in Cambridge, a staff member who wished to remain anonymous stated that they consider heroin a gateway drug because it is cheaper and easier to find than marijuana. He said that more young people than ever before are beginning their illegal drug use with heroin or Oxycontin.

In 1990, 94 people perished from narcotic overdoses in Massachusetts. In the year 2000, that number climbed to 363. In 1992, approximately 11,000 addicts who checked in to Massachusetts detoxes named heroin as their primary drug. In the year 2001 the number rose to 37,399 according to figures released by the National Drug Intelligence Center. Heroin use in Massachusetts is becoming alarmingly widespread and dangerous. Yet the states ability to combat this trend is becoming more limited.

In South Boston, where a bag of heroin costs as little as \$5 and a half-gram can be purchased for \$50, 54 percent of all addicts checking into detox were addicted to heroin. That percentage was exceeded in Charlestown where the figure stood at 57 percent.

The heroin on the streets of Boston has risen from an average purity of 3% in 1981 to 30 percent by 2000 and, according to some lab analyses, has been as high as 70 percent. During my major relapse in February of 1998 through April of 1999, I found that I did not need to shoot the heroin to get high. Snorting it was sufficient. On one occasion, when I shot a bag in the bathroom of the Harvard-Epworth church, I almost died of an overdose.

Ironically, as the illness of addiction skyrockets to numbers never realized before, due to the recent spate of budget cuts the number of state-funded detox beds has dropped from a high of 997 to only 400 within one year. While I was an intern at STEP, Inc. (*what is STEP?*) during the late spring of this year, I experienced the frustration of calling detox after detox for addicts suffering from the throes of withdrawal and finding no beds available. At the end of a devastating two hours, the best I could do was hand them a list of the numbers I had called and tell them to try again tomorrow.

Tomorrow is an eternity away for an addict whose body and mind is wracked with the agony of opiate withdrawal. If they were addicts like I was in my heroin

addiction, I know they were going out to get that money for the fix from somewhere, anyway they could. Addiction only remembers what it needs; the rest is forgotten.

Addiction is an illness and, in South Boston alone, since the beginning of this year, there have been 12 deaths. Treatment options are shrinking.

No sick person should be persecuted like the addict is in today's world. All across New England during the past five years heroin overdoses have claimed more lives than homicides. The fact is that many of these deaths can be prevented by the distribution of Naloxone, an opiate antagonist used by EMT's when confronted with heroin overdoses, to addicts through the Needle Exchange programs. This is already being done in Chicago through the Chicago Recovery Alliance and they have had 115 reversals of opiate-involved overdoses. It is also being done in Baltimore in a pilot program and regularly at the San Francisco Needle Exchange. It is also being done in Albuquerque. In these places addicts are trained how to administer Naloxone (Narcan is one brand name) to another addict who has overdosed. Why is Massachusetts so far behind the times?

Naloxone is FDA regulated but it is not a substance of abuse. It saves lives. When addicts are allowed to possess Naloxone it means that users have a life-saving tool at their disposal. This can be compared with a person who is susceptible to anaphylactic shock from a bee sting having injectable epinephrine in their possession.

In Massachusetts, 8 local non-profit organizations have asked for and received Over Dose Education and Naloxone training for their staff and anonymous participants since January 2003. In addition, a pilot Naloxone program has reached 216 drug users and, according to their reports, 36 overdose victims in Cambridge, Lowell, and Lawrence were saved during the first 6 months of its distribution.

There is no doubt about it. Naloxone is easy to use, not a drug of abuse, and, like epinephrine and insulin, it saves lives. In Chicago, Baltimore, Albuquerque and San Francisco Naloxone is being legally distributed and it is directly responsible for heroin addicts surviving overdoses. Why is Boston so far behind the times? Why isn't the Needle Exchange able to legally operate in Lynn, Gloucester, Worcester and other major cities in Massachusetts where heroin use is rampant? Heroin addiction is an illness and needs to be treated as such now! Contact your House and Senate representatives and your local town councilors. You just might save the life of a family member tomorrow.

Addiction Is An Illness, Not A Crime

Prejudice, besides the prison system, is what killed Kelly-Jo Griffen. Do we look at cancer sufferers as less than human? Why are people with the disease of addiction criminalized, mistreated, and allowed to be brutalized by ignorant people masquerading as professionals?

Just like Prohibition against alcohol was a tragic error, so is the Harrison Narcotics Act which was passed in 1914. Fed misinformation by misdirected politicians, in a wave of anti-drug hysteria, this law was placed in effect and legal persecution of the sick began.

On July 20 Kelly-Jo Griffen was picked up on default warrants from a drug related incident. The next day she was transported, sick and suffering from a 20 bag a day heroin habit, to MCI-Framingham where, unconvicted of a crime, she died in while in drug withdrawal. Out of the prison system no one is giving any straight answers. Kelly-Jo is another victim of what our law enforcement system mistakenly refers to as the "war on drugs."

First and foremost the public needs to be educated about this illness called addiction. Then the Harrison Narcotics Act should be overturned and heroin should be legalized but controlled.

I can only imagine the horror with which this proposal be considered in a country where we struggle just to legalize marijuana. One day, when we look back at this era, we will realize that the demonization of drug addiction is just as prejudicial as our changing attitude toward homosexuality.

Drug addicts are people in the grip of an illness, an illness which permeates body, mind and spirit. It is not a moral failing. Treated with healing care and compassion under a proper medical protocol, this illness can go into remission.

Does it always? Of course not. If intractable, this illness can still be treated successfully by the dispensation of the drugs which are required under the medical model. Addicts, sick people such as Kelly-Jo, need not be incarcerated when they can be medically managed instead. Indeed, half of the crimes she allegedly committed might never have come about if drugs were legal.

During the course of my active addiction, almost every crime I was arrested for was due to the illness which drove me relentlessly on. When I was first arrested for possession of drugs at the age of 18 in West Orange, New Jersey, I was beaten mercilessly by the arresting officers. I was criminalized by the system into understanding that the police were my enemy. I was pushed out of society instead of treated for my illness.

After serving time my disease accelerated. I did not suffer a needless death in prison. Like Kelly-Jo, I might have been the victim of the savage persecution of people who are suffering from an illness, which is sorely misunderstood. It is precisely the lack of knowledge and the spread of misinformation which creates fear and misunderstanding about any disease.

Addiction is an illness. As long as the human species has an ounce of curiosity, people will experiment with drugs. For some of us that experimentation will lead to the illness of addiction. Every addict is someone's daughter, someone's son, maybe someone's mother or father.

The question I have for you is this: If your family member is sick, do you want them treated for their illness or do you want them imprisoned and locked away from medical help under the supervision of ignorant people who have no understanding of the suffering or the medical needs of your addicted loved one?

What Would You Do For A Fix?

And she asked me
"What would you do for a fix?"

I thought for a few moments.

I was this kind of addict.

For a fix
I would steal from my mother's purse
and I did
For a fix
I would take my sister's coin collection
and I did
For a fix
I would desert my children
and I did
For a fix
I would spend years in prison
and I did
For a fix
I would risk hepatitis
and I did
For a fix
I would shoot toilet water
and I did
For a fix
I would draw up puddle water on the street
and I did
For a fix
I would steal from my relatives and friends
and I did
For a fix
I would break into places to steal
and I did
For a fix
I would drive a car with no brakes

crash into other cars and injure people
and I did
For a fix
I would drive hundreds of miles every day
on bad roads
in blizzard conditions
and I did
For a fix
I would slide into an oncoming car in a snowstorm
bounce it into a parked car
then see the dope man up the street
leave the accident scene to get the dope
and then stop nearby to shoot it
while the police closed in
and I did
For a fix
I would steal my parent's car
and I did
For a fix
I would spend the rent money
and I did
For a fix
I would spend the food money meant to feed my family
and I did
For a fix
I would fuck old men up the ass
and I did
For a fix
I would sleep with people that I did not care for
and I did
For a fix
I would take the money out of the pocket
of an unconscious man on the street
and I did
For a fix
I would sell dangerous drugs to novices
and I did
For a fix I would break a promise to you
and I did
For a fix I would tell you anything
and I did.

When my dog was killed
I got high.
When my girlfriend had an abortion
I got high.
When I went to a movie
I got high.
When it rained
I got high.
When the sun was shining
I got high.
When it snowed
I got high.
When I went to prison
I got high.
When I was set free
I got high.
When my wife left
I got high.
When I fell in love again
I got high.
When she said, "If you ever get high again, I'll leave."
I got high.
When she left
I got high.
When the probation officer said, "If you come up dirty on your urine test, you'll go
back to prison"
I got high.
When I went back to prison for a dirty urine
I got high.
When it was time to go to school
I got high.
When I was kicked out of school
I got high.
When I felt sad
I got high.
When I felt happy
I got high.
When I couldn't tell how I felt
I got high.
When I didn't want to get high

I got high.
When I got married
I got high.
When I got divorced
I got high.
When I moved to the country to get away from drugs
I got high.
When I moved back to the city so I could get drugs
I got high.
When I found out that I was losing entire days in memory
I got high.
When I remembered what I had done while I was high
I got high.

In the beginning I got high because I liked it.
In the end I got high because it was all I had left.
In the beginning I got high because I could fuck for hours.
In the end I got high because I could not fuck at all.
In the beginning I got high with my friends.
In the end I got high alone.
In the beginning I got high so I could dance.
In the end I got high and thought I would never dance again.
In the beginning it was dancing dreams on the walls of my mind.
In the end the rooms were dark and lonely; the dreams were dead.
In the beginning I thought I had found a better way of life.
In the end I got high and had no life at all.
In the beginning I got high because I was searching for the way.
In the end I got high because I was searching for the way out.
In the beginning I got high because I wanted to open up.
In the end I got high because I wanted to shut down.
In the beginning I would get high to get closer to you.
In the end I was afraid of you and you wanted nothing to do with me.

In the end it was like this.
If I was to approach the devil to sell my soul for a fix
(I would have done this had I known how)
old Lucifer would have laughed at me and said,
"How can you sell me what you have already lost to heroin?"

I am convinced of this.
If Lucifer was to shoot heroin

he would trade all the provinces of hell for one more fix.

I won't get hooked.

I can stop any time I want to.

This will be the last time.

God, if you get me out of this I'll never do it again.

I promise.

No, no, this time I really mean it.

Honest.

"What would you do for a fix?" she asked.

I looked at her, smiled, and said, "For a fix --

I would do anything."

San Francisco Musings

25 July 01

Just arrived in San Francisco for the NASNA(North American Street Newspaper Association) convention. We're all staying at the YMCA in the tenderloin district. Of all places. The last time I was here I was ripping and running, strung out on heroin, shooting up with this crazy junkette in a burnt out room with a black jazz musician who was about 60 something. He had so much trouble getting a hit that one of us would have to bang the spike into his neck for a main vein. Whew.

The streets are meaner and leaner than they ever were. Folks sleeping on the sidewalk, the lost, the lonely, men and women pushing dope and shopping carts down the urine-soaked boulevard. We're a throwaway nation. We toss the best and the brightest into the heap. Everybody is so fucking crazy and if you don't fit into the accepted insanity, you get beaten, belittled, berated, discarded, disregarded, and finally dismissed. Maybe you get locked up.

Maybe you pick up a substance to ease the pain so you can function in the village of pillage. It's not about anything spiritual nowadays. It goes like, "I've upped my income so -- UP YOURS!"

I'm just going nuts here. I can look out the window and see people doing things in the street. In the first hour I saw the undercovers shaking down one guy and a dope deal happen right in front of me. Then this little black guy wearing a blanket tried to hit on me.

I can feel the energy coming in through the window in my room. It's calling me into the wilds. It says, "C'mon baby, I got what you want."

One bad decision. That's all it takes. I can have everything they have. I can be homeless again. I can be strung out on heroin again. I can get shook down by the undercover cops. Dirty clothes. No place to go. No one to turn to. The daily death of the soul.

Yeah. I can have it all if I want it.

The convention begins at 4pm tomorrow. It is sponsored this year by Street Sheet, the homeless paper of San Francisco. I'm glad to be here, deep in the tenderloin. It's early, just half past nine. The streets are just warming up.

If you can burn in hell, you certainly can burn in the Tenderloin. Hell is where you find it.

26 July 01

The music of Velvet Underground with Nico's voice haunting me. I just came back from an early morning walk around the Tenderloin district of S. F.

It's hard to comprehend how there can be those with so little in a town with so much. I walk past giant bank with iron gates in front of it. It is haunted, empty. Pigeon shit covers the iron, the walk, the impressive entrance. It is abandoned, the financiers fleeing to a more lucrative territory.

The morning streets smell of urine. Bodies litter the sidewalk. There is a woman, younger than me, maybe about 30, deep in a junk nod wrapped in blankets on the sidewalk. A man, much older than her, wrapped in blankets like her, is trying to kiss her. She pulls away a little, yet there is a resignation in her movements which says, "I have nothing but today's high, I am nothing, there is no escape from anything."

I am astounded at the number of people on the streets. They live here, on the filthy sidewalks. The streets look as if no one cleans them, no one cares.

In front of the YMCA on Goldengate Street, the place where I stay for the conference, two black men, one is called Louis, weave in a horrid body movement, it is as if they hear a tune no one else can hear. They are going through someone's wallet, peering about with feral eyes as they do it. They make no effort to hide it from me.

Louis bends slightly forward, then to the side, he weaves like a cobra as he goes through the wallet. The other man stands behind a metal newspaper box, I notice he has another wallet. I wonder who the victim was. Was he some junkie in recovery like myself who decided to relapse and chose the wrong night, the wrong face on the street to approach, the wrong moment when no one was around to watch his back, the wrong alley to walk into with the person who had no intention of giving anything back?

Louis looks at me as he goes through the man's wallet. He makes no attempt to hide what he is doing. Both of them dance to their inner hellish rhythm and they have synchronicity. Louis, the cobra, looks at me. Our eyes lock for a moment. It is a snake's look, he wants me to come to him, "I can get it for you," and he knows what I am too. One bad decision away from the filthy sidewalk. I can have everything they have and less.

Only five minutes away by foot is the United Nations Plaza of S.F. They set up little tents as I walk towards a coffee shop. I ask a man what is going to happen here. He says, "Every Thursday they have a swap meet or a flea market here with collectibles and antiques for sale."

Workers spray down the sidewalk and a giant fountain casts geysers of white water into the air, the water rolls down the intricate cement structure. The United Nations Plaza is right next to hell. I can't imagine what they can do overseas, in other countries, when their backyard is littered with street ghosts.

On the outskirts of the plaza a man pushes a shopping cart filled with his life's collectibles. Every now and then he stops and gestures crazily, waving his hands about and speaking to invisible entities. He rubs one hand wildly through his hair and then begins to push his carriage across a street. He looks both ways, traffic is coming yet he crosses anyway. Is he daring the cars to run him down, I wonder. Or has he already been run down, crushed and mangled by the nightmare world we all take for granted?

My thoughts drift back to the woman nodding on the sidewalk. She had reddish hair. She is someone's daughter, someone's hopes, someone's dreams. She has become a street ghost, a shadow entity beckoning to the dark world, she has crossed the river Styx and is already in the land of the dead.

Reporting to you direct from the Tenderloin District in San Francisco, hell's stronghold existing right next to the United Nations Plaza, early in the morning while I listen to The Black Angel's Death Song by The Velvet Underground. The streets are calling me. They know me better than I know myself.

Still July 26 -- much later

San Francisco -- was it ever the city of light? At the bus stops they have put in tiny benches that flip up so it is impossible to rest on them. At night, when everything shuts down, no homeless person can sleep undercover on those bench mutations.

Rents skyrocket just like in the Boston area. More and more people face eviction. Street ghosts. So many of them. I am ashamed to be a part of a civilization that thinks it can throw everything away. When it breaks throw it out.

When it breaks throw it out. I reach into my chest, break my ribs out of the way, place my callous claw on the sump pump in my chest beating like it might be a heart and cast it out. Watch me now. I won't fall. Now I'm just like you.

27 July 01

Even the pigeons are tattered here. I was up early, out taking pictures. I'm still blown away by the tragedy I witness here on the streets. A woman in her sixties in torn clothing leaning against a wall begging for spare change for coffee. I give her a dollar. She looks directly into my eyes and thanks me.

What kind of people have we become that we can let this happen. We degrade and destroy the world around us. Is our 'civilization' falling into an abyss from which we will never rise again? Humanity mocks balance. The horror of it all is we still may be able to turn it around yet those who govern (rule) us fail to speak to our hearts.

Did you know that the mailing preceding the Bush tax cuts just to let all good Americans know how much they (only those who make more than \$25,000) will get cost the government (that's u.s.) over 33 million dollars. Maybe that should have gone into housing.

Most people who are eligible for the tax rebates will only get from \$300 to \$600. I didn't realize we could sell the soul of a nation so cheaply but there you are. A few nice nights out to eat, maybe a weekend in the mountains or a monthly payment on an SUV and the nation's homeless can rot in hell. Everyday, one day at a time.

28 July 01

On the street this morning. Stopped and took some pictures of people literally camping on the street with tent and all. We chat for a while. My friend Joie from the paper *Loaves and Fishes*, which originates in Maryland, goes for coffee with --- ---- while I chat with -----.

While I stand there two other fellows, both starkly skinny, come up and ask if 'the turkey is available. ----- calls into the tent and says, "Hey baby, grease the

turkey," and a female voice calls out, "Send 'em in," and the two guys disappear into the tent.

I don't know what went on in that tent but, when the guys came out, neither of them could keep the lids off their eyes. If it was sex it was really good sex and if it was dope, it was killer.

Still July 28 but almost midnite now. The streets are full of the homeless. In Japan that's how they say it. The homeless. We've earned the right to be a noun. We all just came back from a demonstration against the San Francisco Chronicle. They have become an organ of the establishment and are guilty of homeless bashing.

We demonstrated in front of their building for about two hours after a short march from the intersection of Powell and Market Street. Finally the editor made an appointment to interview three homeless activists on Monday. No other media seemed interested in the protest. According to corporate media, it was a non-event.

It's dark out and people are kicking back on the sidewalks. Some of them urinate and shoot drugs right out in the open. I've never seen anything like this in Boston. It's almost midnight and I feel like going out to see what's happening. The urge is like a tractor beam pulling me, tugging me back into a world once very familiar to me.

In 1983 I was here, shooting heroin and living on these mad streets. It's much crazier now. I recall the guy sitting on the sidewalk earlier today with his pet rooster. I'm sitting at the computer shaking my head in wonder.

Out of my room, to the elevator, seven floors down and out the main door into the streets. They're shooting dope openly on the Golden Gate Boulevard. I could join them, just like that. Maybe I could pry the elevator door open on the seventh floor while the elevator is on the first floor, leap into the shaft and scream all the way down.

Maybe I'll just shut down the computer and go to sleep instead. I'm totally exhausted. I'm in a room all by myself listening to the Velvet Underground. The music will put me to sleep. I won't be able to hear the cries of the homeless just outside my window. Street ghosts.

People walk by them just like they aren't there.

29 July 01

It's Sunday morning. I look outside the window. The tents are set up on the sidewalk. Did you know that many people become homeless for lack of a high enough pay scale or mental illness and then are exposed to drug use on the streets? When everything is falling apart in one's life, it is easy to pick up a substance to ease the intense emotional and psychic pain.

Which came first, the chicken or the egg? Which came first, the addiction or the tragedy of having no place safe to live? And how do we begin to solve the immense problem of homelessness?

Obviously, there is no one solution. Building more affordable housing, street papers, drug treatment, guided living centers for mentally ill, halfway houses that treat people with dignity and, last but not least, reaching out and becoming a friend to our neighbors on the street and helping them find what they need to become housed in a safe environment are just a few of the required actions on our parts.

Should we choose not to take these actions and more on behalf of the unhoused, then we must re-examine our worth as a spiritual civilization. The homeless are the chosen ones. The way we treat them today is the way we are treating God today.

We need to look into our hearts and lift them up. For us, for all of us, time is getting short.

How I Found Out What A Detox Was

I was living in New Hampshire at the time. I was running a chain of doctors who were writing Tussionex, Xanax, and Ativan. I was also using heroin on the days I couldn't get Tussionex but the problem with using heroin was that I didn't have a New Hampshire connection so I had to drive to Worcester, Massachusetts if I couldn't get Tussionex from a doctor.

I estimate that I was seeing twelve to thirteen doctors a month for prescriptions and I was eating 8 to 12 1 milligram Ativan a day.

I kept a log of which drug store I was using for each doctor so I didn't double-dip, which would reveal that I was using the doctors and pharmacies to support my habit.

I remember it clearly. Well, as clearly as someone on multiple analgesics and sedative-hypnotics. I walked into the drug store and handed him the prescriptions. He smiled at me and walked over to the counting counter to fill the scrips. What I didn't know was happening when he went to the phone was that he was calling another pharmacy that I used with a different doctor for a drug he had run out of.

His intentions were good. Country pharmacists and doctors are very helpful and he was going to send me to the other pharmacy to fill the prescription for Tussionex. Two bits of troublesome information interfered with the process. One, I had just gone to that drugstore to fill a prescription of Tussionex and Ativan within the last two days, and two, he mentioned my name in the process. Obviously, I would have never gone to that particular store because everything would blow up in my face if I did that and I knew it.

Unfortunately, the country pharmacist, eager to help me out, tipped my extremely fine-tuned scam into the river Styx which flows directly to hell. The phone wires between pharmacist and pharmacist to doctor to doctor burned with my name on it and I was shut down tighter than boa constrictor wrapped around a rabbit.

Luckily, back then they didn't know what to do in a situation like this except shut me down. In today's world, I would have been drug conspiracied into prison for at least a dime, which means ten years, with a nickel's worth of probation, which means at least five years of that.

That didn't happen. What did happen was that I had an opiate habit that was hungrier than a homeless waif in Calcutta and a benzodiazapene (Ativan and Xanax) that, in a few days would have me doing the fish out of water flopping on the floor, convulsing with every muscle including my heart, and I was one fatality just waiting to happen.

Opiate withdrawal just makes you wish you were dead, benzo withdrawal makes your wishes come true. Basically, I needed either a connection with everything in the world for cheap money or a hospital detox.

Alice Peck Day Hospital in Lebanon, New Hampshire provided that special service called detox. Now I had no real idea what a medical detox provided because the only detox I had ever experienced was cold turkey on a metal bench in the holding tank before I did time in prison, which, now that I think of it, is a specialized service also. What was new to me was that I had never copped a benzo habit before. It kind of crept up on me because, unlike narcotics, the doctors dispensed it like it was Hershey Kisses and I, when I boosted the opiates with the benzo's (which is lethal children, so don't play that way, I just got lucky) couldn't get enough of that lovin'.

Alice Peck Day and I got a shotgun marriage. Believe me, it was not what I wanted but, as Bob Dylan says, "You don't always get what you want, babe, sometimes you just get what you need." Or was that the Rolling Stones?

I recognized my need for hospitalization because I started having tremors and my chest felt like it had that boa constrictor I mentioned before wrapped around it, and it felt like pieces of glass were scraping my brain. My wife, who was only addicted to opiates so she was in much better shape, drove me to the hospital. We found the hospital in the yellow pages of the phone book and it was the closest to Washington, New Hampshire, that we knew did detox.

At the time I was working at the New Hampshire State Hospital as a Mental Technician II. When you're surrounded by doctors, no one notices that anything's wrong.

When I checked in, the nurse at Alice Peck Day Hospital gave me a list of questions that took me close to two hours to finish. I just wanted my medication. Finally they dosed me with Librium and took me to my room. I asked them if they had methadone to detox my opiate habit with and they said, "Methadone isn't prescribed in this state for drug addicts."

That didn't ease the worry in my mind but the Librium cooled out my benzo withdrawal. Benzo withdrawal feels ten times worse than opiate withdrawal, besides being lethal.

I laid down on my bed. I didn't even have the energy to unpack my suitcase. I was just burnt toast.

Then an attendant, who I didn't know was a drug counselor, walked in and gave me a packet of papers and told me that the top sheet showed my schedule. I looked at it. There was a meeting scheduled before breakfast, two scheduled between lunch and breakfast, then two after lunch before dinner and then an outside meeting after supper.

I handed the papers back to the guy and said, "No thanks, I just need the medication and a rest and I'll be all right."

He looked at me quizzically and asked, "Is this your first detox?"

"Yes, it is," I answered.

"Oh," he said. "You'll find that detox is very different than just being in the hospital because you're sick. There are many things required of you and these meetings are necessary for your recovery."

"Recovery!" I exclaimed. "Christ, I just need to rest and withdraw from these damned benzos, then get the hell out of here so I can stick with just the heroin. I won't make this mistake again."

He smiled at me. "There's a lot you don't understand about what's going on. You're not just addicted to drugs. You have an illness and these meetings are part of the treatment. We're just going to worry about today. We'll deal with tomorrow when it comes."

"What are you talking about?" I asked. "This is crazy. I just need a rest, some drugs to withdraw slow so I don't die and then I'll just take heroin. There's nothing wrong with me."

"Dinner will be served in about two hours. You can rest until then. Tonight someone will take you to a meeting."

That night a biker with long hair and a beard took me out to my first drug support group. I could tell by the way he talked and looked that he was like me. He just said he didn't take drugs anymore. "Just one day at a time, that 's all," he said.

"You can't fool me, you're talking about the rest of my life," I said to him.

"Just listen. That's all. Maybe you'll hear something that will make sense to you. You're just sick and you don't know it," he said.

* * *

On my third day there I conned them for a script so I could taper myself. I think the only reason they gave it to me was because they knew I was leaving because my wife had picked up our paychecks and she was coming to get me. They tried to talk me out of leaving. Nothing seemed to make sense. I couldn't imagine the rest of my life without heroin. I just couldn't imagine it.

I just wasn't ready. I had no idea what I was up against. It was too much to understand that the enemy was me. Two years later I finished a detox. I still didn't stop using.

I went to Alice Peck Day Hospital in 1989. The first time I stopped using was in March of 1994. I finally surrendered and gained some idea about this illness. I'm a drug counselor now. That doesn't mean I'm not still sick. I'm just in the process of healing and I help others to do the same.

Like that biker who took me to my first meeting said, "It's just one day at a time, that's all.

For Addicts Only

Here I sit in the 1369 Coffee House on Mass Ave in scenic sunny Central Square. I look out at the street through the rain-streaked windows. I feel isolated, alone, separated from the rest of humanity by a thin membranous wall. I can see you out there. You are so close to me it seems I can reach you yet, when I try, when I make an effort to join the masses of people living in this insane world the membrane slips into place.

I am fresh out of rehab from decades of heroin addiction. I am well-fed, there is even extra flesh layered over my hungry bones, I have clean clothes on that even fit me well. I have a place to live, not a mean feat in the area of the greed-crazed-swine landlord here in Cambridge and Boston. It is just a room yet, for me, it is a palace for I have my own bathroom. I have not entered it yet, the hungry bag of junk in my hand, sweat pouring from my forehead as I take out the U-100 insulin syringe, place the spoon on the toilet tank lid, rip open the bag and sprinkle the powder onto a fresh cotton. I know my hands will shake with the excitement because soon, soon I will pierce myself and slam the whispering poison home.

Romancing the drug. The junk talks to me, it's husky feminine voice in my ear, tantalizing me with the tongue, saying, "Come on home baby, I'll take care of you; you've had some tough breaks so let me smooooooth out that pain."

My connection arrives here shortly. Oh, he is not coming to see me but I see others I ran with sitting at a table in the back. They watch the door. Why am I sitting here, just out of detox and rehab, raw from the ache of my writhing cells, with the dope man on his way to this place? Why do I not get up to flee, screaming tales of the horror of withdrawal into the coffee-laden air, out the door with my sweat streaming behind me? Why do I not leap into the street in front of a rapidly moving car, or better yet a truck, hoping to be smashed from the physical world into the next reality, one which I know nothing about?

Quick, a gun, can you spare me a bullet, please, I am only contemplating suicide on the installment plan. Come up behind me, place the gun to the back of this head containing this brain which showers me with gibbering terror, pull the trigger, that's it, go ahead. The street sweeper will come, mistake me for garbage, pick me up and throw me into the trash. Only my thoughts will be recycled, from one damned junkie to the next. Junkies like me don't sail over the River Styx to get into hell; we

inject it's foul waters into our bloodstream every day. Our bodies are the boat, our minds the rudder which steers us home to hell.

Ahh, the connection is here; the other addicts are moving towards him. He sees me and grins, the diamond studs in each of his rotting teeth glitter. His eyes empty into my pockets to see what he can make use of; he wants to take it all; his own habit demands it. Addiction only remembers what it needs.

"It's been a long time, where have you been, this stuff is killer, the stamp on the bag is Dose. It's poison dude, how many do you want? You don't need to say anything, I can see the need in your dying eyes, just put the money in my hand." He says.

"I'm just going to do some today. You won't see me tomorrow because I don't want to get another habit. I'll take three, two for today and one for tomorrow morning. There's nothing like a fix first thing in the morning, then a cigarette and coffee." As I hand him the money.

"Good to have you back. I'll see you tomorrow," he says with a grin as he slips me the bags.

"But I," I start to say. He is already walking away, he knows there is no reason to listen to empty songs of protest.

As I run out into the street with the three bags of heroin clutched tightly in my hand, I remember the relapse group in the detoxification center near Worcester. I remember everyone sitting in a circle when the counselor asked us to shut our eyes and then said, "Everyone who thinks they will stay clean after they leave here please raise your hand."

He paused as I raised my hand, determined to be one of the people who stayed clean. Then he said

"Leave your hand up, open your eyes and look around the room."

Everyone had their hand up. Could it be that everyone was as determined as I had been?

Then he said, "Look around you. At least every other person in this room will relapse, according to the statistics."

A part of me wants to throw the bags away. A part of me never wanted to go back to the old haunting ground, yet it felt as if a strange force, inexplicable, powerful, guided my feet back to the fateful place where I knew my connection comes.

I told myself I just wanted to see how my friends were doing. I told myself I just wanted to check in at my old hangout. I told myself I wasn't going to get the stuff; I was strong enough. But inside my stomach was crawling, craving, the hunger hit me like a moving stone wall racing faster than my thoughts. Now here I was skittering down the street toward my room, my bowels turning to jelly as I anticipated the relief of that first shot.

Just this time, I pleaded to some unknown deity, just this once and I'll be all done with it.

Into the rooming house. Up the stairs, taking them two at a time. I feel so excited, I want to scream, to yell, to dance. My hand shakes so much I can barely get the key to the door.

Open. In the room. Shut the door. The telephone. It starts to ring. I get out the hypodermic I saved from my last run, "just in case", take a spoon out, place it on the edge of the sink. My hand trembles so much I can barely get the water in the glass.

I rip open one bag, shake the powder into the spoon. Cotton. Where the hell is some cotton? I am frantic now. I tear the edge of a filter on a cigarette and throw it into the spoon. Danger. I know the filter is made of something related to fiberglass but I just don't care about anything now.

Wasn't the phone ringing? There it is again. Water. Toil, toil and trouble, water boil and bubble. What story about witches had that line come from?

The needle bangs against the bottom of the spoon over and over from the tremors in my hand as I draw up the liquid.

The telephone rings again, incessantly, like it is someone who knows what I am about at this moment. I place the needle above my vein. Someone is knocking at my door.

I hold my breath. Maybe they will go away. I plunge the needle in and, like magic, a spot of blood appears at the bottom of the syringe, I draw back the plunger and slam slam slam it home.

Nothing can hurt me now.

There is someone knocking at the door. I tell them to wait a minute, put everything away in a drawer, light a cigarette, swing the door open.

It is one of the recovery people, a guy named Lenny, that I met while in detox.

He says, "I was just swinging by to see if you wanted to go to a meeting."

I look at him, slowly reaching up to scratch my nose.

"Tomorrow," I say, "How about tomorrow."

He looks at me. I suck smoke from the cigarette, look back at him.

When The Enemy Is Me

I look out at the world through the window of my disease. The world peers back at me, a taunting, twisting version of itself that tells me it is real.

Trust is not an issue. My mind is a flawed projector; I know it lies to me. Sometimes. One of the lies is that heroin will help me write. The horror of it is, at times it does. It clears my fears away, pinpoints my focus and laser-like, my ideas take shape on paper. Yet the laser burns on both ends and soon I am unable to live without the substance.

At times my thoughts assault me with such intensity that suicide becomes a viable option. I smile at you as you pass me; I greet you warmly. I am glad to see you so I am not lying, however, inside myself, I am thinking of how best to do away with myself.

I get tired. I feel as if I am on a futile treadmill. It will not stop. I take one weary step after another. It is an effort to simply tie my shoelaces. My fingers tap the keys on the computer and I try to turn out another story, another poem; I try to create one more reason to keep on living.

My death rushes at me. It comes in so many forms: heart attack, cancer, cerebral hemorrhage, staph infection. Maybe a car in the oncoming lane will veer, its occupant stricken with a lapse of attention, possibly deep in a conversation on his cell phone, the car will hit just at the moment at which I most want to keep living.

I am still tired. My eyes snap open in the early morning; the light invades my sensorium. Fear grips my chest. I am unable to take a deep breath and I pant, desperate to take in my ration of oxygen. A heavy weight sits upon me. Heart attack.

My range of focus begins to fade. I am wild with fear. I pick up the phone and call the ambulance.

After hours they determine I have just had a severe panic attack and send me home with a mild sedative related to Valium. I feel foolish and I am ashamed of myself. However, to me, the paralyzing fear was absolutely real.

At this point I know I will never write again. No matter what I do my life will continue to spiral in the depths. Negative thoughts torture me. They pepper my image of myself like a barrage of bullets. I have a fully armed assault team attacking me and the horror of it is, the enemy is me.

If you have ever experienced the effects of prolonged physical pain then you can only imagine what it is like to be under the control of a reign of terror waged on the Spirit through the thought-world.

A reign of terror. If anyone did to me what my own mind does to me, if anyone said to me the words of sadistic cruelty that my own mind spits at my Being, I would seek to leave their company forever.

Why commit suicide? Indeed, why not? Everyday I must come up with a reason to continue with my life. At times I have to take medication which modifies the terror, drops it down to a low hum where I can only detect it as a vague feeling of something out of synch.

You, out there, enough of you have read my writing to know some of the denizens which inhabit my mind. They are all real. They track out of my dreams, my nightmares, dragging their stinking selves into the daylight of my reality. I have to deal with them.

I place them on paper so your eyes can eat them, your minds can devour them, and while you read them, I get some relief. Believe me when I tell you that some of these creatures are me.

I am the Troll, I am the Frankenstein, especially I am, in an alternate world, Moshe Dean, who is trapped in the world of active addiction.

For you, I open the window, just a little bit, to let you peep in to the window of my disease. I don't know about Stephen King but the world I write about lives inside me.

The doctors call it major depression, severe panic disorder, addiction. I call it reality. I am just a shot away from hell.

Some Addicts Get High. Some Addicts Die

Stella*, the house counselor where I live, relapsed. What a shock to the house! Of course, what it illustrates is that there is no cure from the disease of addiction, just a daily reprieve contingent on one's spiritual condition. What it means is work, work, work. The journey of recovery is long, hard and full of unexpected rewards and setbacks.

I feel wild, out of control. The music is blasting out of the stereo. *All Along The Watchtower* by Savage Grace. I think this is the best version of that song ever made. Are the crazy feelings brought about by the music, the strange energy in the house since Stella relapsed, or is it just me looking for something to blame my jagged mood on?

How many songs swing me from one place to the next in my ragged life? Now it's *Night Moves* by Bob Seger. Yow! Fast bikes, faster women, hard times, harder drugs.

I remember the first time I shot heroin, I had a date with this beautiful Greek girl who had a hard-on for me and we went to the drive-in and I was so fucked up she couldn't even get me to make out with her. All I wanted to do was sit there with my eyes closed and watch the reel spin inside my head while she was all wet and pissed off and never went out with me again and who could blame her for that! She probably was a wonderful wife with children for some lucky guy while I traded the scales of a snake for powder that made my veins shake and got lost in the poison mist that I mistook for rainbow laden clouds. Who could tell in those old days?

Stella, the house counselor relapsed! What does that mean on the eve of me beginning a course to become an addictions counselor? Indeed! What does anything mean?

Just recently the woman I love more dearly than anything became critically ill. I remember it as if it were happening right now. I relive the haunted look in her eyes when she was sinking into darkness.

I see my sweetheart in the storm of my mind's eye. She is connected to a respirator at the hospital. There is a group of wires connected to her neck which they tell me

is running to her heart. Even her face is swollen with the poison that flows through her body and they tell me she might not make it. Might not make it!

What makes them think I will make it if she doesn't? Don't they see the death in my eyes if she dies? When the depression hits, when it hits, when there are no reasons I can come up with for continuing my miserable life, why should I not be sitting in a McDonald's bathroom drawing water up from the toilet for one last pathetic fix that won't fix me anyhow because the sickness in me is so soul-deep that nothing made of material can even touch it.

Then the priest comes to touch her with Holy Oils. She is deep down in herself, close to the edge of the darkness.

The priest speaks her name and begins to pray. And God of Holy Gods, she begins to stir! Her entire body yearns in the direction of Him while he touches her with the Oils. She believes! She believes even while hidden in the deepest darkness, the bottom-lands of dream where the demons dwell in close proximity to God's Angels.

If you could have seen her move towards the priest, towards God, towards the prayers, your disbelief might shatter also. Just like mine. Who am I to doubt when the proof of profound faith is directly in front of me?

Faith. Faith is the most important component of my recovery. I cannot intellectualize the miracle. The most natural act for a dyed-in-the-cooker heroin addict is to shoot more heroin. And here I have been clean for more than two years. How does anyone account for this?

How about faith? How about daily prayer, almost daily meditation and constant invocation of the name of God at times when I am on the street and my mind tells me to wave the dope man over to me.

What else? There were moments on the street when I was in early recovery when I had to pack up my papers and go across the street to the pay phone and call Stella at Moore's Way and tell her I was coming in because the compulsion had wrapped its gnarled withering hand around my tight throat.

On the commuter rail coming home praying. The bicycle ride to Moore's Way. Then I am at the door looking up the stairs and I see the office door is open and I know Stella is in there. She was a safe harbor for me and many an addict since she started as a counselor there in 1994. Many of us literally owe her and our Higher Power, which I choose to call God, our lives.

Now she has gone, her own demons scabbled their horn-toad-claws into her heart and caused her to place the substance inside her. My heart is afraid. I remember so well what happened to me with almost four years free of heroin. How I forgot my faith. How my mind, twisted creature that it is, skewed my reality and spun me toward the darkness. How my body, ravaged by emotional and psychic distress, reached for the morphine pills and threw them down my quaking throat.

And how it took me 14 agonizing months to return, a broken empty shell of a man, to recovery.

The door out to hell does not swing back in again so easily.

I think of Stella, the woman who helped so many addicts stay clean at the unique program in Gloucester named Moore's Way, and I drop to my knees and pray. I think of Stella, who for so many years did God's work, and wonder how the demons got to her.

Addiction. I remember so well, so many times, when an addict relapsed and someone, possibly myself, made a judgment call. Then Stella would take me or whoever it was to task and say, "Remember, this is not a moral issue. Addiction is a disease and, for some of us, relapse is part of the process."

I know what she said is true. I still pray for her and hope she returns quickly. What scares me is what my sponsor told me when, just recently, an addict named Judy relapsed and died.

He said, "Some addicts get high. Some addicts die."

I don't know what the future will bring. I don't want to know the future. All I want is to do the next right thing today. Today is all I have.

No matter what happens I owe a immense debt of gratitude to Stella and Moore's Way. They were there and helped me when I was unable to help myself.

With a debt like that, how in the world do I begin to repay it? All I can do is freely pass on the gift that was given to me.

Thank you Stella. Thank you Moore's Way. Thank you God.

**Stella's name has been changed to protect her anonymity.*

In Memory Of Tim Kelleher

"I saw the best minds of my generation dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix." -----Alan Ginsburg, Howl

No more. Now the heroin is in all the neighborhoods. It knows no racial boundaries. Heroin picks its victims at random; not a one of us knows who it will strike next.

The strongest, the youngest, who among us thinks that we will be the one to be taken down by the bag with just a little too much junk in the mix. No junkie ever worries about the bag with too much, only the bag with not enough.

Just two months ago, in the July 26th issue of *Spare Change News*, I wrote an article called *In The World Of The Addict*. I spoke of a wonderful man who had a gift to reach others, especially children. I did not name him at that time to protect his anonymity.

His name was Tim Kelleher and he was a clown. He made balloons for many a happy tourist in Harvard Square, performed at private and public gatherings, and brought laughter to the lips of many a child. He was a beautiful man and a wonderful clown.

He had a terminal illness.

The trouble with this illness is that it carries a stigma. The trouble with this illness is that those of us, like myself, like Robert Downey, like many of our sons and daughters who have this illness, are harshly judged, imprisoned, isolated, punished.

Ironically, the prime punisher of those people who have this illness lives within the primary victim. Those who love the person with this illness are the secondary victims, not that they suffer any less.

Tim's suffering is over. He was 46 years old. God bless you, my brother.

Harm Reduction: The Needle Exchange and Other Options For Addicts

When I first started using heroin intravenously, which was back in the early sixties, a number of us would be sitting around the table emptying what were called tres bags into our cookers. Due to the illegality of injection devices there might be only one needle available to us.

Disposable syringes had not yet been marketed so we would take an eye dropper, strip the edge of a dollar bill around the end or possibly use thread to coil around the narrow part of the dropper and wedge the needle on to that. Because it was not a perfect fit, some blood or water might leak from the dropper and soak it, forming the perfect storage place for harmful bacteria. A baby pacifier placed on the top of the dropper instead of the smaller rubber bulb made it into a more effective drug delivery device.

One by one, we each shot our dope with the binky, as the device was called, gave it a cursory rinse with a little water and then passed it to the next person. At times arguments would break out amongst us as to who was going to shoot first.

I remember going to my connection's place and copping a few bags. I had no working "set" (another name for the device) of my own and so I asked Norman, the junkie who was dealing, if I might use his. His yellowed eyes peered into mine and he said, "I don't mind but, you know, I have hepatitis," as he extended the binky in my direction.

I did not hesitate. After all, when you are dope sick you just want to get well and damn the consequences. Believe me, if I had had access to a clean set of works, I would have preferred it and used them instead. Hypodermic needles were illegal and they were more difficult to get than dope at times. Sharing needles was a way of life in the junkworld.

A few weeks later I was in the hospital with Hepatitis B. It is clear that, for us in previous eras, the only needle exchange that took place was from hand to hand around the table with the same needle.

Today, in some places, intravenous drug users (IDU's) have more options open to them. I will quote directly from the Controlled Substance Field Manual 2000

Edition which is, under ideal conditions, read by police officers throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

As follows: "In 1993, amendments to the Commonwealth's controlled substances statute were enacted so that pilot needle exchange programs (NEP) could begin. DPH was authorized to approve local needle exchange programs through an amendment to Section 27 of Chapter 94C of the Acts of 1993. The amendment provided, in part that: *"Needles and syringes may be distributed or possessed as part of a pilot program approved by the Department of Public Health . . . and any such distribution or exchange of said needles and syringes shall not be a crime."*

A study was set up to determine how crime was affected in the areas where needle exchange programs were sited. During that first year crimes such as homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, larceny, and vehicle theft remained unaffected in those areas, meaning that there was no increase or decrease in crimes of that type. However, there was a definite decline in crimes such as simple assault, vandalism, weapons violations, prostitution, drug offenses, and other crimes of that nature. Although the decline was small, what it indicated was that the siting of a NEP in a community was not detrimental to the neighborhood.

However, one of the flaws in the new law is that needle exchange programs need local approval to be set up in a community, regardless of the need for one. This means that a community such as Lynn, which has an extremely high rate of intravenous drug users, has no local NEP in their city. An addict must travel all the way to Cambridge or Boston to exchange used hypodermic syringes for new ones.

Ironically, even though a NEP is not sited in Lynn, users who live in Lynn may join the needle exchange program wherever it is located and are thereby exempt from arrest for possession of a hypodermic needle/syringe no matter where they are in the Commonwealth. There have been instances where members of an NEP have been arrested for possession of needles/syringes by police in communities where no NEP is sited, however no arrest of that nature has culminated in a conviction.

In a previous paragraph I made the statement that, to exchange a used needle and syringe an addict would be forced to travel "all the way from Lynn to Boston." While this may not seem very far to the "normal" person, to an addict suffering from the throes of withdrawal, this short trip has eternal connotations.

Remember, people who use drugs are oriented totally to the present, are extremely concrete in their thinking and have a need to see what they consider positive results right now, not in some dubious future. When I was using one of the remarks I

repeated on a regular basis was, "I want it right now, and I want to inject it." This was my orientation to reality. Rather than make the trip all the way to Boston, an addict might borrow a syringe from any addict nearby if his own is incapacitated from overuse.

Ironically, many providers attribute negative qualities to drug users which are totally false. They say drug users have a lack of commitment, an inability to follow through, a lack of patience, and a lack of willpower. Of course they say this in light of "their own goals" for the drug addict.

What they fail to consider is the hard and difficult work a drug addict is willing to do to obtain their "paycheck", the bag of dope. The addict will follow through on the most difficult task, are totally and irrevocably committed to their goal, will wait forever in the wind, rain or snow, and will not quit until they are satisfied or locked up. Hell, even after they're locked up they will work unceasingly to get what they want.

Therein lies the key. Truly, it is the providers job to help the addict want something better. And how does one reach the addict on the street. The first thing a provider can do is 'provide' something which satisfies an immediate need for the addict.

Needle exchange. Easy access to it, preferably by public transportation. It should also be in a comfortable place where groups can be held and have hours such that an addict could go there during the day without an appointment to be served.

Incentives to attend groups might include reimbursement for travel, coffee and snacks, extra syringes, health and safety kits in which include Narcan case of accidental overdose. Many an addict has died needlessly because others with him/her were afraid to call 911 because of the very real threat of arrest and incarceration.

Needle exchange is one aspect of what is called "Harm Reduction".

What is Harm Reduction? I will quote from literature provided to me by Cambridge Cares About AIDS, which by the way is looking for a new site for a permanent needle exchange in Cambridge. If you can help with this please call them at [617] 661-3040. Hopefully they will find a new site soon for it is badly needed.

Harm Reduction is:

1. It accepts, for better or for worse, that licit and illicit drug use is part of many cultures, including our own, and chooses to work to minimize it's harmful effects rather than simply ignore or condemn them.

2. Harm Reduction ensures that drug users and those with a history of drug use routinely have a real voice in the creation of program and policies designed to serve them, and both affirms and seeks to strengthen the capacity of people who use drugs to reduce the various harms associated with their drug use..
3. Harm Reduction understands drug use as a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon that encompasses a continuum of behaviors from severe abuse to total abstinence, and acknowledges that some ways of using drugs are clearly more safe than others.
4. Harm Reduction establishes quality of individual and community life and well being – not necessarily cessation of all drug use – as the criteria for successful interventions and policies.
5. Harm Reduction calls for the non-judgmental, non-coercive provision of services and resources to people who use drugs and the communities in which they live in order to assist them in reducing harm in their lives.
6. Harm Reduction recognizes that the realities of poverty, class, racism, social isolation, past trauma, sex-based discrimination, and other social inequities affect both people’s vulnerability to and capacity for effectively dealing with drug-related harms.

Some of the ways a Needle Exchange Program makes the community safer are as follows (taken from literature):

1. It removes the likelihood of syringes discarded improperly or on the street where children can find them.
2. It makes it safer for the police who will not be exposed to needle sticks when searching a drug suspect because the needles/syringes need not be hidden for fear of charges.
3. Needle exchange programs reduce the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C and successfully link injection drug users with treatment services.
4. The Boston/Cambridge needle exchange program has actively linked over 360 injection drug users to treatment, including long-term addicts who had never before sought or obtained substance abuse treatment. In its first year of operation, the Northhampton program linked 50 clients – 25% of participants – to substance abuse treatment.
5. In Boston/Cambridge, both serious crime and “quality of life” offenses, such as vandalism and disorderly conduct, decreased in the areas where the NEP (needle exchange program) was located. Similarly, Northhampton experienced no increase in crime after implementation of their NEP.
6. Virtually every scientific body that has studied NEPs supports them: the National Research Council/Institute of Medicine, US Centers for Disease

Control, National Commission on AIDS, the American Medical Association and the American Public Health Association to list a few.

7. The National Commission on AIDS concluded “Legal sanctions on injection devices do not reduce illicit drug use, but they do increase the sharing of injection equipment and hence the spread of AIDS.

Incidentally, the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C are not limited to the IDU only but also their wives, lovers, and their children which accounts for 44% of people currently living with AIDS in the Commonwealth.

Harm Reduction is a strategy of non-judgmental action to help drug users minimize the damage to their lives and is also a pathway to recovery should they choose that way of life.

Harm Reduction is a different concept than recovery. Recovery is thought of as abstinence. Because Harm Reduction is a different concept than recovery, I also feel that there should be two different types of halfway houses. There should be Harm Reduction Halfway Houses and there should be Halfway Houses for addicts in Recovery.

It is a mistake to mix these two different types of programs. Unfortunately, that is what is happening today in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Methadone Maintenance is Harm Reduction. At this time, due to DPH (Department of Public Health) funding requirements halfway houses are required to mix recovery clients and methadone clients. This is, in my opinion, a terrible error and it will only lead to turmoil within the programs.

I believe both types of clients deserve to benefit from halfway house living situations, however the two different programs are not a suitable blend.

Personally, I think Harm Reduction is a concept that is right on time. The “war on drugs” is nothing more than a war on people who have a disease. If it were not for Harm Reduction I would not be abstinent from drugs today.

If the human being with the disease of addiction is shut out from education about their illness, then he/she will remain an outsider and an outlaw with no options open to them. Good decision-making is a learned process. Only the acquisition of good information can make that process viable.

Harm Reduction is the strategy by which many drug users, who have lived so long on the outside that they don't know there is another way, can be brought in to receive the proper medical care they and their families need.

In The Dead Of Winter

Ice creeps up the windows. No snow in sight. The days start lengthening yet it is difficult for me to notice the difference.

One by one the Christmas decorations come off the houses. The nights seem longer and darker than ever. This darkening of my mood is so familiar and yet it never ceases to immobilize me. I know it will pass.

I know it will pass. The problem is that the knowing is intellectual; the malaise is spiritual. All the voices of my past rise up to haunt me.

My father says, "You'll never be a man." How young was I the first time it rang in my ears? Just a child. And children believe their parents. At the age of ten or eleven I couldn't just "process" the information and recognize how false it was.

When I turned thirteen and was Bar Mitzvahed, in the Jewish tradition, I had become a man. Yet, on the inside, I was tormented. Suicide was constantly on my mind. All I desired was some relief from the burden of self.

I remember standing on the curb of Livingston Avenue trying to muster up the nerve to throw myself into the traffic flow. "Coward!" I thought to myself. "You can't even kill yourself properly. You'll never be a man!"

There is so much from my childhood I can't recall. I have a deep sense of sadness rushing at me from the past and a cloud of dread looming over the future. I twist in agony in some dubious present I am hardly aware of due to the chatter of demons in my head.

I want to run to heroin for relief. The psych drugs they give me are like "the pills that mother give you that don't do anything at all." I have hit the iceberg of midwinter and, like the Titanic, I am going down, all souls lost.

I have just completed reading a great book called *You Can't Win* by Jack Black. It was the book that influenced William Burroughs and, according to Bill's own testimony, changed the course of his life. I was thrilled to find it at the Harvard

Bookstore in Cambridge, reprinted by AK Press/Nabat books. It was originally published in 1926.

This book interested me greatly for it was the book *Junky* by William Burroughs that changed the course of my life. Ironically, it gave me reason to hope. How perverse, one might exclaim, that a book about the underworld of heroin can be the shining light that altered my existence.

In the world of my childhood, in my own tortured spirit there was no room for any god. I trusted nothing, no one. I viewed the world through my fractured prism and saw people mistreat each other and their supposed loved ones. Nothing rang true to me. I knew the human species was not a rational animal by what they did to one another. The world, as I saw it, was mastered by a species gone insane.

One by one, the forests of my childhood were torn down. The rivers fouled by chemicals. There was war which seemed senseless to me, bodies torn and broken. There was always chatter about it all being 'for the greater good', yet I could not perceive how death by violence did anyone any good at all.

I learned the history of the recent holocaust during World War II and knew for sure I had been thrust into a mad world.

All I wanted was to run from my existence. What I saw in heroin was a way to be in the world yet apart from what I felt. I laughed at a recent ad on television that said, "No one wanted to grow up to be a junkie."

I did. I searched for the balm of the opiates and found them. For years heroin prevented my suicide and let me function in the world. Of course I was in an 'alternate' society and I reveled in it.

Understand this. For many years of my addiction I thought I had found my answer. Your problem with my addiction to heroin was your problem, not mine. For me, heroin was an answer, a solution.

Today, I have found other solutions yet still, the heroin, the opiates talk to me. They still tempt me at times like this, when the darkness, the long suffocating night, the dead winter of my spirit engulfs me.

At times like this, I just don't know what to do. So I read *You Can't Win* and enjoy the journey through a world I never knew, yet it is so like a world I came from. I imagine what it was like to be a yegg, an underworld character in a time without

fingerprints, police radios, in a time where, if you had a mind to, you might cross the state line and start a new life without your past following you.

Is this good? Is this bad? Like all things, I have to say it depends. That is always the escape clause.

Jack Black began a new life. He became successful in "society". He worked for a major newspaper. He travelled and gave talks on crime and prisons. Yet in the end, the shadow claimed him. He said to his friends that if life became too grim for him, he would attach weights to his shoes and drop himself into New York Harbor.

Soon after that his favorite watch was found in a pawn shop. He disappeared and was never seen again.

Did his addiction rear up after thirteen successful years? Maybe his own darkness swallowed him.

I can feel my darkness opening its mouth, the foul maw sucking me into it.

What can I do at times like this? I sit at my computer and write. I tell you this story so, if I disappear, you might know where I have gone.

The Voice Of Addiction

One of the trickiest aspects of the disease of addiction is dealing with a faulty belief system. This addict has voices in his head which whisper untruths with a definite tone assuring him that, no matter what, this is the fact and it is indisputable.

My belief system has one overall message it repeats in various forms. This is its basic shape.

"Listen, so you have writer's block. Just a little taste of narcotics will take down that wall separating you from your stories as easy as the snap of a finger.

"Go ahead, take it. I can tell that you know I'm telling you the truth. No, no, don't check in with one of your addict friends in recovery. You know they'll tell you that it will pass, you will write again, just sit with the feelings for a little while.

"Maybe they'll tell you to pray, to ask God for help in order to relieve your compulsion to use. But why wait when you can just take a little and you'll lift the empty hollow in your stomach, drop all of the tension that is in the way of the muse coming out and ease on in to sleazy street."

That's about the truth of it. When I write without drugs, I have to work on it. It is a fact that God has given me the gift of writing, but I still must get right with my spirit in order to access the gift.

Can I write while I'm high? Most definitely. However, the price is quite steep.

Feeding my addiction is a full-time job.

The first story comes easy. The second story costs me thirty dollars and the loss of some self-esteem. Then I'll go out to cop so I can write the third story but first I have to get the money. It is always a possibility that I will get arrested fueling up to write.

I know, from past experience, that they don't let me have my computer to write with in the holding cell.

It is true. I did write a book of poetry in prison back in 1982-83. It took almost two years to write. In prison I was high on and off. Some prisoners might be lucky enough to get a steady supply of drugs while doing their bid, however, for me the drugs came sporadically and there was never enough.

Never enough. Heh. There never is enough.

I have to remember that when I put the first dose in my body it triggers a switch, turning my addiction on, and it has no off-switch. In other words, it is like having sex with a giant gorilla. I'm not done until the gorilla says I'm finished!

I have an old back injury which acts up periodically. Yesterday I threw my back out and had a rough time straightening up. I carefully made the trip home and have been taking ibuprofen and a mild muscle relaxant to stop the spasming.

My back pain triggers the voice in my head which says, "there you go boy, you need narcotics now."

Chatter, chatter, chatter, it doesn't let up on me.

I have to think it through. Am I bed-ridden? Can I still move around? Really, is the pain that bad this time? What is the price of a fix for me?

This disease will use any strategy it can to suck me in. Now it is attacking on two fronts. "You need me to kill the pain. You need me to write. Come on, you can handle it. You have a legitimate need now. Any normal person would take some mild narcotic pain-relievers right now."

Let me ask you, you out there who happen to be 'normal', when you have a backache, do you wrestle with the thought for hours as to whether you should take narcotics or not? Does it drive away all other thoughts until you can't think about anything else?

Do you have to drop to your knees and ask a Higher Power for relief from the obsession to put a narcotic substance into your body? Do you come up with a multitude of rationalizations as to why it is a good idea to take some narcotic pain-killers?

Hell, maybe with you it's all about a piece of cheesecake. Or ice cream.

Maybe its internet porn. Hey, you know who you are.

I'll tell you one thing. I don't obsess for hours as to whether I should take an ibuprofen or not.

You know, I want to change the world for the better. I ask God to help me everyday to be a force for positive change, to guide me to forget my small self and open me to the possibility of helping another person today, to let me be a source of love and hope on the sometimes mean streets we traverse daily.

How do I change the world? Well, I have to begin with me. For me, that means I really have to know what is ticking inside me when, for one reason or another, I want to put narcotics in my body.

I ask people I trust. Sometimes they tell me "I don't think that's a very good idea," when I run my solution past them. I learn to listen to them.

I learn not to listen to the addict who lives in my head. I learn not to romance the drug. I learn to think it through and to accept that I am an addict and the rules I must live by, for my own survival, are strict but not rigid.

I trust the voice of my spirit. I know my mind can be my enemy. The human mind is a wonderful tool when put to the right use but mine has side-effects. The side-effects are my thoughts. I am not a rational animal. I must be Spirit-driven to survive.

My faulty belief systems have been constructed over many decades. They have multiple voices and they lie to me all the time. It isn't really the first drug which drags me into hell. It is the first thought.

"If you don't get high, you won't be able to write," hisses my addiction.

Thanks for sharing, I tell it. Now take a seat in the back of the room while I finish this article.

Thanks for being there. I'm talking to you.

The Benches In Front Of Libby's Liquors

I just don't get it. Michael Sullivan, the Mayor of Cambridge, thinks the benches in front of Libby's Liquor store attract the "wrong kind of people." He says, according to the Cambridge Chronicle, that "the benches have become an outdoor cafe for drunkards and homeless people, and have a negative impact on the atmosphere and business of the city."

Then, to add insult to injury to a group of disenfranchised, economically devastated people with a terminal illness who have lost their daytime shelter due to Jane Swift's merciless budget cuts, the legal drug dealer by the name of Jim Hill who owns Libby's Liquors and makes plenty of money from "drunkards and homeless people", thinks it is a great idea to remove the benches in front of his dope den. After all, no drug dealer wants his customers hanging out in front of his place of business.

For years the CASPAR shelter at 240 Albany Street has been open during the day to protect and serve the many homeless people who suffer from the illness of addiction(alcoholism -- alcohol is a drug). These are people who cannot protect themselves from the elements of life due to a disease.

There are different stages in the illness of addiction. In one of the stages the sick person is unable to stop using substances and continues to do so even though he/she may hate using and finds him/herself using/drinking against their own will. It is like being on a treadmill with bars surrounding the person.

I have a deep understanding of this illness. I am one of the afflicted. It is only by some inexplicable miracle of God that I am able to stay clean today. For well over thirty years I placed substances in my body, both willingly and unwillingly, and for the last ten to fifteen years of my using I lived in a house divided.

I can remember times when I was on my way to buy heroin, tears spilling down my cheeks, tired, dirty, sick and lonely, desperate to kill the pain of myself yet literally dying to find another way to live. I thought I could never be clean of addictive drugs.

Today I am clean. Tomorrow? Who knows. For some of us relapse is a reality. I have experienced it myself. I know all too well the suffering of a man who has an intellectual knowledge of what this disease is all about yet, suddenly and almost inexplicably, finds himself in a bathroom ingesting the substance that took everything away from him. Again. After years of recovery.

These are certainly dark ages for those human beings afflicted with an illness that is little understood and greatly feared. Then this illness causes them to be persecuted under the full extent of the law.

Instead of treatment centers, hospitals, places to rest, these hapless humans, like myself, are driven even from shelter, imprisoned and killed by an inhumane police state created by years and years of sustained prejudice fostered by ignorant people with political and capital (monetary) agendas. Some of these people who bring about the oppression of the sick are cruel, others are manifested by greed. There is big money in the sale of drugs(alcohol is a drug). There is big money in the criminalization of drugs, both for the dealers and the "criminal justice system." There is plenty of motivation to keep the public stymied with propaganda so the profits can keep rolling in.

Every family has individuals who suffer from the illness of addiction. Under certain circumstances under which all who are sick with this disease are eligible, these family members can become homeless because of the way this illness is (mis)treated.

According to the *Cambridge Chronicle*, City Councilor Marjorie Decker said, about this strident call to remove the benches, "Something doesn't sit well with me. Symbolically, we're just trying to touch the tip of the iceberg."

City Councilor Tim Toomey said, "I understand that people are frustrated. Let's come up with something more."

Indeed.

Mayor Sullivan is firm in his resolve, again according to the *Cambridge Chronicle*. He says, "I just think it's a bad idea -- an outside cafe, a package store and outside drinking. It's just a bad message to be sending."

In my opinion, the "bad message to be sending" is the mistreatment of terminally ill humans with no place to get out of the cold. People, people who are just as human

as you or I, are going to die in the cold this winter because of the human rights violations of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The cold weather has come early in this season of falling leaves of many colours. The situation is critical. Treatment beds in hospitals and halfway houses, and in all different types of shelter for people in various stages of the disease of addiction have been callously cut from the budget. Sick people have nowhere to go but on hard, cold wooden benches in Central Square.

Now Mayor Sullivan wants to remove the benches and let the homeless die on the cement sidewalks of Cambridge. Jim Hill, the owner of Libby's Liquors, thinks it is a great idea. Of course he is happy to take the money from the homeless.

Then, as he stuffs his pockets with the profits, he wants "those people" to just disappear. He doesn't want them to be found dead on the bench in front of his store.

Living With Depression and Addiction During Winter

By Marc D. Goldfinger

"I don't know why there's no sun up in the sky, stormy weather, it's raining all the time." ---from Stormy Weather by the Zircons.

"Winter darkness brings on the extreme winter depression the Polar Eskimo call perlerorneq. According to the anthropologist Jean Malaurie, the word means to feel "the weight of life." To look ahead to all that must be accomplished and to retreat to the present feeling defeated, weary before starting, a core of anger, a miserable sadness."----Barry Lopez, Ice and Light, from the book Winter.

Sometimes I get this sick feeling inside me and I just stare out the window. I find it hard to do anything. I can think of many things that need to be done so it's not like there is nothing calling me but the emptiness is winning.

I am a drug addict even though I no longer take any drugs. I shot heroin, drank cough syrup, and threw pills and reefer into the mix for more than thirty years of my life just as a suicide preventative, if you know what I mean. Now I am clean and wondering if it is still worth it.

There is music coming out of the computer. The name of the group is Dead Can Dance and I love the music.

I've been thinking about death alot. How it can come at any instant. Just when we're not paying attention, wham, there it is right between the eyes. It makes me realize how serious every moment is. Every cup of coffee, every cigarette, every word I speak could be my last. Or yours, for that matter. Think about it.

Maybe you don't want to think about it and the fear starts to creep through you and then you just focus on something else. Like when I lay down to rest and the thoughts come. I touch my chest to see if my heart beat is steady, take my pulse It feels as if the air doesn't have enough oxygen in it and I try to breathe deeper but that only makes me feel dizzy and then I get frightened because I feel like I am going away from myself.

I wonder if I am going to wake. Relax, I tell myself, there is nothing I can do. I can either die afraid or die well.

There are times at night when I feel myself slipping away and I leap up clutching for something in the real world so I might hold on and not leave. I will cry out and the cry will seem to save me but my heart beats so hard that it feels like it will be done at any moment. How much can the heart take?

All the cocaine, the Ritalin, the methamphetamine, and finally the heroin, the heroin, over thirty years of it, has twisted the muscle of the soul of my flesh until it aches with every pulse. The hammer of life.

I begin to set up a new office to write in. I call it the dark room. It will mirror my mind. The beasts in my head bear my name. I can feel the vein in the right temple twitch right now as I write. Where is the weak spot? When will it burst? How long do I have to live?

But then I realize that it does not matter. Right now, right now, I can do whatever I want, whatever I want, until it is done with me.

Trust, Confidentiality, & Compassion

Confidentiality is the essence of successful treatment between counselor and family. It is the breeder of trust. Without trust there can be no meaningful discourse.

If the participant in the healing work trusts their counselor, they are likely to disclose all the facts that concern their conflicts with the outside world.

Different agencies have varying confidentiality guidelines, however, most of them are quite similar in the mental health field. No matter what the agency's policy is, the policy you adopt should be beneficial to the participant you are working with. Breaches of confidentiality can do damage to a participant that may never be overcome, at least by you.

Trust takes time and work to be established. It is far easier to build trust from a bare bones start than it is to re-establish trust once it has been broken.

At one agency I worked at I was approached by a woman who I knew well, not only from working with her, but from previous benevolent encounters in the outside world. On this particular day, she came in with tears streaming down her cheeks, her sorrow quite evident.

She asked to speak with me and, because we had floor coverage besides myself, we were able to move to my cubicle where we could speak privately. She was distraught due to the activity of her son, who I also knew, not through private life but as a participant in the agency program.

First, she asked me if I had seen her son, and due to the confidentiality guidelines of the agency, I was unable to disclose that information to her.

She lived in Section 8 Housing in a single unit and, because her son was homeless, he was sleeping on her living room couch. She informed me that he hadn't come home for a few days and she was extremely worried about him.

Because of his lifestyle, she told me that she had called the police to see if he had been arrested and had called various hospitals to see if he had been admitted. The hospitals she called had confidentiality guidelines of their own, yet, if he had been

admitted as an overdose or some other type of physical problem, they may have been able to give her some information due to the fact that she was his mother.

So far, on her own, she had come up with no information. Ironically, I had seen her son a few hours earlier, so I knew that, as of the time I saw him, that he was okay.

What I did was ask her if I had her permission, should I see her son, to let him know that she was worried about him. I also asked, should he come in, if it was okay if I let him call her from the agency phone.

She agreed to this. She asked me if there was anything she could say to him, when they talked, that might help him stop shooting heroin. Because I had a long-term counseling relationship with her and had built up layers of trust between us, I asked her if I had her permission to talk to her about the delicacy of what she wanted to talk about with her son, and the ramifications it involved, letting her know in advance that it could be a painful conversation for her.

She agreed to this. The actual process took longer than what I discussed in the previous paragraph. I felt that, as her counselor, I had to prepare her for news that she would not want to hear.

I explained to her that, as a continuing participant at the needle exchange due to her own active addiction, she was a powerful example for her son. I let her know that, because she came in for clean needles regularly, she was setting a good example for her son because it showed that she cared about her body to the extent that she used injection devices in a manner that would minimize her chances of being exposed to various illnesses which came as part of the package of injecting drugs.

However, I told her, when she talked to her son about not using heroin, it was a counterproductive situation. I explained that, if she made a living stealing, it would be difficult to dissuade her son from doing the same thing due to the fact that what she did spoke to him so much louder than what she said.

I explained to her that the best thing she could do, if she wanted her son to stop using, was to detox and stay abstinent herself, using whatever programs were available to her. Of course, this was no guarantee, I explained, that he might quit using, however, because she was abstinent, her words would carry the weight of her acts behind them.

After a lengthy conversation, checking in repeatedly with her to make sure she was okay, we concluded the session. The next time her son came in I was able to tell

him that I had talked to his mom and that she was worried about his activity because she had not seen or heard from him, and I offered him the opportunity to use the phone just to let her know that he was okay.

He thanked me, gave me a hug, and called her. His eyes were filled with tears as he spoke to her and I left the immediate office so they might have privacy as they spoke.

The good news is both of them are still alive and, considering what they do, pretty healthy. They are still participants in the program, which means they care enough about themselves to use clean injection equipment. They have both been in and out of the hospital and still struggle with the symptoms of their illnesses. I use the plural term because they both have major mental illness and the co-occurring substance use disorder.

What came first? It's certainly hard to tell. I still occasionally see them in passing, just the previous day I saw them both, one of them in Central Square and the other between Harvard and Central.

It's a long drop from Harvard Square to Central Square. Once you fall in that direction, the climb back is extremely difficult to make. Sometimes a few of us make it back. It takes more than luck. We all need someone to trust.

Confidentiality builds trust. Without it, our room has no floor.

Clean Needles, Saving Lives: The Cambridge Needle Exchange

When the wind is blowing, it always seems to blow hardest in Central Square, Cambridge. I grasp my hat tightly as I climb the stairs from the Red Line train into the square. To get to the new home of the Cambridge Needle Exchange, I cross Prospect Street and walk towards Harvard Square on Mass Avenue. I am on the same side of the street as the Cambridge Post Office. I pass the YMCA and, at the next corner right in front of Dream Futon, make a left and walk down Sellers Street to the last door on the right, just past # 17, which is the Cambridge Cares About AIDS regular office entrance. There is a sign on the door that says "Exchange Here."

There is no need to knock, just pull on the door handle and it opens. Climb the stairs and, if you are an injection drug user (IDU), you have entered a friendly, non-judgmental atmosphere. The Cambridge Needle Exchange is one of the Harm Reduction Programs of Cambridge Cares About AIDS and it has finally found a new home in a brick building which is attached to the back of St. Peters Church.

The new home of the exchange opened on October 6th, 2003. Currently the operating hours of the needle exchange are Monday through Friday from 10 am to 6 PM, except for Tuesday when it opens at noon. The comfortable drop-in center, open to all IDUs during regular hours, is open and facilitated by Cambridge Cares. The needle exchange is an anonymous program. IDU's are registered only with a nine digit code on their participant card.

Some other functions of the Cambridge Needle Exchange are as follows but not limited to: 1) free anonymous HIV testing and referrals to Hepatitis C testing at the Cambridge Health Alliance which is located at Cambridge City Hospital; 2) referrals to detox and holding programs for addicts who express a desire for it; 3) referrals to methadone programs; 4) 1 on 1 counseling with addiction related problems; 5) a safe place to come during the day; and 6) referrals to other types of medical care at non-judgmental facilities whenever needed.

Cambridge is fortunate to have a needle exchange sited in their community but this is no accident. It is due to the evolved thinking of the Cambridge political body. There are only four communities that have approved the siting of needle exchanges within their borders. Those communities are Cambridge, Northhampton,

Provincetown, and Boston. Other communities that need exchanges desperately due to rising rates of HIV and Hepatitis C transmissions from one person to another are Lynn, Fitchburg, Gloucester, Lowell, Lawrence, New Bedford, Worcester and Fall River. All these communities have a sizable contingent of injection drug users whose needs are not being met. In a conversation with a female in her very early 20's from Fitchburg I heard news that was deeply troubling to me.

She said, "In Fitchburg, because we don't have a needle exchange close by, clean needles sell for five dollars but you can buy used needles for two or three dollars." The HIV and Hep-C transmission rates in Fitchburg are extremely high when compared to communities with a needle exchange.

Keep in mind that many IDUs are family members who sleep with non-IDUs and, without proper needle exchange, contract illnesses that they may spread unintentionally to other members of the community. The purpose of the needle exchange is to protect the entire community from the spread of communicable diseases.

There are those brave souls, some of them with prior drug use experience, who travel throughout Central and Northeastern Massachusetts to supply drug users with clean needles through what is called secondary exchange. Unfortunately these needle exchange activists are constantly harassed by local law enforcement agents who do not yet comprehend the fact that the spread of blood-borne virus does not stop at the town line.

These grass roots activists, known as The New England Prevention Alliance, aka N.E.P.A., are a tenacious group of committed individuals who are passionate about their calling to get sterile injection equipment to areas where there is no state sanctioned needle exchange and where HIV and Hep-C rates are out of control among IDUs. The members of NEPA's independent needle exchange were some of the forerunners of today's state funded needle exchange. NEPA does about 1/3 of Massachusetts' needle exchange (approximately 180,000 needles yearly) with no state or federal funding. NEPA also trains injection drug users on how to administer the life saving drug known as naloxone (or Narcan). Naloxone is an opiate receptor blocker that the Emergency Medical Services uses when they are called (911) to a heroin overdose scene. NEPA's naloxone education program was responsible for saving 98 reported lives in the past 14 months.

NEPA continues to work under an incredible amount of pressure and stress throughout the state with very little support or funding and will do so until the state

of Massachusetts makes it possible for all injection drug users to have access to the sterile injection equipment they deserve!

In some towns, even though a Needle Exchange participant is legally registered throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts no matter where the Needle Exchange is sited, the police actually destroy the card issued by the exchange and unlawfully arrest the participant for possession of hypodermic needles and syringes. When the police do this, they are in direct defiance of a Department of Public Health mandate to stop the spread of HIV, Hep-C, and interfere directly with an IDUs desire to bring their used needles back to the exchange for proper medical disposal.

Some people who live in communities with no needle exchange, where the police don't respect the card, are forced to get rid of their needles because of the way they are treated by the police. The police actually waste a great deal of the taxpayer's money and endanger the rest of the community when they make unlawful arrests which are overturned, at the court level, when a participant IDU presents a letter which is generated by DPH and shows them to be a lawful member of the needle exchange.

"Needles and syringes may be distributed or possessed as part of a pilot program approved by the Department of Public Health . . . and any such distribution or exchange of said needles and syringes shall not be a crime."----- Section 27 of Chapter 94C of the Acts of 1993 is printed legibly on every needle exchange participant's card. On the card it also states that *"1) A participant in an approved needle exchange program may legally possess throughout the Commonwealth hypodermic needles obtained from a program..*

2) Probable cause to arrest does not exist when an individual, found to be in possession of hypodermic needles, presents a facially valid needle exchange membership card." If a police officer can read, and one hopes that they can, the officer has no excuse for arresting a card-holding needle exchange participant.

There are also some homeless shelters which confiscate needles and don't return them to the IDUs who are forced by inclement weather to frequent those shelters. This creates a conflict within the IDU because he/she wants to follow the correct procedures for needle exchange but cannot keep their needles and gain shelter for the night. There are a couple of shelters which hold an IDU needle exchange participant's needles overnight and then return them in the morning. The shelters which do not do this should evaluate their procedures so the Department of Public Health can carry out their mandate to stop the spread of disease and facilitate the proper disposal of medical waste.

Ironically, Massachusetts is one of four states in the country and the only state in the New England region in which it is still illegal to buy sterile syringes from a pharmacy without a prescription. The other three states are California, New Jersey, and Delaware. The three most recent states to pass laws allowing legalization of hypodermic needles and syringes are New Hampshire, New York and Rhode Island, all during the year 2000. There has been no recorded increase in criminal activity or drug use since these laws have been enacted. Minnesota, which repealed its prescription requirement for needles and syringes in 1997, has reported a 17% decrease in syringe sharing, according to statistics compiled by the Minnesota Pharmacy Syringe Access Initiative.

On January 28th, 2004, there were four bills presented before the Joint Committee on Health Care which deal with decriminalization of needles and syringes and legal pharmacy access without a prescription requirement. There were also two bills presented which would expand needle exchanges throughout the state by the Department of Public Health for the purpose of preventing the transmission of communicable diseases. Let us hope that recalcitrant politicians will not block the passage of these bills as they have done in the past.

To gain updates on these bills or see what you can do to help their passage, you may access the AIDS Action Committee at <policy@aac.org> or snail mail to the committee, 294 Washington St., Boston MA 02108.

The Hotel Central Square

"Battle not with monsters, lest ye become a monster, and if you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you." --- Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

The ghosts of dead junkies sit on every bench in Central Square. A clown sits on the bench in front of Rodney's Used Bookstore. He put himself through college to become a drug counselor working as a clown. He's certified. He was a gifted man of many talents. Heroin took him down.

In front of the Fleet Bank sits a husky man with a large burnt nose. He wraps himself in a blanket or cardboard and stems for money. He switched to alcohol for about five years but the Imp of junk called him back. A few days before they found him dead with the needle still in his arm, he showed me his new needle marks. "I'm gonna stop soon," he said. "I just needed a change of pace. I always liked heroin the best."

While I was working at CASPAR Detox on the corner of Beacon & Kent Streets in Cambridge I met a bicycle courier who was kicking heroin. Despite the generation gap, we hit it off well. He went right from detox into a six month program. He was doing really well, heavily focused on his recovery. What turns a heroin addict back to junk when all is apparently good? What thoughts emanate from the subconscious mind that hypnotize the addict in recovery who is working a good program?

I can tell you about those thoughts but I don't have enough time right now. This young man, the bicycle courier, came into the needle exchange for new needles. "Yo, man, what's up," I asked, "you still in the program?"

He looked directly into my eyes. "I just relapsed. I'll get right back quick."

I asked him if I could make some calls for him, get him right into a detox, break the chain. I didn't know if I could get him a bed because of the devastating budget cuts, but I was willing to try. This guy had Heart and, in the short time he was clean, had helped many people.

It was Friday morning, close to 11 o'clock. He paused for a long moment, smiled disarmingly at me, and said, "Look, I'll come in Monday and we'll call out for a bed." He took his gear and left.

On Sunday night he was found dead in his room. His ghost still rides through Central Square.

Heroin isn't the only killer in the Square. In front of Libby's Liquors there is a group of benches. The albies, living, dead, and in-between stack the benches.

The twilight world of the addict. One foot in the shadows, one in the light, we drift like transparencies from coffee shop to coffee shop, shelter to shelter. No longer solid, when the wind blows parts of our selves detach like wisps of smoke.

Just recently I knew a beautiful man who was a musician and an artist. Curly black hair, dark skin, intense brown eyes. I remember well the last time we gazed into each other's eyes. I had just copped a half-gram of heroin from him. His skin covered his bones and there was barely any extra flesh on him. He had recently been released from the hospital where, for about six to eight weeks, he had been treated for Endocarditis, an infection borne by the blood that afflicts the heart and its valves. It is caused by bacteria that lives on the skin, which is why phlebotomists clean the skin with an antiseptic alcohol pad before piercing the skin into the vein. At the needle exchange they supply alcohol pads and instruct drug users in safe injection practices.

Ahh, but I digress from the topic.

A few weeks later, having apparently recovered from the heart inflammation, he began shooting drugs again. He was at a friend's house and was in the process of helping them with their laundry. He carried a few bags up the stairs to their porch. Suddenly he clutched his chest and a panicked look came into his eyes. He abruptly sat down on the floor and was having trouble breathing.

His friend asked, "What's wrong? What can I do for you?"

The gentleman sat on the floor and said, "Nothing man, I'm okay, I'm just trying to catch my breath, I'm okay." My other friend went in to the house and told his girlfriend to call 911 for an ambulance. When he went back out to the porch, his friend was dead, gone. They tried Cardio-Pulmonary-Resuscitation but it was too late. He died of a heart attack.

My friend said, "It wasn't necessarily the fact that he was shooting again. I mean, after all, he smoked cigarettes too and never exercised. He just didn't take care of himself. Stuff like that happens."

At this point, I would like to briefly state that 'denial' is a component of the illness of addiction.

But it wasn't so much the comments of my living friend that live in my mind. I still see my deceased friend's dark beautiful eyes looking into mine as he handed me the packet. I can picture him vividly, sitting on the porch after falling, trying to catch his breath. Even though I was not there, his final words echo over and over in my mind.

"Nothing man, I'm okay, I'm just trying to catch my breath, I'm okay."

I wonder what he was really thinking, trapped behind his dark eyes, right before his glorious lights went out. He was 32 years old.

ADHD. PTSD. Bi-Polar. Schizophrenic. Severe Panic Disorder. Major Depression. Addiction. Which came first? What shattered the prism of the lens we look through? I can quote passages from the Narcotics Anonymous text with a needle in my arm. Just for Today. I am what I write about. Whether I am using or "clean", when I look into another addicts eyes, I am peering into myself.

Resiliency: A Moment In Addict's Time

If I made funny noises and ran around the room, I wouldn't have to tell the therapist anything. I know my mother told him I wet the bed all the time. But no one else knows about the boy who said he would play doctor and stuck the stick up my rectum. And no one else knows about the baby sitter who had a boyfriend who did things to me with a banana. I was only nine and I lived in my head. It wasn't safe.

My mother went to therapy too. When I asked her why, she told me it was because I was sick. She told me I hated my father. I remember crying when she told me that and I made up my mind that I would hate her too.

But most of all, it was me. It was me that I hated most of all. I just wanted to shut my mind off but the dials were inside my head. It was 1954.

* * *

If someone had said to me, in June of the year of my graduation from high school, that I would have a rat's chance at being alive in the year 2005 I might have swished my tail at them, pulled at my whiskers and said, "The life span of a junkie, dipped in a vat of heated depression molasses, struck hard with a severe anxiety disorder that simulated heart attacks is guaranteed to be shorter than a man with a heart condition shoveling snow while gasping for breath in between drags of a Camel non-filter cigarette who's idea of a rest break is a quick shot of cocaine and heroin administered intravenously, and then back at it again."

So then, the question is, "what kinds of events have been most stressful for me," has many answers.

There is a knock at the door. I go to it, see that it is a policeman, run to the bathroom with my two grams of pure amphetamine, think about flushing them because I am already wired tighter than Harry Harlow's dangling monkey in the pit of despair, but snort them rapidly instead.

Two hours later I am hooked to an intravenous flow of Valium. I sleep 36 hours, eat for the first time in days, then fall back asleep again. I wake up 20 hours later, they tell me I need to go to a drug program, I sign AMA papers and leave. Customers have been waiting.

Angela is a big dyke. She is loaded on codeine based cough syrup and Doriden, just like me. We are sitting on stools at a diner in West Orange, New Jersey. I watch her as she eats two more Doriden. Suddenly she falls off her stool, she can't stand up, everyone in the diner is watching us, she is attempting to tell me something but I can't understand her, a string of drool spills from one corner of her mouth onto my shirt as I lurch for the door of the diner, bearing her weight is a terrible chore, I can barely bear my own, I drop her, she giggles as I hoist her up on my shoulder again, we are almost at the door, I stumble and Angela pulls some more pills out of her pocket and attempts to eat them, I say "hey, you're going to get us busted" and just then the plainclothes dicks burst into the diner with a bunch of bluecoats.

I try to explain that my girlfriend just got sick and we're going home, we just need help to get to the car and all of a sudden the handcuffs are on both of us, Angela is calling the cops "a bunch of pig-mother-fuckers" and I realize that we're not going to be able to talk our way out of this. I have been eighteen years old for three days but I've been high on pills and cough syrup and heroin for almost a year and a half without missing a day. Seven bottles of Robitussin-A-C, a blank stolen pad of prescriptions and a pocket full of seconals and Doriden and all I'm going to get is a back-room beating and a phone call seven hours later.

Angela lights her mattress on fire in her cell. It is 1964.

* * *

I'm weaving down Interstate 91 with 70 bags of heroin and 9 bottles of methadone with 90 milligrams in me in my pick-up truck. I side-swipe a car and I hear the horn blowing and I'm wide-awake now with my foot pressed to the gas pedal. I can't even look at the speedometer because I'm swerving in and out of the traffic so fast. I'm in the moment because I know that if I get caught I'm going to back to jail faster than you can say, "you're busted mother-fucker" and I'm still in Connecticut but I'm turning off 91 onto Interstate 84 and I slow down to the speed limit and I'm so frightened that my foot on the gas pedal is doing the bounce-bounce beyond my control.

I'm not high anymore, or if I am I'm not aware of it. I pull into a rest area and run in, piss, grab a coffee, and head into Peterborough, New Hampshire, where my wife works the night shift at a group home. The four older women, they called them retarded back then, are asleep and my "buddy" Ritchie is waiting in his truck outside. I told him not to wait, that I would call him, but you know how it is, I had

asked him to keep me company for the ride to New York City, but he had other things to do but he's been waiting for me right there for hours.

20 of the bags are his, he gave me the money in advance, his money paid for his twenty and twenty of mine.

The women are sleeping and Sascha tells us to keep it down; everybody is dumping dope in the cookers, I tell them to only do one because the dope is killer, the best on the streets of the city and now the best in Peterborough. Sascha sneaks a second bag into the cooker, and I'm feeling the rush and finally leaning back to relax, when I hear the death rattle and Sascha drops to the floor.

"Richie, Richie, help me," I yell, and I pick Sascha up and she's not breathing as Richie grabs his dope off the table, looks at me with heavy-lidded pinned eyes and says, "I'm outta here," and he is.

Cold showers, beating on her chest, wiping the puke she's choking on from her mouth and trying to get a breath in her; she wakes up, says I'm all right and her eyes roll up all white as she drops to the floor again.

I pick her up and shake her, throw the door open and drop her in the snow; she jumps up, she's knows she's in trouble and starts to run around with a wild expression on her face but then she drops again like a beheaded chicken and I drag her back in, I don't even notice the cement walk is ripping her nails out of her bare feet until later, I do CPR and pray; I can't call for help with fifty bags of heroin and I'm not gonna flush them.

It's three hours later and she's breathing normally. She looks at her feet and says, "Fuck, what the hell did you do?" and I just look at her and tell her "I told you to only do one, but you never listen."

"Why didn't you just let me die, it would've been easier," she says and I tell her "You didn't act like you wanted to die."

It's 1984 now.

* * *

I skipped the part in 1986 where, twisted on methadone and benzo's, I flipped my pick-up truck and Sascha broke her back. I had a major head injury but that's what I started with since I was a child.

* * *

In 1998 on December 7th, no one was there to bring Sascha back. They found her alone in a bathroom with the needle still in her arm. On December 8th I turned 53 years old.

* * *

I didn't skip 1991 where I got hit by the pickup truck doing 65 miles an hour on the shoulder lane while I worked on my motorcycle. That's in another story I call *Getting Fixed in South Carolina..* The guy holding the flashlight for me died instantly. I smoked a Camel non-filter while I waited for the ambulance when I wasn't blacked out.

* * *

I've had one or two really good counselors, quite a few that didn't really measure up, and some that just filled the room. I'm a counselor myself now. There are those that say I'm good. I don't know what they say behind my back. I hope I help.

* * *

I still remember what I used to think when I was sick. Actually that helps me as a counselor because when you say you're not ready to quit shooting dope, I know exactly what you mean.

* * *

The biggest obstacle I ever faced was my mind.

* * *

What makes me hopeful about the future is how much I have changed in the face of adversity. What scares me most about the future is what I can't see yet.

* * *

I can count on my fingers. I can count on my teachers. I can count on myself, but only if I'm there. It's 2005 now. It's almost 2006, but I'm not there yet.

Recovering From The Disassembly Of My Life

There are aspects of my illness that I don't remember. I recall seeing counselors of all different types, i.e.. psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, etc. and being tested over and over again from Rorschach to Intelligence Quotient to tests that dizzy me when I try to remember their names.

It began before I was seven years old but that's when I started seeing what they call professionals at a place called Jewish Child Care.

I don't remember many of the sessions. My mother was going for help also and when I asked her why she was going, she told me, "Because you are sick."

I was angry, suicidal, sad, depressed, manic, afraid, wrapped tighter than the rubber bands in a golf ball and that's how fast I could bounce. As a matter of fact, I turned on the music with my 45rpm record player, stacked them up with the automatic changer and jumped. And jumped. And jumped. One foot up, one foot down, one foot up, one foot down, faster and faster -- for hours at a time.

There were times when I felt like throwing myself in front of a car. I started smoking cigarettes at the age of eleven, Camel non-filters, and drank coffee like a pro.

Southern Comfort and Schaefer Beer (when you're having more than one) in 7th grade. I was bad at holding my liquor but I drank it anyway; even though it felt bad it was better than being me.

Then I was introduced to codeine-based cough syrup by a girl I was dating. Then I was dating codeine-based cough syrup and I couldn't get enough of her. I boosted her up with Doriden, Seconal, Tuinal, and Nembutal and I was drinking two to four bottles a day.

My gut hurt but it was better than being me. Every night I was never going to do it again. I was 16 years old. Three weeks before I turned 17 I shot heroin for the first time. I said, "I'm going to do this the rest of my life."

I almost did.

There were hospitals, jails, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and beatings by police and others. When I was young I sold myself for dope but it got too hard to do that so I began selling drugs and that became my modus operandi. That doesn't mean I didn't forge prescriptions, break into drug stores, do petty shoplifting escapades. Nothing mattered except writing and getting high.

I was hidden under so many false layers that I didn't even know who I was. I'm still finding out; a beginner in my own life, just like Malte Laurid Brigge in the book by Rainer Maria Rilke.

When did I begin to recover what I had lost? How does one recover what one never had? I would have to say that my story is an Uncovery Story, a period of revelations where the truth was revealed to me piece by piece.

I was told that I was going to have to take medicines I didn't want to take and do things I didn't want to do over and over and over again.

Support groups. Do I always look forward to my support groups? Does it thrill me to set my alarm for 4:30am so I can go to a support group at 6am? If I want to spend evenings home with my wife, whom I am extremely lucky to have, then I have to go to groups in the morning, almost daily.

Constant repetition of what my illness is composed of is necessary just to stay off heroin. Then I still have to take medication that doesn't feel good like heroin or I'll do it despite the support groups because I am diagnosed with Major Depression, ADHD, PTSD, Severe Panic Disorder, and Sleep Apnea besides having a Co-occurring Substance Use Disorder. I'm also losing my hearing and have to wear hearing aids.

Of course, even when I had good hearing, I only heard what I wanted to hear and disregarded the rest. Or maybe I couldn't hear it because it would shatter the fragile self that I had to fight daily to maintain.

Today I am who I am and I have learned to live with it. I don't always have to like it. I have a moral code that it is imperative to live by. For example, I can't steal. If I steal, I'll feel badly about myself and then I'll hurt myself in some way.

I work on telling the truth all the time. Sometimes I don't know what the truth is. People tell me the truth and it is hard for me to hear them even if I am wearing my hearing aids. I just don't want to know sometime. I don't want to know I can't do

heroin. I just happen to know it because people tell me I can't do heroin over and over and over.

I am a writer. I am a loving, devoted husband. I am an addictions counselor. I am good at all those things. But when I am in my sickness, all those things fade into the distance and I have to re-remember who I am.

Today, one of my strengths is being aware of some of my weaknesses so they don't get the better of me. I would like to say this works all the time but, the truth is, it doesn't. So then I have to engage in dialogue with myself, disagree with myself if you will, until I overcome the SWAT team that lives in my head and has a plethora of weapons pointed directly at me.

Like most people with major mental illness, I've had counselors that did no good at all, counselors that helped a little, counselors that helped a lot and some that just listened. It's tough to transmit a reality that seems alien to the person who is trying to help but just doesn't get it.

Currently I have two psychopharmacologists. One of them writes me prescriptions and talks to me, but really is quite limited as far as what he understands. I work with him.

The other psychopharmacologist is specially trained to dispense a unique drug for opiate addicts. That's his specialty and that's what he's good for. I don't know if he even recognizes my other illness, but they are not his concern. As long as I keep the focus on what he is supposed to do and don't criticize him for what is not his job, I'm okay. He does what he does very well.

Right now I have a therapist who helps me with the way I perceive reality and is well-trained when it comes to Substance Use Disorders. She is excellent when it comes to maintaining professional distance. Previous to her I had a therapist for about three years who walked me through my childhood (they call it reparenting) and did a wonderful job. Unfortunately, before all the work was finished, she became sick and started to step over professional barriers in a way that made me extremely uncomfortable. At that point, I discontinued my therapy with her and looked around for the therapist I have now.

At the time I began with my current therapist, I had relapsed on narcotics because I was suffering from chronic pain and just needed to take narcotics. I strayed way over the line and she helped bring me back by guiding me to the current

psychopharmacologists I have now. I had to do the footwork but she helped me look at myself, even when I didn't want to.

My relationships with others, especially my wife, makes my life meaningful now. I have a sponsor and go to support groups regularly. I am an addictions counselor but I am currently not working because of ethical concerns about how long I have been abstinent. I have only been abstinent for 7 and one-half months this time and I feel it is necessary for me to have at least one year of abstinence before I look for work in that area again.

I am a writer. I consider this my primary profession, even though I make very little money. I get published all over the place, unfortunately I have not reached the point where I make enough money to support myself. I find this very discouraging. Marketing my work is extremely difficult for me because it is a totally different mind-set than writing.

I have just been given some advice by a well-published writer who is extremely impressed by my work as to a variety of strategies to market my work. She even remarked about me on her website with links to two of my works on the internet.

So I'm a writer. The truth is that many excellent writers die in poverty. Rainer Maria Rilke was carried by others his entire life yet, if he was alive today, he would be rich. I have to work very hard not to be overcome by that reality.

I'm currently in school at Bunker Hill College through a Consumer Provider Program which is funded by CasCap for individuals who are dually-diagnosed. The purpose of the program is to have us certified to work in the field as Consumer-Providers. Unfortunately, because of my CORI, CasCap was unable to find an internship for me.

When I went to school to become an addictions counselor, it was very different because many addictions counselors have police records for drugs. The reality is that there are people with CORI's who are predators and people with multiple mental illnesses can be very vulnerable. Unfortunately, responsible, ethical people with CORI's pay the price because of those people with police records who are still dangerous.

So where do I go from here? Well, I'm going to keep writing and I'm going to struggle to market my work. I've finished one book of short stories about drug addicts, one science-fantasy book where the heroes are extremely unconventional, and one book of essays about Dual Diagnosis individuals with Co-Occurring

Substance Use Disorders. The book of essays is unique from many others because it exposes the thought processes of people who struggle with these illnesses from the inside because I am one.

Last, but not least, I have reams of poetry, and I have published five chapbooks of poetry and sold out of almost all of them besides having poems published all over the world.

So, before I poke a sharp stick in my eye and put a 44 magnum bullet in my ear, remembering to take my hearing aids out first, I'll finish this essay on recovery and take a ride on my motorcycle.

My favorite line out of all the movies I've seen is from a movie called Angel Heart when the devil turns to the detective with amnesia who has just found out that he sold his soul to hell many years ago and says to him, "How sad it is when wisdom brings no comfort to the wise."

One Man's Story of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence takes place in the home when one partner has power over the other and uses it in a manner which is destructive to the well-being of the other.

Some domestic violence is physical in nature. Usually the physically more powerful person is the batterer, however this is not always the case. A man can be battered physically because he feels it is wrong to strike a physically weaker partner. The other partner can hit or scratch the stronger person and the stronger person won't fight back.

Of course, when physical domestic violence takes place, in most cases, the more powerful person is the batterer.

Another type of domestic violence is through intimidation, calling names and constantly monitoring all movements of the person. When someone monitors your movements, this can be called stalking.

A person can threaten another person by saying, "When you're out at the meeting I'm going to wipe your poetry off the computer." This happened to me. I was so afraid of losing my writing that I backed everything up on discs and hid them at someone else's house. I also printed out hard copy and put them in boxes and hid them. Then she found out I had made copies and asked me where they were. When I told her I was afraid she would wipe them off the computer she yelled at me and belittled me. She said, "I was just saying that to scare you." As a writer, I had no choice but to take that seriously.

Sometimes she would give me the silent treatment. I'm not talking about a couple of hours here; I'm talking about days; as long as a week sometimes.

I left her a few times and every time she promised things would be different and she told me lies to get me to come back. I felt sorry for her and hoped things would be different so I went back.

For a short while there was what is called "the honeymoon period", where she would go out of her way to cater to me but soon her behaviour deteriorated again.

One behaviour she had was when I went to drug support meetings and went out for coffee with the group, which is recommended to build a support network, she would follow me there, sit in another section of the restaurant or at the bar and glare at me.

She would also browbeat me and insult me for hours and then try to manipulate me into having sex with her. When you've been belittled, verbally bullied and shamed by a person, the last thing you want to do is have sex with them.

She would listen in on my phone calls and insult my friends when they called saying things like, "It's another one of your addict friends," really loud so they could hear it. This is when I was clean and these were people from the meetings who were clean.

If I tried to introduce her to someone who she knew I knew through meetings, she would just turn away or just glare at them when they extended their hand to shake hands. Then she would get mad at me when I didn't introduce her to my friends. I couldn't win.

I never knew what to expect when I got home. Maybe she would browbeat me or maybe she would be pleasant and then I might say something innocent and she would just freak out and start up. She was kind of like that Rolling Stone song where Mick Jagger sings, "You can start me up, and I'll never stop, never stop, never stop."

It got to the point where the only people we socialized with were the one's she chose. I remember one time when I asked her why she was rude to my friends and she said she was only rude to the one's she didn't like. Unfortunately, she didn't like any of my friends.

I told her once that, even if I didn't like one of her friends I always treated them with respect so why couldn't she do the same? She said, "But you like all of my friends."

I said, "that's not true. I don't like some of your friends but you don't know which ones I don't like. I treat them with respect because they're your friends."

She quickly changed the subject.

I lost jobs because of the way she treated the people I worked for when they called. Then she'd blame me for losing the job.

When I sold the paper *Spare Change News* on the street, suddenly I would look up and she would be standing across the street glaring at me.

I became afraid to go home and afraid to stay away.

I knew that if I said I was going to a meeting that there would be a fight before I left and an endless tirade of verbal abuse when I got back. Gradually I wore down and stopped attending meetings.

Then when I finally relapsed, she blamed that on me too. When my friends from the support group called to see which detox I went to she told them I didn't need them; I could stay clean all by myself.

It wasn't her fault I relapsed; I didn't have the skills to get away. I have a personal understanding why women return to their batterer over and over again because I did it.

Actually, my primary batterer is heroin but this woman seemed to make heroin very secondary. When I finally left and stayed away from her I gave up heroin and cigarettes for almost 3 1/2 years. I still don't smoke but I really struggle with my heroin addiction and if I don't go to my meetings and take my Suboxone, I could easily relapse.

Back to domestic violence. Yes, I was accused of having affairs with everyone and, the sad truth was I was faithful even when things were terrible in the relationship. For me, committment means committment.

In the end she always got her way because I knew if I didn't give her what she wanted I would pay for it.

Finally when I left her for good she stole my computers and if I didn't have my writing backed up on hard copy, I would have lost it. I thank God I did give someone else my discs to hold. I did lose some writing but I was lucky to get away with my life.

I wrote a poem called *Significant Other* to remind me that I have a tendency to be attracted to the woman who is most damaging to me. I am still in recovery from that battering relationship.

The police will help you get a restraining order for protection through the courts. In two weeks you will have a hearing in front of a judge to see if there is sufficient reason to continue the restraining order. If there is, it will be continued for at least a year; if there isn't it will be vacated at court.

There are shelters for battered women; I'm not sure if there are shelters for battered men. You can find a shelter and counseling through the Multi-Service Center in Cambridge on Brookline Avenue just around the corner from Mass Ave in Central Square. Women can find help at the Mass Coalition of Battered Women. Locales and telephone numbers can be found on the Helping Hands page in every issue of the *Spare Change News*.

Seasons of Denial

My word for this winter is "relentless." During the first snowstorm, while shoveling, I wrenched one of my bad knees. It swelled up quite a bit and I was wracked with pain. Unfortunately for me, a recovering addict, I needed pain killers to quell the agony.

This started a cycle of advance and retreat of my illness of addiction, like the many snow storms we experienced this winter. I have trouble controlling the drugs once they alter my consciousness unless I stay focused and in constant touch with folks from my support groups. Truth or consequences, so to speak.

This time I did everything backwards. I pulled away from my support groups. I became less than honest with myself and those around me. My illness invited me to Hell and I jumped right in.

Despair, degradation, denial, depression, and a total disregard of what was important in my life took full sway. With the illness of addiction, unless one asks for help from a Higher Power and others, we shipwreck on a hostile shore. Suddenly I found myself alone in my tattered mind, tortured and more damaged than my knee.

I had surgery on the knee on February 28th of this year. After a continuing run on pain killers, both prescribed and, when that was not enough, street purchased, I took my last drug on March 3rd. Had my knee pain gone? No, it stayed with me but I found that the pain of active addiction was worse.

I started attending support group meetings on a daily basis again, sometimes two a day. I reached out and asked for help from a Higher Power that I choose to call God. My wife supported me mightily in my efforts because she remembered what I was like when I had a working recovery.

I told her that I knew my Intelligence Quotient dropped 40 points when I was using pain-killing substances. She smiled at me when I said that and replied, "No, at least 50 points."

Today my knee is still swollen, yet not as much as before, and it still hurts. The good news is, so far, the pain is manageable and I have not yet taken another pain

pill. Addict that I am, when my doctor offered me more on a later date, I accepted them and had them filled at the pharmacy. The good news is, because I was attending support groups and asking for help on a daily basis, was that I talked about it with others and turned them over to my wife. She locked them up in a small safe that I don't have the combination for. I was able to request this because I was praying for help and welcoming it when it came.

I believe the illness of addiction is a major mental illness because it affects the thought process in dramatic ways. Why would anyone continue to use a substance that was separating them from everything good in their lives? One would have to be mentally ill.

Addiction is the talking illness. It talks to me in my own voice and tries to shut out the advice of others and my Spirit. It is the only illness that says to the sufferer, "You are not sick. It is everybody else's fault. Just look at this horrible world that surrounds you. No wonder you need a substance to chase this abominable reality."

In the beginning I didn't realize I was sick. Now I know better, yet knowledge alone is not enough to put this savage illness at bay. Constant treatment is necessary. My treatment consists of daily support groups, prayer and meditation, and reaching out to others who are similarly afflicted at different times during the day. Ironically, my reaching out to them not only helps me stay substance-free, it also helps them. We get back what we give away.

When I first began seeking help for this illness, fortunately there was a well-laid out system of help consisting of long-term detoxes and rehabilitation centers. Thirty day programs were common and there were also many detoxes that catered to homeless folks who had no insurance back-up. Many people, including myself, were able to be guided to recovery by this system. The hospitals didn't kick us out while we were still shaking from the physical withdrawal from this illness.

Unfortunately, due to the budget cuts for treatment of the illness of addiction, more than half the recovery beds have been eliminated and the stays in the detox programs have been shortened to the point where people are released while they are extremely at risk. It is tough to think things through when the body is so sick that it is sending a river of negativity to the mind.

Hope has diminished for those suffering from the major mental illness of addiction. Had I not had a foundation in recovery already, faced with the inadequate systems that exist for detox and rehab today, I might not have been able to recover from this relapse.

In closing, I would like to briefly state that addiction takes many forms. We are not only addicted to drugs and alcohol. We become addicted to food, body shape, money, power, fossil fuels, and last but not least, war. Think of what the war budget, just half of it, could do for human services. Miracles might be performed.

I am frightened by the direction of our country and civilization. It would seem that we are willing to destroy the world of the future just to have more riches today. We gobble our resources without any thought of tomorrow. And we kill. We have become experts in killing in other countries all over the world.

Of course, those currently in power would deny this. Denial is extremely powerful and comes in many forms. Just like me on the individual level, left to my own devices, I might destroy myself with my drug addiction. So goes the person, so goes the world.

My hope, my dream, is to one day be effective enough to change the world and help, with all of you, to bring peace and environmental justice to the Earth. Today, I change myself. I understand, all positive change begins with me working on me. Then, only then, can I reach out, take your hand and walk this world to a healthier future.

I heard someone say once that we must think seven generations ahead. I believe this is true. However, what we do today, in this day are the most important acts of all. Today I will stay drug-free.

Early One Morning

Another rainy day. This Spring, it has been darker than usual, one might use the word dismal to charge it with emotional meaning. For those of us affected by sunlight deprivation it has been a rocky season.

It is Sunday morning. I wake up agitated for no reason I can immediately discern. Jeremiah, the red cat, stamps on me because he is hungry. His diabetic cells scream sustenance-lack into his little feline mind. He knows I am one of his sources of food and also that I sleep light. I am much easier to wake than my wife.

I peer at the clock with early eyes. It is 5:35am. Joshua, the tuxedo cat, lurks near the bed. He lets Jeremiah do the dirty work of yanking me from the realm of dreams.

Dreams. I was dreaming that I was going through the items my mother had left behind when she crossed into death's world on July 25th of 2002. In the dream she had hundreds of unopened packages of panty-hose. I offered them to one woman and she said, Oh, I can't take them; they belonged to your mother.

I began to cry and begged her to take them. My mother didn't need them anymore.

Dreams. They come and there are times I remember them. I know dreams are a type of crossing over. But it is time to feed the cats. I rise, wash the phantoms from my face and move into the kitchen. Joshua eats one type of food; Jeremiah eats another due to his special diet. They both seem to prefer what the other one gets so I must monitor them. For me, sleeping in is dreaming until 6am. It rarely happens.

I watch both cats eat. They know I am watching and don't try to cross the divide between bowls. If I return to the sleep-launching pad they immediately shift feeding stations. I must stay awake; remain alert; pay attention. I get the insulin out of the refrigerator, roll it up and down in my hands to warm it a little bit and stir the solution without shaking it. Then I get out the hypodermic.

For me, the hypodermic needle is very familiar. In my quest for inner peace, I shot heroin for over thirty years. At the time it seemed to work but, over the years, the dreams that brought me peace were expelled by the nightmare life I was cast into by the consequences of my drug use. Whenever I pick up the needle I always

remember. Because of the euphoric recall of my addiction a hypodermic needle talks to me like an old friend.

I shunt the thoughts of my split-brain-addict-mind into the background and fill the hype with insulin. I grab the furry thick skin around Jeremiah's neck, gently insert the needle and then press the plunger down.

The cats finish eating and I climb back into bed next to my wife.

I lay there and marvel at how different my life is today. No longer homeless, I live in what I consider to be luxurious quarters in a two family house. There is an office in the house filled with doo-hickeys I have collected from trash-gathering forays. I could furnish a house with other people's throwaways. Wondrous things have recycled my way.

I rise up quietly and go into my office. There is a picture of my wife on the wall in front of me. There are religious artifacts which resonate with my Spirit on the wall, on top of my old floppy-disc Mac, on my bookcases. A small CD player hooked to an old JVC tuner I found in the trash echoes the music of Enigma out of Proton speakers from someone else's garbage.

I write. Jeremiah suddenly jumps onto my lap and I sit back and run my fingers through his fur. I close my eyes. Today, just for today, even without heroin, I am at peace.

Suboxone: A Positive Alternative For Heroin Addiction

Addiction is a mental illness that has been as misconstrued and stereotyped, especially since the early 1900's when it became criminalized. Addicts are always shown as bad people as opposed to being sick people. In 1914, the Harrison Narcotics Act was passed into law, immediately criminalizing people who were suffering from a Substance Use Disorder.

Ironically, the Bayer company, famous for aspirin, named the drug heroin which they derived from morphine and aggressively marketed it as a pain killer and a cure for morphine addiction.

It worked. Unfortunately, it had an addictive capability beyond morphine. Before heroin became illegal, the majority of users were hard-working, honest citizens and housewives. The Harrison Narcotics Act changed all that. Prohibition didn't work either; it just blew up in our faces faster. Now it's time to take another look at our drug laws.

A person with a Substance Use Disorder is one who is mentally ill and should be treated using a medical model, not punished for having a disease. Unfortunately, when it comes to the illness of addiction, we are still in the dark ages.

As I write this, the drug Suboxone is dissolving beneath my tongue. I am diagnosed with Major Depression, Severe Panic Disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome complicated by addiction. I have been in treatment for mental illness since I was seven years old. My introductory drugs were caffeine and nicotine. When I was nine years old, a group of friends and I, sitting in a patch of wild strawberries broke out a pack of non-filter cigarettes. I remember getting dizzy and nauseous yet, at the same time, I derived a sense of pleasure from the powerful drug and smoked regularly from 1956 until April 25th, 1999, when I had my last cigarette.

I used the patch to detox with. The only drug I have found harder to kick than cigarettes is heroin. Since March of 1994 I have had long periods of abstinence from heroin, but I have fallen victim, time and time again, to the sudden overpowering impulse to use. There are a few people who have maintained longer periods of abstinence through support groups, but I am not one of them. For me, the groups help; I just need extra help.

My first experience with opiates was with codeine-based cough syrup. I thought I had found Nirvana. When I was a teenager this type of cough syrup required a signature at the drug store to obtain. Now a prescription is necessary. My habit accelerated rapidly to where I was drinking 2 to 4 bottles of cough syrup a day and boosting the effect with what were called "goofballs" back then. They were barbiturates, such as Seconal, or hypnotics, such as Doriden. A friend introduced me to heroin and that was that.

I became a maintenance user, meaning I worked regular jobs, and treated myself with heroin as a self-medicator. I worked in psych hospitals, group homes, factories, gas stations and many other jobs to get along. I also had to do things that were against the law (besides using the drugs) to get by because the illegality of heroin caused the price to be excessively high.

Now, I treat this illness in three ways. I receive medical, mental and spiritual support for my addiction. For the physical aspect of the treatment I use Suboxone, which is a new treatment developed for opiate users. You could say it is Prozac or Clozaril for the heroin addict. A person like myself could take Suboxone daily and live a normal life. Suboxone has two components. The first component is Buprenorphine, which fills the receptor cells that crave heroin. The second component is Narcan, which is a heroin blocker that does not work on Buprenorphine.

You could look at it like this. A person contains an empty room which, if filled with heroin, causes a state of euphoria. This room is the receptor which acts on the opiate. Buprenorphine fills the room without causing the euphoric effect, yet it eliminates the long-term craving for the opiates. The room is full, ergo nothing else can be put in it. The second drug, Narcan, is an opiate blocker.

Many an addict who can stay abstinent for long periods of time suddenly uses. Why is that? The addict is hit with an "impulse craving" which, if given enough time, will disappear. The Narcan, the opiate blocking component, lasts long enough to fill the time because the addict knows, even if he/she uses, nothing will happen because of the blocker.

Heroin activates the opiate receptors in the body. In medical terms they call heroin an *agonist*. Medically, Narcan is called an antagonist because of how it reacts with the opiate receptors. Buprenorphine is an *opoid partial agonist*. This means it has a ceiling and the euphoric reaction that heroin causes is extremely limited with "Bup", as they call it on the streets. When taken daily it eliminates the craving and fills the opoid receptor without causing a euphoric reaction.

Suboxone can be obtained from physicians who have been specially trained to dispense this drug. There is a list of them on the internet if you run a search engine on Suboxone. This list is not always up-to-date and I talked with at least six of the physicians on the list before I found one that satisfied me. There were a few doctors who were only in it for the money and treated me like a "junkie." I took my time and found a physician who was compassionate and really cared about his work. I recommend you do the same.

The Suboxone takes care of the physical component. Support groups take care of the mental component. There are many different types of support groups that treat the psychological aspect of the illness. The type of support group used would be determined by the person with the Substance Use Disorder through experimentation. For me, a certain type of support group works best and I attend it five to six days a week. At the support group, I don't speak about medication. I have known people, when criticized for taking medication by people at some support groups, who stopped taking their medication and committed suicide. Even in some of the support groups a narrow-mindedness and prejudice exists with some of the people who attend. Thank God not everyone feels that way.

Then the third aspect of this illness is the Spiritual component. This I treat with a specific type of prayer and meditation. There are many different forms of prayer and meditation, depending on one's belief.

One could use a mantra, a repetition of a word, or a group of words, that may or may not mean anything specific. There are more types of meditation than I know. I use a particular type of meditation. It involves the Rosary. Previously I used a meditation with a Mantra. The purpose of a meditation, as I see it, is to shut down the "small mind", the one with which we do our everyday thinking.

Meditation awakens my Spirit to a greater degree as it shuts down the "small mind." I am a beginner at this. One can read about meditation and never "understand" it. Only the practice of meditation can give any insight as to what it is.

I hope this essay has given you some information that rectifies any misunderstandings you might have had about addiction, and that you can come to accept addiction as a mental illness that has a medical, mental and spiritual path that leads to wellness.

The Flower Days

In the beginning
there were the flower days
they followed the days of heroin and hypodermics

It was a time of cleansing
the sweet smell of the burning grass
washed away the stench of old cookers
fish-hook hypodermics
and selling myself to old men
on the streets of the worm-core Apple

Suddenly it was like Tinkerbell of the Peter Pan story
had finally appeared on my window-sill
and dropped the magic on me

I flew that night
we all did
we danced the Woodstock even before it happened

At first it was the Window-pane
the four-way Sunshine
the Owsley Blue Acid
and they sang to us to "Love the one you're with"
and we did.

We didn't know that it meant to love ourselves
But we loved you with a passion.

Getting high was the quest for God
Getting high was sweet love in the mosquito-dusk
Getting high was old friends
in the soft-afterglow of the moonshine
Getting high was the sweet smell of hemp
in the cloud-mountain morning
back at the commune.
Getting high was the scent of she slipping back

into the sleeping bag with two joints rolled
rolling acid on her tongue
and *she* kissing the power-hit pungent smoke
deep into you
the sweet organ honey from the night before
was the perfume dancing you deep into each other.
There could be no going back.

Who would want to?

Then the nightmares crept into the dreaming

We would dream awake

Flying on crystal meth for days

The loving ended.

The fucking began

Seven days later we wondered when we had last slept

Pulling away from each other as sweat poured from pores

and blood spilled from our genitals

Searching and running crazy from one damage to the next

Faces eaten by drug lust

The dealers cutting the dope with screams and rat poison

as the needle boys slithered in snake-skin soft.

Getting high was sucking strange cock

in the cobble-stone dawn of the Big Apple

Getting high was the brown-breath of rotting teeth

calling from the mouths of children

Getting high was hiding from the face of an Alien God

Getting high was she

leaping into the air with blood running

out of her nostrils and ears

and screaming for someone

to take the shot back out of her vein

when no one could.

Getting high was lockdown on maxi-tier

someone slipping a joint through the bars and

after you smoke the pinner

peace and love and all that shit

your cell-mate asks you

"what would you do if I set you on fire
while you sleep?"

Getting high was hands shaking
sitting on the shitter in McDonald's
dope in the cooker
you drop your vial of clean water
and draw up the water from the toilet
to shoot the dust of lost dreams into your veins.

Never dreaming it could end like this.
Never dreaming angels could die and blow away like dead leaves.
Never dreaming that the alleyways would be home to so many.
Never dreaming that hospitals, institutions and death
demon-sighs in the night
past lovers becoming hag-bag legions pushing shopping carts
genius poets screaming rhyme through Haldol haze

praying for electro-shock to take them home
would become acceptable facts.

Never dreaming that you could dream again

Even the old men didn't want us anymore
blown away powder-boys and girls of the sweet sixties
Dead leaves burning in chemical piles
on the heated grates of cities that should have no names.

Some of us still remain
to tell tales of how it was
and how the times of light became darkened.

We only sing these tales
like tellers of old because we are compelled
by what was once an Alien God.

Come sit by the fire and we will sing you a song
of how it was

They were the flower days
in the beginning.

Collections

"Men have in their minds a picture of how the world will be. How they will be in that world. The world may be many different ways for them but there is one world that will never be and that is the world they dream of."-----Cormac McCarthy, Cities of the Plain

A cabinet full of old clothes, magazines tattered yellow with age, tools too many to count, vials of pain killers, sleep inducers, medicines to ease heartburn and heartache, tins full of odd buttons, a case of thread, metal thimbles, a piano with chipped keys.

As we broke up the old dresser with sledgehammers and crowbars the spiders fled and left their nests behind.

If we knew what we would smell like when we were fifty as we sat around campfires cooking potatoes in ashes at the age of ten, we would cut each other's throats before the jokes were finished telling.

Trashmen, we clean up the houses of the dead, their children, older now, turn away as we take the collection of lifetimes, too familiar to them to look upon, pack them into an old pick-up, a roll-away dumpster, a six wheel dump truck, drive down Mass. Ave to the Jet-A-Way dump, a fine spray drifting down from the sprinklers at the top of the giant indoor building to keep refuse, reject, turn-a-ways that once were treasures from burning, to help them rot.

At home later, fifty-two years old, understanding that it might be better to burn out than fade away, knowing it is too late to burn out this lifetime, I pick through my comics, some yellow with age, my clothes, some I never wear anymore yet keep around anyhow cluttering the closets. I play an old Webcor, Dinah's Blues, Johnny Ray's *Cry*, scratchy 78 records, then thumb through books of poetry, look at the face of Jack Spicer, William Burroughs, Alan Ginsburg, Rainer Maria Rilke, the dead, Patricia Smith, Marie Howe, Frank Bidart, Demetria Martinez, still the living, Donald Hall writing about Jane Kenyon, life met death, others not so well known, Seth Morgan, killed in the middle of the story. Then I move from sagging couch to chair, uncomfortable in my own skin, go to the bathroom, urinary hesitancy, open the medicine chest and stare at vials of my own, pain killers, anxiety reducers, the over-the-counter medicine that doesn't work anymore but I still don't throw it away.

My eyes have become the eyes of a stranger now, the eyes of a trashman alien to myself, I pick through my things after my death and nothing means what it did before. Everything left behind, rooms emptied and closed, cold and old, boards up on broken windows, cracked doors letting in the outside, crumbling cement walks, sweating and dirty, thirsty for the water in the cab of the truck, Jet-A-Way the ghosts of the future.

Piles and piles, left behind, small frames connected to machines begging for life or death, unable to bear the pain or the smell of our own bodies.

Everything gets left behind.

I am a poet and a trashman, a terrible combination, I carry myself away before I am ready to go, I smell myself in the morning or catch glimpses of myself in window reflections, when I was ten I had no idea it would be like this.

Acts of courage are getting out of bed in the morning, brushing my hair (what's left of it, 200 strokes of the brush on a good day), opening the medicine cabinet and then closing it without taking a pill. Sitting down at the table and writing this to let you know who I am, smaller than all my dreams, yet more than that to those who love me.

A cabinet full of old clothes, magazines tattered yellow with age, tools too many to count, vials of pain killers, sleep inducers, medicines to ease heartburn and heartache, tins full of odd buttons, a case of thread, metal thimbles, a piano with chipped keys.

This is my house too.