

# TAPESTRY OF OUR *Lives*



Diana Spore, Ph.D., Editor-In-Chief  
Liz Krivich, Illustrator

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ASHLAND COUNTY

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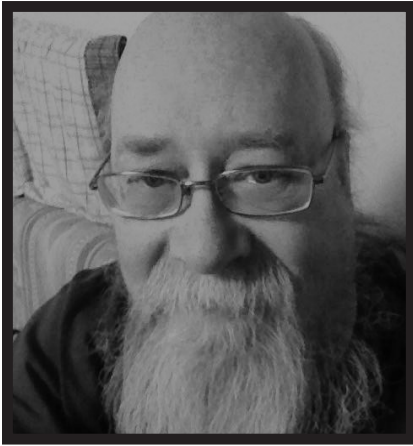
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# **TAPESTRY OF OUR LIVES**

Diana Spore, Ph.D.  
Editor-in-Chief

Liz Krivich  
Illustrator

## DEDICATION



This anthology is dedicated to the life and legacy of Patrick Risser, 1952-2016.

Pat was a pioneer of the psychiatric disability movement and a passionate advocate for human rights and social justice.

Pat was always a fighter for the unmitigated respect for all people. For him, there was no one “less” and no one “other.” He was a pioneer in the field of self-directed services in mental health, and a formidable opponent of coercion and abuse in that field.

Pat served on several committees at the local, state, and national level. Some of his affiliations included: The Alternatives Conference Planning Committees, the Subcommittee on Consumer/Survivor Issues (an advisory committee to the federal government), the National Association for Rights Protection and Advocacy (Board Member and past President), the National Association of Case Management (board member), and as a peer reviewer for the organization of Federal Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness. In addition to his work on the national scene, Pat served on several state and local boards including The Mental Health and Recovery Board of Ashland County, Ohio Legal Rights Service (now Disability Rights Ohio) and was active on the Consumer Advisory Council for the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

Pat was recognized numerous times for the volume, quality and integrity of his work, receiving the National Association of Case Management XCEL Award as Consumer Case Manager of the Year in 2000, the National Mental Health Association Clifford Beers Award in 2005, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration “Voice” Award in 2011, among many others.

*“I don’t believe in ‘mental illness.’ My thoughts, moods, feelings, and emotions are not a disease, disorder, or an illness. They are me. They are the essence of my being and what makes me a unique human being.”*



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# FOREWORD

Steve Stone

For the past several years, a small yet dedicated group of writers has gathered to explore ways to use writing for overcoming life's challenges, improving the quality of life and building social connections with others who share a desire to become "a writer in recovery." *Tapestry of Our Lives* is the result of their hard work. Additionally, the works in this anthology are rooted in adverse life experiences and childhood trauma, such as physical, sexual or psychological abuse or severe neglect. *Tapestry of Our Lives* explores these difficult issues, empowering writers to explore the use of writing as a tool to promote their own recovery and to share their experiences with others. Readers are challenged to listen and respond with understanding, empathy and warmth. We invite the community to join us as we seek to foster a community that understands trauma and its effects, and provides an environment that promotes healing and recovery for those who are hurting.

Currently, Diana Spore, Ph.D., facilitates the writing group, Pathways Peer Support Program operates the program, and Ashland County's Catholic Charities Community Services administers Pathways. The Ashland County Mental Health and Recovery Board funds Pathways, so the writing initiative is one example of many programs we currently support. Ashland's Board prioritizes programs and services that align with our commitment to building a trauma-informed system of care and a trauma-informed community.

The trauma model of mental health care is based on different assumptions than the widely accepted medical model. The difference between these two models is best reflected in the well-known paradigm-shifting question; instead of asking "what is wrong with you?," the question most often asked under the medical model, a trauma model of care asks "what happened to you?"

We can engage in a wide range of activities to improve our health, the quality of our lives and overcome the challenges we face. Physical exercise, mindfulness, yoga, social activities, hobbies, volunteerism and healthy eating are a few of these activities. Creative arts, including music, drawing, writing and photography, are also valuable for many people.

As you read *Tapestry of Our Lives*, the role and value of creative writing for promoting personal growth, healing, recovery and social connections becomes evident, even impossible to ignore. Diana Spore speaks to this power in "The Stranger Within," explaining, "Writing provides me with the freedom to express my thoughts, ideas, and dreams openly. Writing allows me to reflect, to gain

insight, to learn from past experiences, and to let go of pain, sadness, distrust, jealousy, and hatred” (p. 91). The writer par in “Parts,” describes how a process of redefining ourselves can heal “those parts of us / That are frightened, sad, alone...”; writing, it seems, is not only a social activity, but a process for self-exploration and healing, too (p. 86).

Just as creative writing may be used differently by different people, recovery has a range of meanings. Recovery is not about recovering to some previous state of stability or “normalcy” as much as it is about recovering one’s sense of self and dignity after it has been stripped away by abuse, neglect or other harmful experiences. Trauma expert, Judith Herman, tells us that “The guiding principle of recovery is restoring a sense of power and control in the victim” (1992).

“Writing for recovery” groups offer peers opportunities to support each other as they focus on facilitated activities, providing assistance and feedback to each other. Writers begin to discover their voices as they put their thoughts, feelings, experiences and memories into words. They learn that there is value in expressing feelings and thoughts, giving others a chance to learn from their experiences and building relationships based on shared values.

Writing in this way is not an easy process, as anyone who has attempted it knows. The writing group works in an atmosphere of support, connection and safety, all essential ingredients of recovery. The experiences and emotions described throughout *Tapestry of Our Lives* run the full gamut and writers make no effort to sanitize the suffering so often invisibly endured, even by people we interact with every day. Contributors to this collection show us there is an assured hope that tomorrow’s pain may diminish and that life can get better. Recovery, even from extreme experiences and trauma, is not only possible; with the proper supports and resources, it should be expected.

The title of this book, *Tapestry of Our Lives*, was chosen by the editorial committee from a line in Susan’s poem “On Blindness” (p. 19). Susan’s description about how our experiences and relationships are threads woven into a tapestry of our lives inspired the title of this anthology. Liz Krivich conveys a similar idea in her beautiful image on the cover. The people we have known and who become part of our story, along with the experiences we have along this journey we call life, profoundly impact who we are, our values and our ways of living in the world. And as diverse as our experiences may be, ultimately we are woven together in a tapestry of relationships, friendships, neighborhoods, communities, readers and writers.

## Acknowledgments

First and foremost, Ashland County's Board thanks each of the writers and the illustrator for their contributions to this anthology. Without your vital contributions, an anthology would not exist. The degree to which you have engaged in the creative process as a means toward healing and recovery is remarkable. Your willingness to share of yourselves in such a deep and personal way cannot be taken for granted. It is my hope that your contributions will bring understanding, hope and healing to many. Likewise, Liz Krivich's drawings contribute so much to the overall impact of *Tapestry of Our Lives*. Like all art, the feelings and ideas that Liz communicates in her work emerge from her own experiences and provide an excellent complement to our overall project. Together, the words and images offer a glimpse through others' eyes and experiences.

In the words of Henry David Thoreau, "Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eye for an instant?" Thank you to all the contributors for giving readers a chance to look through your eyes and to learn from you. It is deeply gratifying to be able to share the works that you have created by publishing this anthology.

The driving force behind this project is Dr. Diana Spore, editor-in-chief, who previously served on the Board and who shares that she is in recovery herself. The history of the writing initiative is described in Diana's Introduction. Here, I want to acknowledge her vision and passion that sparked the writing initiative and that are essential for its continued success. Diana is persistent and determined to make a difference and this anthology is only one example of the many contributions she is making to help improve the lives of others. Added to this was the task of organizing the writer's individual works into a unified "tapestry."

Each of the other editors on our committee (Kailey Bradley-Thomas, Chris Duggan, Andrew Kinney, Pamela Mowry, and Diane Switzer) brought a unique perspective and diversity in terms of their knowledge, skills and experiences. I would also like to acknowledge Diane Switzer for her work on this project. In addition to serving on the editorial committee, Diane was responsible for the layout and design of the anthology. This was new territory for Diane but, as you can see from the final product, she was up to the task! Also, a special thanks to Sheryl Villegas and her staff at Catholic Charities for providing a home and support for the Pathway's Peer Support Program and the writing initiative.



## *About the Mental Health and Recovery Board*

Financial and other support for this project were provided by the Board. For readers who may not be familiar with the community mental health system in Ohio, all counties have a mental health and recovery board like ours. County boards serve an important purpose. Boards work to understand the needs of their communities, develop priorities to meet those needs and oversee services to address needs. Ultimately, the work of the Ashland Board is to help individuals and families who live and work in our communities.

The eighteen Ashland County residents who comprise our Board have adopted a framework for community mental health and addiction services referred to as the “Three Legs of the Stool.” Our framework brings together the three principles of trauma-informed care, recovery and medication optimization (a conservative approach to the use of medications), which guide the Board’s services, priorities, and use of funds. In Ohio, county mental health boards do not provide services directly but, rather, establish a network of providers and a system of care for county residents. Ashland’s community agencies under contract with the Board are:

- Applesseed Community Mental Health Center
- Catholic Charities Community Services/Pathways Peer Support
- Ashland County Council of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse

More information about the Board’s philosophy and framework can be found on our website ([www.ashlandmhrb.org](http://www.ashlandmhrb.org)), and is best explained in our document, “Our Human Community.” We invite readers to explore our website, engage in our events, support our providers and amplify our message: there’s hope and healing for you, your loved ones, and our community at large.

Thank you for your support,  
Steve Stone, Executive Director  
Mental Health and Recovery Board of Ashland County

## *References*

Herman, Judith, 1992, *Trauma and Recovery*. New York, NY: Basic Books

Stone, S., et. al., (2019). *Our Human Community: Supporting and Promoting Attitudes and Services That Do No Harm*. Ashland, OH ([www.ashlandmhrb.org.ourhumancommunity.pdf](http://www.ashlandmhrb.org.ourhumancommunity.pdf))

# INTRODUCTION

*Diana Spore, Ph.D.*

Creative writing is beneficial for healing and recovery, for reducing stress, for promoting emotional well-being, and for expressing thoughts and feelings about mental health issues, life challenges, and adverse experiences. Research reveals that benefits include improved quality of life, empowerment, and a maximization of resilience. By engaging in “writing for recovery” and sharing creations with peers, who are providing support, progress in recovery will occur. Peers are in a unique position, due to lived experiences, to “get it,” and to empathize. In addition, sharing works of written art can benefit others who are facing similar situations and, in some instances, are struggling with the recovery process.

Ultimately, recovery can be promoted by finding your voice as a writer, individual in recovery, and advocate; by using the power of the pen; by describing your recovery journey; and by creating and sharing all or part of your life story. Writers may wish to identify transformative experiences that altered the course of their lives, or that made them realize that they were on their way to recovery.

Priscilla Ridgway and her colleagues (2002) identify some of the reasons why sharing your story is so important. First, by sharing our stories, we are able to make it clear that recovery is possible. We are survivors, and can send a message to others that we made it through a dark tunnel, and bring hope to others. Second, by sharing our stories and listening to others, we make a difference; bring meaning and purpose to our lives; heal; learn different ways to adapt and reduce stress; and maintain social connectedness and a sense of community. Third, we serve as role models by revealing what challenges we have faced and overcome, by showing that we have thrived not just survived, and by identifying what has “worked” in our efforts to become and to remain well.

Writings from individuals in recovery can reveal in depth what the recovery journey may entail and how it “feels.” Writers can challenge readers or listeners to look at issues in different and more balanced ways; can educate and promote awareness; can confront incorrect assumptions and myths; can reduce stigma; and can advocate for change.

## *“Writing for Recovery” Initiative*

Discussions – between Steve Stone (Executive Director), David Ross (Associate Director), and me (Board member) – commenced in 2014 about creating and

implementing a “Creative Writing for Recovery” initiative, under the auspices of the Mental Health and Recovery Board of Ashland County (MHRB). A grant proposal was submitted to the Margaret Clark Morgan Foundation (MCMF) in 2015, emphasizing the use of creative writing as a therapeutic tool for recovery. The MCMF awarded funding, with a grant period from January through December 2016. The project commenced with a half-day recovery-focused seminar in April 2016, presented by Dr. JoAnn Streeter Shade. A series of eight intensive writing clinics took place in May/June 2016, co-facilitated by Dr. Shade and Dr. Judy McLaughlin. In efforts to sustain and maintain this initiative, the MHRB provided funding for a spin-off to the project; specifically, a writing group that met monthly, with sessions starting in October 2016, facilitated by Dr. Shade. The writing group transitioned to being under the auspices of the Catholic Charities Services, Pathways Peer Support Program in July 2018, facilitated by me.

Potential benefits stemming from this type of initiative -- including having well-designed albeit flexible writing group sessions -- are extensive. First and foremost, personal recovery and recovery of others are promoted. In addition, this initiative aims to promote self-empowerment, decrease stigma, enhance quality of life, and increase awareness by others about the potential for recovery and for productivity.

### *“Writing for Recovery” Group, My Role as a Facilitator*

The Pathways writing group is grounded in trust, respect, confidentiality, and a trauma-informed care philosophy. Objectives are (1) to use creative writing to promote recovery, healing, and personal wellbeing; (2) to develop and hone writing skills; (3) to learn about the editing process and how to provide constructive feedback; (4) to share works of written art with others in the group; and (5) to engage in a social process in which supportive relationships are forged with the writing group facilitator and with peer writers.

As a facilitator, I develop assignments and writing exercises, find ways to reach individuals at different stages of recovery and varying levels of writing skills, and encourage efforts to “just write.” I have discovered that group exercises are a solid mechanism for promoting cooperative and collaborative writing.

A list of recommended resources about “writing for recovery” is included in Appendix II. These resources will be of interest to individuals who want to learn about the process and benefits of written expressions, about how writing is linked with recovery. I have found the following resources to be particularly

useful in stimulating ideas that would strengthen my work as a facilitator and for spreading my wings as a writer:

1. **The Story You Need to Tell: Writing to Heal From Trauma, Illness, or Loss** (Marinella, 2017).
2. **Writing for Wellbeing** (McAdoo, 2013).
3. **Pathways to Recovery: A Strengths Recovery Self-Help Workbook** (Ridgway et al., 2002).
4. **Writing Through the Darkness: Easing Your Depression with Paper and Pen** (Schaefer, 2008).  
In addition, one resource has been helpful in my efforts to design an innovative curriculum for the Pathways writing group. This resource will of great interest to those who wish to facilitate writing groups or to be presenters at writing workshops.
5. **Writing Works: A Resource Handbook for Therapeutic Writing Workshops and Activities** (Bolton et al., Eds., 2006).

Writing group participants developed a sense of community and trust, became more open with each other, and (when ready) shared works.

As a peer with lived experiences, I share my life story and works with writing group participants. For over 25 years, I have sought care through the specialty mental health sector, used psychotropic drugs to manage symptoms, have dealt with numerous challenges in my recovery journey, and am more than a survivor or psychiatric label (“Bipolar Disorder”). When I sustained my first psychotic break, I was not expected to recover. In the poem, “No one believed that she would recover” (p. 23), my message may sound hopeless at the outset. The piece, “The stranger within” (p. 91) reveals how very severe my breakdown was, still triggering questions in my mind about how in the world I remained safe. I have encountered ups-and-downs, including the need for additional psychiatric hospitalizations, ones in which experiences were negative, even traumatic. I have had periods of severe depression and have dealt with suicidal ideation (e.g., “Tick tock,” p. 55).

However, the bottom line is that I broke through “walls,” and came to believe -- completely -- that recovery was possible and attainable for me. A variety of factors helped me to move forward in my recovery journey, including writing that made me heal, support from peers and others, engagement in meaningful activities, and medication optimization. I discovered that I could make a difference, and use the power of the pen to advocate for change in our mental health system, and to provide support to others who are struggling in their recovery journeys.

## *Creating and Submitting Works to this Anthology – What You Should Know*

The process of creating and submitting works to this project required creativity, work, dedication, time, and incredible courage or bravery. Writers decided whether or not to take a leap of faith and to submit, to create new works or polish ones that had been in development. Some writers immersed themselves in revising works until they were ready to “let go” of them, in asking for (and being open) to feedback. Writers became very emotionally invested, striving to write to their best ability. Several viewed this as an opportunity to grow, learning more about the editing process, writing style, sentence structure and grammar along the way. All writers made the judgment call as to how they wanted to be identified in this anthology (e.g., first name only, first and last names, pen names). All contributors signed releases to allow us to have the privilege and honor of publishing their works.

## *The Process of Editing, Reviewing and Selecting Works*

Completion of all aspects of this project was a learning process for me as Editor-in-Chief, the other members of the editorial team, and Steve Stone who maintained oversight -- from creating the call for submissions (e.g., designating the criteria for which works would be deemed “on target” for inclusion) to working with writers to reviewing the works and to selecting which would be accepted for inclusion.

Editorial committee members were appointed by the MHRB, with each member offering unique strengths, expertise, and perspectives. Biographical sketches for those who comprised the editorial team are provided in Appendix I.

During the time period between when the call for submissions was released and the deadline for receipt of submissions, writers were provided with emotional and technical support. Sheryl Villegas at Catholic Charities made it possible for writers at Pathways Peer Support to have “working” sessions in which they learned about editing, restructuring works of written art, and how to provide constructive feedback.

Before works were reviewed by the entire editorial committee, I made minor edits (e.g., corrected spelling and typographical errors), ensured that reviews would be “blind” (members would not know who had created specific works), and compiled works in a way that all submissions would have the “same look”



(e.g., typing submissions that had been handwritten). Subsequently, works were reviewed by committee members and evaluated on a three-point scale (very good/good, adequate, poor/very poor) for (1) creativity; (2) clarity; (3) skill at expressing thoughts, feelings, or beliefs; (4) relevance to theme; and (5) overall quality. Recommendations to accept or not to accept specific works were made by committee members individually. However, final selection was grounded in group consensus and discussion. I did not “weigh in” with regard to works by me that have been published in this anthology.

### **Underlying Themes**

This anthology underscores recovery and the nonlinear recovery journey, one that may include both darkness and ugliness as well as light and beauty. Themes or topics addressed in published works of written art included: recovery; personal stories and experiences; grief, death, and loss; religiosity; writing for recovery and the process of writing; trauma; and messages of support to those facing significant life challenges.

### **Reflections on Specific Works**

When compiling this anthology, one challenge was identifying a title that captured the big picture of what our writers created, pulling together underlying messages. The title, *Tapestry of Our Lives*, and cover art are tightly linked, creating an overarching “umbrella,” under which works are organized. The works of written art are intricate, rich in vivid descriptions and creativity. The interwoven tapestry, enhanced by unique patterns (e.g., stanzas and lines of poems), reflects a merging of individuals’ expressed thoughts, feelings, and views. The threads represent connections forged -- with peers and others -- when writers share their stories of recovery and works of written art.

The second challenge was to assemble the works in a way that went beyond categorization by topics, types of writings, or collections by individual writers. Designated sections, selected after multiple readings of all creations, are: stepping stones; reflections and revelations; within reach; river of words; and breaking the chains. Liz Krivich’s art work is embedded at the beginning of each section, inviting readers to visit what is written within.

**Stepping Stones:** This section of works compels readers to think about what the stepping stones are to recovery, what makes a difference in our making progress in a journey that can be incredibly painful, troubling, and challenging. In “Stepping stones toward recovery” (p. 21), Cindy and Rebecca write about

the process of writing, allowing one to “[paint] a picture with words” that can be “very freeing and empowering.” The coauthors noted that when works are shared, power can be taken back.

Some of the works published in this anthology focus on religiosity and faith in promoting recovery, bringing a sense of peace. For example, in “The long path” (p. 26), Celia Cureton writes “My Father, my God, my Healer holds me in this path of sanity, of light.” In “Peace be still” (p. 27), Stacey focuses on the serenity associated with the “softness” of His [“your Creator”] voice, the “sound of stillness.”

A poem entitled “The question” was created by writing group participants (coauthored by Derrick, par, Stacey, Cindy, and Rebecca, p. 31), collaborating in response to a group exercise. They were asked to write a poem with all lines being questions except for the final closing line. Based on group consensus, writers decided to pose questions that are asked when ill, at the start of a long, arduous journey. Questions are direct, realistic, and sincere, including: “Am I or am I going crazy?” “Why did this happen to me?” “Where do I go from here?” “Is life worth living?” “Will the pain ever stop?” The writers concluded with a message of hope, after reflecting on the possibility and “realness” of recovery.

There are many possible stepping stones to recovery (e.g., belief in the power of love, engagement in meaningful activities, social connectedness). Notably, support is linked with recovery. But what type of support is needed at different points in our recovery journey, what is helpful, what is neither helpful nor desired in any way? In the thought-provocative work “Promises” by par (p. 22), the writer emphasizes what should not be said to someone who is struggling, challenging the use of basic (meaningless?) sentiments and words of advice. par asks that one merely listens and hears, while “sharing my private hell.” For example, par writes “Don’t promise me a bright tomorrow/While I struggle through today,” and indicates that “...I can’t see past the second/And a minute’s darker than the night.”

Liz Krivich’s illustration for this section (p. 20), entitled “*Stepping Stones to Recovery*,” expresses her vision of moving forward toward reaching a personal goal and recovery. As illustrated, stepping stones are nonlinear, reveal multiple pathways, some that are not connected. The art work shows an upward progression, reaching toward the sky, achieving a dream.

***Reflections & Revelations:*** In the work, “Present moment” (p. 34), Stacey reflects on the “sense of tranquility” that permeates her life when she

embraces the moment given to her by the “Creator.” Her closing line focuses on taking advantage of moment-by-moment, staying in the “moment:” “Enjoy, live, love and play in the moments that tick away.” Serenity is also reflected in the poem, “The music brings life,” written by Ben Wellington (p. 48). Ben’s work captures the reader by his use of imagery and descriptors: “A music uncomplicated, unpolluted, unrushed./Giving peace, a context for living./.../Wind across the strings....your strings.”

Writers who share personal stories courageously reveal themselves – their hearts, their minds, and their souls. Examples include the following: “Despite epilepsy, you can do anything,” written by Cindy (p. 37-38); and “Trial, tumor, and triumph,” written by Derrick (p. 41-45). Both are similar in dealing with physical challenges that have affected the courses of their lives, both reveal incredible strength in overcoming problems faced. Cindy writes openly about her physical health history, on symptoms associated with epilepsy and resulting ramifications. However, her underlying message is extremely clear; despite what she has defined as a “disability,” she has thrived, has retained decision-making power, and is explicit about how she wants to live her life, “her way,” “no matter what.” Derrick shares his life story, chronologically, focusing on the challenges of having a brain tumor, of being tested with MRIs, of undergoing surgeries, and of receiving radiation treatments. However, all of this is embedded in writing about relationships with others, in revealing that – despite (or because of?) challenges faced – he has become stronger. Derrick concludes his story with a simple note of gratitude, revealing his faith: “I am grateful that God intervened early.” Both Cindy and Derrick are survivors and resilient, and their writings send messages of hope.

The work of art – created by Liz Krivich – that is included in this section “*Breathe Out*” (p. 33) captures her vision of emerging from the fog and restrictions, allowing one to “breathe,” exhale and inhale. The illustration provides a picture of what it means to let go, to have the fog “clear up.” Liz shared that this is about release, and finding peace.

**Within Reach:** Recovery is always possible and attainable, it is “within reach.” This is the message underscored across the works published in this section. For example, in the “Runaway train” (p. 59), Susan captures her tumultuous journey from alcoholism to becoming sober, using vivid imagery and powerful language. In a three-paragraph essay, she shares her story of recovery (“I was uncertain if I could navigate the curves of getting sober without plunging over the edge”; “Like that train, I did derail. And yet, the emergency brake held and slowed the beast so that a massive crash was averted”). She indicates what was

necessary to do change the course of her life, to stay sober (e.g., "...after years of new friends, renewed relationships, countless meetings, and a healthy, empowered lifestyle, I am sober").

Liz Krivich's artwork entitled, "*Piece of Heaven*," (p. 53) reveals her vision of "grabbing" to achieve dreams and goals, including recovery. The artwork reveals "reaching out" to discover "the piece" that will result in the completion of a "puzzle" toward a bigger picture of what is possible and attainable.

**River of Words:** "Words," written by par (p. 66), is eloquent and descriptive, capturing the beauty of words and the writing process, including phrases such as "unique hunger for prose," "burning need to write," "making words flow like magic," "river of words," and "I found words that are just right/To soothe the savage beast in me/And help me through the night."

In "The light," by Celia Cureton (p. 97), elegant and creative language is used, revealing a strong belief in God's role as a protector and in one's recovery. Celia refers to depression as a "monster," and notes that "the light my God has given me will scare him [monster] away/It's a light that fills my life, a gift./More precious than anything else./My Jesus, He battles the darkness when I am weak."

"What recovery means to us," an acrostic poem, was created by a group of writers (p. 81, coauthored by Susan, par, and Cindy). Perhaps the most powerful line in the poem is "Victory will be the end result." The recovery journey can be challenging, can even feel like a battle or war at times; with recovery, we are victorious! Another strong poem created by a group of writers, "The epitomy of recovery: An AlphaPoem," offers reflections on the meaning of recovery (p. 79), coauthored by Susan, Derrick, Celia Cureton, par, Stacey, and Rebecca). Strong and striking language is exemplified in the lines: "Jousting with the demons yet/Keeping hope alive."

"Rose," written by Rose, was rich in eloquence, imagery and creativity (p. 67). Her elegant language is revealed in the following lines: "The rose is a symbol, never to be trampled"; and "The rose single or in company reaches to the sun and comfort in shade./She, the rose, finds company among her sky, day and night,/She is the rose." When you read her work, "Night," in the WITHIN REACH section (p. 60), you will be struck immediately by the simplicity and power of her words. Her two pieces reflect distinctly different writing styles for sending her underlying messages, an approach that is challenging for many writers as they attempt to have writing styles and themes merge well (e.g., to discover what "fits" best). From my perspective, she was successful in rising to the challenge.

Liz Krivich's artwork, entitled "*River of Words*" (p. 65), is a reflection of letting out emotions that beg to be released, expressing oneself in written form, laying the groundwork for recovery. The ink represents the creative process that takes place when using writing as a tool to "get through" difficulties that one is facing and attempting to overcome.

**Breaking the Chains:** In the first work in this section, "Breaking the chains," (p. 83), Rebecca reveals her self-empowerment and ultimate freedom from – in effect— a toxic relationship. This breaking through is "shouted" by Rebecca, as reflected in one line repeated four times, "You have no power over me!" In "Empty pages...new pages" (p. 84-85), Kathleen reveals breaking away from being a "prisoner" or "hostage" of the past, one filled with abuse, when she received help that made a difference. She writes powerfully, "New life full of joy./ New body seen as beautiful./I let others in and break the chains./I live as the grown woman I have become and not a broken child." Kathleen concludes her poem with three words: "I am free."

Liz Krivich's artwork in this section, entitled "*Unlocking Potential*" (p. 82) captures her perspective on "breaking through" what is holding you back from expressing feelings, what is being locked inside. The chains may be internal; e.g., pain, trauma, and anger. They may be external as well (e.g., toxic relationships), walls or chains that need to be broken through in order to reach your dreams, reach your full potential. However, it is also about believing there is more inside, and setting it free – unlocking potential. Her vision is one of hope and self-empowerment.

### **Closing Comments**

In closing, this anthology paints an intricate and "intertwined" picture of the *Tapestry of Our Lives*, bringing written words to life throughout. It captures creativity of individuals in recovery well, challenges us to think about issues at the individual as well as at the societal level, reveals the role of connectedness in promoting recovery, and provides a beautiful and provocative intermingling of written and artistic expressions.



## WORD OF CAUTION

*Steve Stone*

This anthology is a collection of writings that reflect the hope of recovery for people who struggle with mental health and addiction challenges, who have histories of mistreatment, abuse, neglect and other harmful experiences. As a result, the hope of recovery cannot be separated easily from the painful experiences and the consequences which one is attempting to recover from.

Reading this anthology can provoke emotional distress or raise difficult and painful memories for some readers. It is important that every reader exercise some discretion when reading the contents of this anthology. If you find yourself feeling distressed or are reminded of painful personal experiences, it is important to know that help and support are available. Please talk with someone and accept their help and support.

Many times, a trusted family member, friend or pastor/faith leader can offer support and provide a sense of connection and security that will help to relieve your distress.

For immediate assistance, you may call the Crisis Hotline at 419-289-6111 or 1-888-400-8500. You may also access the Crisis Text Line by texting 4HOPE to 741741.

For information about other supports please contact the Mental Health and Recovery Board by calling 419-281-3139 or email [ashmhrb@ashlandmhrb.org](mailto:ashmhrb@ashlandmhrb.org).

Remember- you are not alone and support is available!

## *ON BLINDNESS*

Let's contemplate blindness, the kind our fears create.

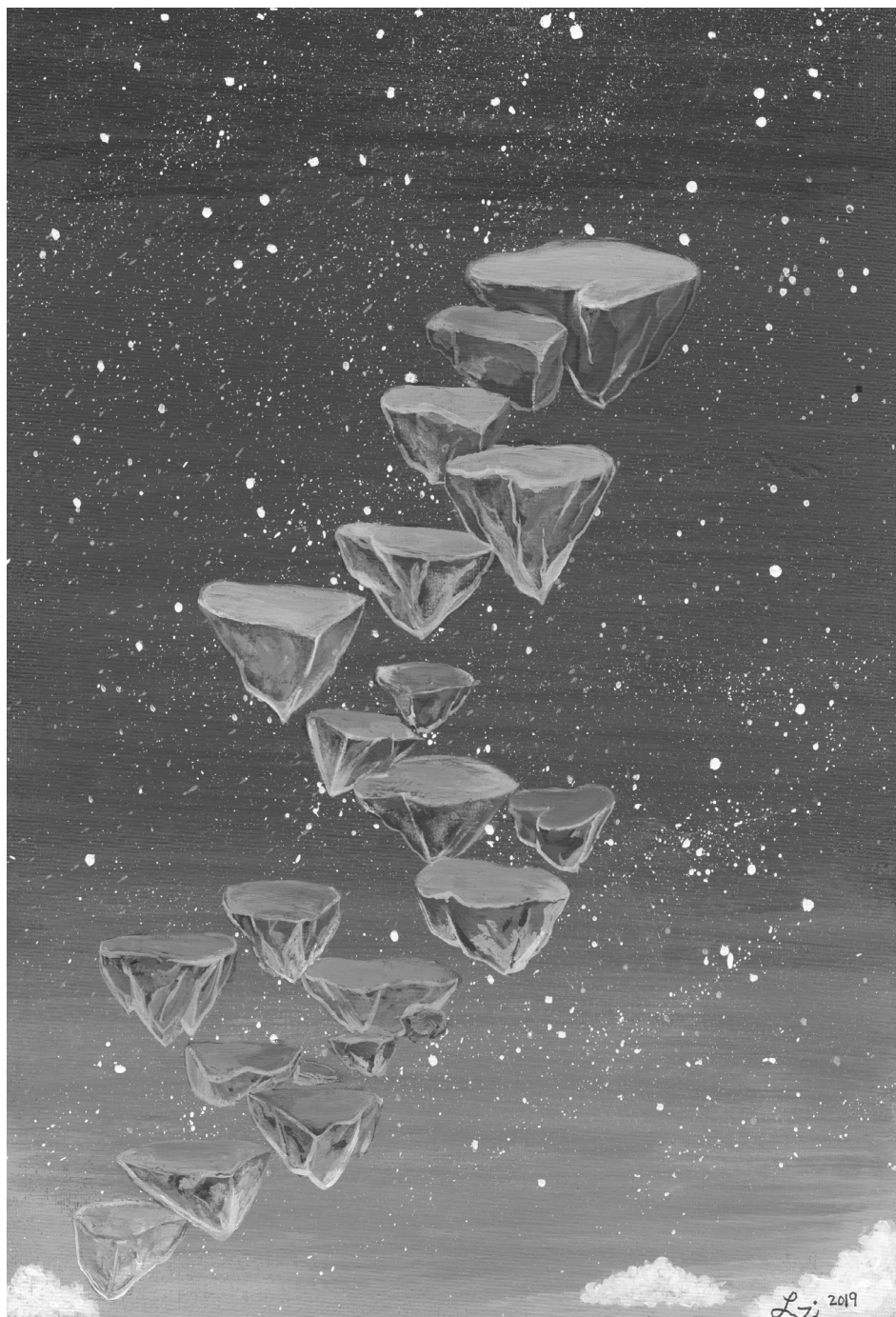
The fear of heights prevents us from beholding the extensive panorama of the Grand Canyon. The existence of fear of small spaces blinds us to the secrets of the gratifying quietness of being alone. In fearing passion, we are blind to the comfort of a diverse group of people with a common goal. If we fear change, we are blinded to the joy of exploring a new community. When we fear death, we can't see the truth known only through faith.

During our lives, we all face challenges and conflicts. Relationships come and go, helping weave the tapestry of our lives. These connections benefit us, assisting us to see beyond the fear, to savor the similarity of our reality. Because of this, we all take turns being blind or being guided through the blindness – never knowing which we are called to be, until we realize the significance of the lessons we are to learn. This lends proof to the theory that we need people in our lives in order to experience life to the fullest.

Susan

# STEPPING STONES

*Stepping Stones to Recovery*



## **STEPPING STONES TOWARD RECOVERY**

While so many thoughts are swirling through your mind, writing helps to organize and process them. Writing is a form of expression that allows you to let others know how you feel. Painting a picture with words can be very freeing and empowering. Writing helps with healing and working through effects of trauma. When others hear your story, the benefits are two-fold: (1) helping you to take your power back; and (2) offering other options to use in their recovery. Sharing your story can be beneficial to both self and others, revealing that recovery is possible.

Cindy and Rebecca

## PROMISES

Don't promise me there's sunshine  
On a cold and rainy day,  
Don't promise a bright tomorrow  
While I struggle through today.

Don't promise me a world  
That is shiny and bright,  
When I can't see past the second  
And a minute's darker than the night.

Don't tell me that there is happiness  
At the end of the long road,  
And don't tell me that I am not trying  
When you couldn't hardly know.

Don't sit up on your pedestal  
Like God on Judgment Day,  
Looking down on me so self righteously  
Saying you know it will be OK

Don't tell me anything at all  
Just let me take a while,  
And be myself and feel my way  
And share with you my private hell.

I don't need advice or promises  
I need a listening ear,  
I don't need a god or righteousness  
But a human being who hears,

I'm walking my way carefully  
But if I stumble and I fall,  
Please, don't help me up with promises,  
They're not any help at all.

par



## **NO ONE BELIEVED THAT SHE WOULD RECOVER**

Decisions forced upon her as if she was bound in linked chains.  
A future blocked by a monstrous wall created by a powerless self,  
By others who were uninformed, who thought they knew best.  
With her inability to envision prior plans ever coming into fruition.

She had no choice but to turn down the job of her dreams.

What she had worked toward for over a decade –

She sat quietly by while others closed her apartment,  
Sold her car and furniture, threw her belongings away.

She stared and bought into the idea that everything was over

Now on a fast track to pain and despair, rather than

Toward a promising career as a researcher and academic.

She had blindly looked out the windows in the plane that was

Hurling her toward a destination that was best forgotten.

And the wall would stand strong and tall for a very long time,

Until she started to chisel and then fought her way through

As the stones started to crumble, and her hot tears fell.

Diana Spore

## THE WOUND

Wonderful, the summer day was absolutely wonderful, especially enjoyed by such a young boy as I. Zooming everywhere I: the park, across fields, around the building, up one little hill and down the next, racing through the little creek in between.

Actually, down the little hill is where the problem came in. You see, at the bottom, where the little creek flowed also was where gravity placed the broken glass. Wouldn't you know my bare foot – for what little boy on a bike on a hot, sunny summer day is not barefoot – encountered the shard. The cuts – oh, what a bloody mess – were across my left big toe, forming a little “V” pattern.

With bike in tow, I managed to hop up the hill and into the library front hall, for you see, this was a park, and being a city park, came complete with its own small public library. The librarian stopped the bleeding and managed to get a hold of my mom, who came to get me. Over the next week or so, I was required to soak the foot in Epsom Salts to prevent any infection. To this day, I still have that “V” shaped scar on my big toe.

An emotional scar also came when I was a young boy, though this time without a bike or shard. It had to do with people, my schoolmates to be exact. In sixth grade, I was somewhat of a misfit, a person to be picked on it seemed. I remember at recess being wrestled to the ground in an attempt to humiliate me. I remember being picked on when we lined up to come in from recess. I remember the wrongness of it all.

I don't know why kids do these things, and why to me. Can they sense someone who is less confident when they pick on him? Can they just tell? I don't know, but they can, and some take this awareness into the level of abuse and bullying.

Maybe it is some form of relational gravity that collects these sharp and cutting kids into your world, only to cut you and hurt you as you zoom by. Do they cut and scar because they are wounded themselves? Often such is the case with kids, I think. Whatever the cause, they inflict long-term damage upon the sensitive and vulnerable, and such a one I was.

I think this alienation and exclusion helped to create in me a yearning for acceptance and importance; I want to heal my hurt. This pent-up cry from deep within set the stage for a hypomanic release into an illusionary world of significance. At last, I was important.....but it was mostly a lie.

## *THE BEST I COULD*

I've written some poetry in my time,  
Some turned out pretty good,  
Although heartache and pain beset me,  
I did the best I thought I could.

I looked back through all those efforts  
When my struggle seemed doomed with strife,  
"I'm doing my very best," I YELLED  
"Is this all there is to life?"

Even in endless frustration  
My pain, my sorrow, my grief,  
I kept moving on with the struggle  
Hoping for a little relief!

Then, finally, I saw a bit of light  
Was it the end of the tunnel I saw?  
Or was it just a hole in the tunnel,  
Reflecting light off dark tunnel walls.

By the time I reached that bright lit place  
And rested my head in that light,  
Though it lasts for a day, a week, or a month  
It gave me hope to finish the fight.

I know that darkness hovers around  
I catch a glimpse of it now and again,  
And when it comes time to face it  
I hope I can do the best I can.

Today I sit in the light I found  
Knowing it might disappear,  
I'm doing the best I can, you see,  
That's all any of us can do, my dear.

par

## **THE LONG PATH**

Wow, where did the years go?

It seems so long ago and yet sometimes, not long enough.

My Father, my God, my Healer holds me in this path of sanity, of light.

Willingly choosing what keeps me out of depression and darkness

Identifying the stumbling blocks along the way

Willingly choosing what is sometimes uncomfortable but knowing what is needed

To stay in the sometimes hard path of recovery.

Celia Cureton

## *PEACE BE STILL*

Clock ticking in the Silence of Stillness,  
Mind still wanders and sighs emerge from within  
Peace the quest, quiet my soul and rest, be still  
And know your Creator awaits your presence as He is already there  
Look up and be still, peace surrounds in the stillness of this 'morn.  
Deafness can't hear the softness of His voice ...  
Open up your ears and welcome the sound of stillness.  
Peace.

Stacey

## *THE GAME*

I suppose I should be flattered, but I'm still not sure what to make of it. Someone actually made a video game about my life...well, at least me in it anyhow, hopping about as a frog. Seems to survive there, you must make it to the next stepping stone. Sometimes I make it, sometimes not so lucky. There are a lot of stumbling blocks in this game too! Oh wow....hit one, and you are out, dead, caput! Too black and white for me. My life has much more grey in it; many times I do not hit the next stone very well.

I've had several times in my life where I hopped, missing the stepping stone badly, but didn't die...although at the time, I sure thought I was!....and then later saw how much that miss was actually an entrance into something that was good. Took time to see it, but the good did appear.

Take my mental illness, for instance. According to the game, once I miss the stepping stone I am goners, finished. No mercy, no second chance; you give up a life. You have no choice but to disappear and hope the game has another life to offer.

If I believed the game, I would have given up long ago. It claims there is nothing good that can ever come from missing a stepping stone, be it a log or a passing alligator back. You either make it all the way across the river to the goal or you have failed and are of no use.

It took a while for most of the good in mental illness to appear. Of the most apparent good is that mental illness is often not just an illness, but a syndrome, with both bad and good effects. The bad is obvious and what is often talked about, the good is more hidden. It has to do with incredible gifting, be it musical, writing, acting, or just plain creating. History is full of those near genius who tend to leak a bit around the sides. With a mental illness, you join an elite crowd historically! Celebrate you!

Suffering, or at least the lessons learned through suffering, is another good that can come from mental illness. Nothing teaches compassion like one's own suffering. Patience and understanding, both can be fruit developed through the suffering of mental illness. I stumble every now and then, and it is ok if you have your moments, too. I don't expect perfection, either from me or from you. You are a frog, just like me.

I have also seen benefits from prior interaction with some of my past delusions. Even though a context may be an illusion, my heart response is not. I actually laid my life before my God in a very deep and sacrificial way, albeit based on illusionary circumstances. God knew my heart, even when I did not know my reality. I seemed to totally miss the stepping stone, only to find that stumbling block was actually God's way forward for me all the time.

Yes, the video game about me is not an accurate display of my life. It may look somewhat like me on the outside, but my life is so much more complex than needing to hit every alligator stepping stone to win. Even when I fall in the drink, my God can turn a stumble into a success!

Ben Wellington



## *THE HALLWAY OF DESPAIR*

The wide tunnel is patrolled  
A disorderly procession  
Some soldiers stumbling, awkwardly  
Others walking rapidly, almost feverishly, tat-a-tat  
As if eager to reach some unknown destination  
Some moving backward and forward, unaware  
Many marching expressionless  
A few stopping dead in their tracks  
As if horrified to realize that they are engaged  
In a forced mission  
Others stopping to converse or argue  
With soldiers in their unit  
All wearing some form of armor  
Many willing to go AWOL if the opportunity arises  
But all are aware that the tunnel is controlled  
In this uncharted world, a psychiatric ward

Diana Spore

## *THE QUESTION*

Am I or am I going crazy?  
Why did this happen to me?  
Can this be true? Is this real?  
How can I protect myself from ...?  
Will I ever be...?  
Who can I trust?  
If I am hurt, will I reach out again?  
When can I expect some results to understand better?  
Where do I go to get help?  
What is recovery? Is it possible? Is it real?  
What is the end game?  
What kind of help do I need or want?  
How can I find out more information about it?  
Does anyone understand?  
What do others see in me?  
How do others perceive me?  
Where do I go from here?  
Will I believe again?  
Is life still worth living?  
Will the pain ever stop?  
Each dawn brings hope and a new path of possibilities.

“Writing for Recovery” Writing Group  
Derrick, par, Stacey, Cindy, and Rebecca

**TRUTH: AN ACROSTIC POEM**

**T**heory explained.  
**R**eality granted.  
**U**niversal fact.  
**T**rustworthy belief.  
**H**onesty confirmed.

Susan

# REFLECTIONS & REVELATIONS

## *Breathe Out*



## **PRESENT MOMENT**

Stay here with me, present moment so precious and free. No past to haunt, no future to worry, but a sense of tranquility -- present moment and me.

Return to peace in living this moment given by the Creator of time ... a timeless treasure, this moment, a precious breath of mine. Learn, grow, create, let go, and stay in this moment of time.

Enjoy, live, love, and play in the moments that tick away.

Stacey

## **THE FISH**

It was a cool, crisp early Sunday morning when Joe woke up. He thought he would skip cleaning the basement and go fishing instead. Who knows how many more clear mornings there would be before autumn? Joe wanted to take advantage of each one he could.

His neighbor, Wayne, lived right next door in a simple, three-room apartment. Nothing fancy, but it was comfortable.....and warm on those crisp autumn mornings. Wayne was feeling really down. His girlfriend of three years had left him recently, and he was really struggling. It had been hard to sleep the past week, so much pacing and then watching the Red Eye Theatre on T.V. He was so tired, and yet couldn't sleep. He really missed Alice! To top it off, his church was in a big uproar over the new choir director .....so much friction and anger going on! Wayne was just an emotional mess.

Joe had no idea what Wayne was going through. Wayne was always so quiet and to himself. He was friendly enough, just didn't talk much. More than once, when they both found themselves working in the yard, Joe would try to make small talk. Wayne would simply briefly comment and then go inside. Just so much to himself!

All Joe knew this day was that he was going fishing; something he really loved to do. Usually so peaceful and quiet, he was without a care in the world. So off to the lake he went, tackle in hand and ready to go. As the birds started to sing, in went the bobber and bait, cast way out into the lake so that he could maybe catch the big one. As time passed, and no fish appeared, Joe found himself being sucked into his most frequent nemesis: self-reflection followed by despair. As Joe sat, waiting for even a nibble, he flipped small pebbles into the water to pass the time. The little ripples expanded out, painfully reminding him of how his life was, like these pebbles without much punch, creating really pretty pathetic ripples. There was so much he had wanted to be in life! He felt like such a failure; such a small, passing ripple with really no impact or importance! So insignificant!!

Then it hit, jolting Joe out of his self-decorated pit of despair. It was a big hit too, being such a big fish! Line was whirring as it started to run....Joe almost missed grabbing his rod as it attempted to surf behind the racing fish. But he got it, starting to slowly reel in the fighting stallion. Seems like an hour had passed before the fight was over, then there on the bank it lay, exhausted. At first, Joe was very pleased with his catch. But after another beer and time went by, he became more and more despondent. Even with the momentary fun, he still felt worthless,

just couldn't shake it! Eventually Joe, now again in his dour mood, looked at the fish, gave it a kick, and started wondering what to do with it. Usually, he enjoyed making a catch but not today. He was just so down on himself and his lack-luster life.

So what do worthless people do with fish they don't want? Just leave them to rot? Throw them back? What to do? Joe figured he might as well throw it into the truck and figure it out later. Maybe it was worth keeping and cleaning, if he felt like it. If not, throw it to his old mutt.

Nearing home, he happened to pass his neighbor Wayne's place. Maybe he could stop by and see if wanted this fish. I mean, after all, it was a nice-sized fresh fish and maybe it would open things up a bit with him. So Joe pulled in and knocked on his door.

After a few minutes with no response, Joe knocked again, hoping Wayne was home. Finally, Wayne came sheepishly to the door. Cracking it open, he asked, "What do you want?" Joe, clearing his throat, asked if he could use some fresh fish this morning. He was just out fishing and caught a big one.

Wayne was somewhat stunned. He couldn't remember the last time someone had gone out of their way to think of him, and here was a man offering him a fresh fish. After a moment's hesitation, Wayne accepted the offer. He thanked him quietly and took the fish inside, shutting the door behind him. As Wayne stared at the fish on the table, he was slowly overcome with emotion and fell to the couch, weeping. Someone he hardly knew had thought of him! There was some goodness left in this world after all; it wasn't totally wrapped up in negativity and fighting. As Wayne thought on this, he reached over and slowly shut the desk drawer with the gun in it. There would be another day to open the drawer if he wanted to. He only knew that this day, he had been gifted with a reason to keep living.

Ben Wellington



## **DESPITE EPILEPSY, YOU CAN DO ANYTHING**

E – Energy it takes an enormous amount  
P – Penetrating goes straight through you  
I – Improvement makes you a new person every time  
L – Learning constantly how to do and redo  
E – Encouraging things will be changing for the better  
P- Praying for understanding from others  
S- Self-control to keep everything together so people accept you  
Y – Yearning for acceptance and understanding

The disability has affected my recovery and life very much. When I had my accident, I was holding a good full-time job at Richland Industries. RNI was a work place for employees with mental and physical disabilities. The employees made a little money while learning good work habits. The pay depended on their job and capabilities.

I wasn't feeling very well so I called off work. My husband was coming home early that day so we decided to have lunch together. So the day wasn't a total wash out I decided to do laundry. When I opened our basement door, I got my feet tangled into the load of laundry, pulling my legs out from under me. I fell down the basement steps hitting every one of them. My face smacked into the cement floor. I hit my head so hard that both eyes swelled shut, and shook my brain. I had a severe concussion with permanent brain damage done. My brain injury is why I have seizures and will take medication for the rest of my life.

I was unconscious for quite a long time. When I regained consciousness, I didn't know anything or anyone at all. My husband tried calling a squad but I didn't even know my husband of 10 or more years. So my husband called our personal physician Dr. Roemer. Dr. Roemer said "I Don't Care If You Pick Her Up and Throw Her Over Your Shoulder, Get Her To The E.R. Immediately!!" Dr. Roemer would meet us at E.R. later. My husband lied and told me he was going to take me to the doctor's office. He took me to the E.R. in Mansfield where I could get help a lot faster.

When we arrived at the E.R., the medical staff took one look at me and called the police. They separated us which was okay because I knew no one at all. Medical Staff badgered me unmercifully. "That man beat you into this condition right??" "No I fell down my basement steps." Medical staff: "So He Pushed You Down The Steps, Then Beat You Into This Condition?" "No, I fell down the basement steps."

Dr. Roemer finally showed up. “He Said My Husband Would Never Hurt Me Physically.”

Finally, the medical staff believed Dr. Roemer and let him back with me plus turned me over to his custody. I had to be woken up every few hours for a few days.

After the fall I was completely blind, so my mother-in-law would check on me during the day several times a day. My husband would fix us lunch and go back to work every day.

I started having petit mal seizures, which did less damage to my brain and body. But they were more dangerous because I would go with anyone at all. The seizure is an explosion in my wiring that the signal never makes it to the brain. The body can't move the way the brain wants it to. That is what the shaking or convulsions are, the signal trying to make the connection but can't. After having so many petit mal seizures, my body changed and I have grand mal seizures now. These are really fun to have, people stare at you like you are a freak show and can help it. You can't so have a little compassion and please get help!!!! These types of seizures do damage and cause physical scars which heal but the brain and emotional ones never do ever!!!! You deal!!! learn how to do things differently then you used to, or others do. But you can do it, it is okay!!!! It may take longer, have to be explained differently or many times but it's all okay!!! That is what recovery is!!!!

In conclusion, you can do anything you put your heart, body, and soul into. You might have to do it differently but that makes you unique. It will become part of your life and become easier. Having a permanent disability, you try not to judge until you look behind the person. Some have life better, some worse but I choose to live my life to the fullest and my way no matter what!!!

Cindy

## CHOICES

I would have had some loving  
In my early tender years  
Had I the choice  
If I could have chosen

I would have had a hug or a kiss  
That was safe, that was kind  
And maybe meant for me  
Never for show

I would have had friends to play with  
And toys to share  
And maybe a bear to cuddle  
Or a small pet to love and care for

I would have had a sunshine so bright  
That it burnt away my fears  
Or a rain so soft that I could turn up my face  
And lick at the drops, one-by-one

Tender, so tender can be the lonely child  
With a field of imagination as big as the world  
With needs as big as the sky  
And tears as big as the oceans

I would have had some loving  
In my early tender years  
Had I the choice  
If I could have chosen.

par

## ICY FOG

The long, dim fluorescent light hangs from the ceiling, intermittently flickering. Her teeth chatter as she wanders around the frigid cubicle. There are three windows, frosted over, with diffused light coming from the other side. Muted noise and voices can be heard through the walls. Shuffling from one window to another, she uses her fingernails to scrape the ice off, only to attain an obscured view. The door only opens a slit, scarcely allowing a glimpse of the world surrounding the environment that she inhabits.

Indifferently, she continues to meander around the cubicle day after day. Occasionally, she can remove enough ice from the windows or open the door wider to observe an uncertain actuality of her existence. She views one reality and then with a gentle tilt of her head, her reality changes. However, survival is the goal, the mind twists and anything can become normal.

Similarly, this is what it is like when asked to remember and communicate childhood memories. They are absurdly difficult to grasp. Mentally, I know that I participated in events and activities but there are no emotional connections to them. Always close but veiled and out of reach. Living with dissociative disorder – the unexpected separation from self, people, and events – has robbed me of most of my childhood.

I still have problems with dissociation in stressful situations. Having learned some of the warning signs, I try to ground myself by sitting in a chair. I grab the sides and mentally make note of how everything feels physically. I shuffle my feet back and forth, once again making observations of how this feels on my feet, how I am grounded. I also control my breathing, slowly inhaling and exhaling. As a result, the dissociation is less frequent and life is better.

Susan

## *TRIAL, TUMOR, AND TRIUMPH*

My name is Derrick. I am 35-years-old. I would like to share a little bit of my history with you. Thank you for reading this essay.

I don't remember a lot of my younger years. I know that my mom and dad separated and divorced when I was 13-14 months old. My older brother and I lived with my dad after that. My mom enlisted in the Navy. We could not live with her because she had to ship out occasionally for months at a time.

I really don't remember my paternal grandfather because he died when I was about three-years-old. Without pictures, I would have no memory of him holding me. I value the pictures for that reason. I did spend some time as a kid with my paternal grandmother. My brother and I would go to church with my grandma on Sundays. When Grandma couldn't pick us up, my stepmom at that time always made sure I arrived at grandma's house. Church and family were very important in our household.

I was fortunate that I had the chance to really get to know my maternal grandparents. We would go to spend the weekend at their house quite often. They were a lot of fun, kind, patient, and loving.

Dad has been married three times – to my mom and two stepmothers. Roseanne, one of my stepmothers, was nice to me but not so much to my brother. I think she was so nice to me because she had a son named Derrick who she did not get to see. I kind of filled in that empty space for her. While they were married, we lived in a house in the country. It was a great adventure. We lived there until I was in the fourth grade. Roseanne left us after my dad, brother, and I were saved. She wouldn't have anything to do with church at all. My dad had to sell the property in a divorce settlement so we had to move.

A little bit before Easter of 1994, I started at my new school. That's when I started to get bad headaches. These headaches were unusual because I was getting them at the same time every day. We would call my Aunt Linda, who wasn't working and lived close at the time. She would come and pick me up, and I'd go to her house for the remainder of the day. She'd give me some ibuprofen and I'd rest in her recliner, which sometimes helped. Aunt Linda had three girls, two who are twins. I remember that the twins would call the recliner my "sicky chair." As the afternoon passed, my headache would eventually go away. Dad would pick me up on his way home from work. The next day, it would happen all over again.

At school, my teacher would have me lay my head down on my desk for a while to see if my headache would go away. I'm sure that my teacher was totally convinced that I didn't like math. I would complain to my dad that I couldn't see the chalkboard up in front of the classroom. So dad called to make an appointment with an eye doctor. The office couldn't get me in for over a month. Dad asked for me to be placed on the cancellation list so that I could be seen sooner. Three days later, a receptionist called, indicating that their office could get us in for an appointment. The next day, we rushed to the ophthalmologist's office for me to have an examination. The doctor quickly scheduled a scan of my head for the following day. After that, we went to Maryland for Easter, as was our tradition, to visit Aunt Cathy and Aunt Paula. This year was no exception. We packed up the vehicles and left.

The next morning, Dad received a telephone call for me to go to Columbus Children's Hospital right away. My paternal grandmother had to use her frequent flier miles so that I could get an airplane ticket to return home. This was the first time I had flown on an airplane, and I was totally alone. At first, my Aunt Linda was going to leave her three girls with the rest of the family and fly with me. Unfortunately, she did not make it to the airport for the flight! So, here I am, only 10-years-old and flying on an airplane all by myself. It wasn't as scary as I thought it would be. Actually, I found it to be cool. With me being all by myself, the airline policy was to wait until all of the other passengers disembarked to escort me personally to my father. He was waiting to take me directly to Columbus Children's Hospital.

It wasn't until we arrived at the hospital emergency room that we were informed of the severity of my condition. Until then, no one had told us that I had a brain tumor, a large tumor. Both Dad and I cried.

My tumor was on my pituitary gland, pressing on my optic nerve. I was admitted that day. The doctors did an MRI to get a better understanding of the tumor size, location, and severity. I was administered steroids immediately to help reduce brain swelling. It wasn't long afterwards that I had surgery.

I remember that after surgery, I had to wear a turban on my head. Someone brought me a panda bear. When I got of surgery, the bear had a turban on his head too. The hospital placed a wristband on his neck with his name, my name, and my room number on it. It was like he was wearing a collar. I treasured that little panda so much, and have kept him to this day.

Recovery was a blur. I do, however, remember that my maternal grandmother would bring my brother to visit and relieve my dad so that he could go to night school. I was never left alone. One of the nurses who took care of me had a Gameboy with two games in her locker, and she gave it to me. It was such an unexpected kindness.

It was a great relief to find out on a follow-up visit with my surgeon that the tumor was not cancerous. We were told that it was about the size of a golf ball!!!

I had to have MRIs done often for quite some time. Eventually, the frequency of testing tapered off to only once yearly.

My dad had met Karen in the past but got to know her better at a Baptist single outing after my surgery. After courting a while, they got married. I finally had a mom who was a real mom to me, one who cared about me and treated me like a mom should. Karen is the best mother ever. My birth mother has never really been that close to me or to my brother.

When I had surgery, I missed my class trip to the zoo and rainforest. So Dad, Karen, my brother, and I took a trip there. My classmates had colored pictures of animals at the rainforest and zoo, and made a picture book of their creations for me. Each classmate had written a note to me on each picture. That was nice.

I have another good memory from middle school. A nice older couple worked there. The guy was a custodian at the school. His wife worked in the cafeteria and out on the playground. They just loved us kids. We called them Grandpa and Grandma. To this day, when I see them, they call me by name, ask how things are going, and say that they are praying for me.

In high school, I decided to go to the Career Center during my 11th and 12th grade years. I took up drafting. I really like doing that kind of thing. I was never successful with drawing blueprints by hand. However, I really did well on the Auto Cad System, simplifying creating plans (without developing them by hand) and printing them off. After graduation, I worked at a few different places.

During a routine MRI in July 2004, a tumor was found, having grown back in the same spot as was the case before. The doctor said that surgery was required to remove it. During a follow-up appointment, we learned that the recurrent tumor was only as big as the tip of the doctor's thumb.

While I was in the hospital for the second surgery, my stepmother, Karen, was



a patient in another hospital in Columbus. She was undergoing a preventive procedure for a lung condition. We were both discharged from the hospital around the same time. I remember that I healed more quickly than she did. I know that I was driving sooner than I should have because I went to pick up my Aunt Linda's three girls so that they could help with household chores.

Sometime after I was healed, I was referred to OSU hospital in Columbus for radiation treatments on my head to, hopefully, keep the tumor from growing back. The hospital arranged for me to go into an apartment in Columbus so I didn't have to keep traveling back-and-forth from home to Columbus every day.

I had been informed that I might have nausea and become very tired as a consequence of receiving radiation treatments. So I would schedule my appointment for as early as possible in the day, in the hopes that nausea would be prevented. Over the weekends, no radiation treatments took place. On Friday, I would go home after my early morning appointment. I would set up Monday's radiation treatment for later in the day so that I could stay at home as long as possible. Toward the end of the six-week mark, I started to become fatigued. I wouldn't go home over the weekends.

During radiation treatments, I had to lay flat on a table with a mesh mask over the top of my head. The mask had been formed at an earlier appointment. It prevented me from moving my head at all during the radiation treatments. They used different angles so that rays could be directed to all parts that had been affected.

Shortly after, my maternal grandmother's health declined, and I moved in with her. Our time together was very special for both of us. I'm grateful to have had the opportunity because shortly after, she was admitted to a nursing home and died. I can't help feeling that once she moved from home, she just gave up on life. I believe that if I had still been living with her, she would have lived a lot longer. But I can't change that.

After moving back with dad and Karen, I started to think about getting my own place. I found that affordability was only possible by receiving assistance from the Metropolitan Housing Authority. Once I signed up, I learned that there was a two-year waiting list. Once I received the letter indicating that I was at the top of the list for receiving assistance, I was out looking for my own place. I was so excited because it was a long road to get there.

I located an apartment in Ashland. There was a bonus; my cousins lived in the complex already. The apartment I selected was directly across the hall from them – a win, win! With it being the first place of my own, it made it easier knowing that they were just across the hall.

Once there, I started driving for Lifeworx as a volunteer for something to do. I would attend group sessions during the day because I would get lonely at home. Soon I became affiliated with this organization. Eventually, Lifeworx received a grant to purchase a twelve-passenger van, and to pay a driver. I started to get paid a little bit for picking up and dropping off members. While at Lifeworx, I had the opportunity to meet the woman who is now my fiancée, Jennifer. We are now living together in a two-bedroom apartment. Although Lifeworx has closed, I am now a member of a wonderful group called Pathways Peer Support.

As for right now, I still must have MRI testing done every few years. So far, no more tumors have grown. The radiation seems to have helped.

I am grateful that God intervened early.

Derrick

## SONG

So the song came out and it wasn't very strong  
It sounded thin and reedy, and I said to the song,  
"Song, what's the matter? You do not sound so good."  
And the song sang to me in a soft, sad voice,  
"I am the song of your life.

When your life was happy, I sang out loud and clear, with laughter in my sound.  
When your life was sweet with love, I sang a song of mischief and contentment.  
But now your life is precarious, filled with hollow emptiness and sorrow.  
And this is the only voice I have left to give you,  
For this, the final song of your life."

par

## *PEACE*

A soft touch of a blanket as I lie wrapped up in it on a cold winter's night; Peace.  
The Stillness of the night with no shifting shadows but a friend at my side. Peace  
inside.

A bark interrupts the quiet; my furry friend makes her presence known  
My deep love, heart leaps. Peace.

The new beginning on New Year's Day; Peace awaits the next moment.  
Will I seize it or pass it by?

This Peace quietly at my heart, my mind, and all around ...

The choice my Peace Giver offers, His very own.

This Peace, I can contain and will pray that it remain the next tick of time  
This new friend of mine.

Stacey

**THE MUSIC BRINGS LIFE**

Wind across the strings  
Resonate with earthborn life.  
The humming bass or the singing alto.  
The wind makes its own harmony.  
So stop, clear the throat, and sing along.

A music uncomplicated, unpolluted, unrushed.  
Giving peace, a context for living.  
The wind, some strings.....resonating.  
A humming as it was meant to be.  
Wind across the strings.....your strings.

Ben Wellington

## *ALONE NOW?*

Hear the hissing silence among the warmth of my aloneness.  
A kind of gratitude; a kind of solitude....  
Earlier grasping at old traditions and memories this Christmas Eve Day  
Wondering what would come of me  
As I searched for a place to land and stay. Alone now.  
“Where would I go,” praying to my Maker  
“Stay home,” His reply.  
Home? Void of others; How can this be?  
But a sweet sense of tranquility came, this silence and me.  
O Holy night, Silent night...

I welcome you silence, this new aloneness.  
It has been too long among the people, even within the Steeple... a time of rest.  
Resting in the Everlasting Arms of my Father; it's safe here.  
He and I ... and Our Aloneness.

Stacey

## **MY FRIEND, PEACHES**

- F: Friendly, you feel safe  
R: Reliant, I can always depend on you  
I: Independent, stand on your own  
E: Excited to see us  
N: Networking even though you are a dog  
D: Dependable to the best of your ability and more.

I looked into your dark pools, only half open.  
Pleading with me, help me.  
The pain is welling up inside your body.  
The love that you have for life is boiling up inside you and me.  
I make the call to help you while the tears are falling down  
my cheeks, like waterfalls that won't stop.  
When you and I arrive, they had a nice soft, warm blanket  
for you to lie on.  
Then a very nice, gentle man came, talked to you, and asked  
about your condition.  
After that, your Mom got to cuddle with you.  
You went into a deep blissful sleep.  
Now there is no pain.  
You're with all the animals that go to heaven.

In conclusion, your Dad and I will miss you. But my love for you had  
me take away your pain and hurt.

We will always love you, my dear Peaches!!!

Cindy



## MY TWIN

Have you ever seen my twin? Oh, I hope not. Not even my wife liked him best.  
He is so impulsive, all feelings and not thinking things through.  
Buy this, say that..."because it just felt right," he says.  
All sense of reason seems to have migrated south out of that one it has!

Me? I am not like he. I contemplate and think about things so much more.  
Evaluate, analyze, reflect ....I live much less by emotion.  
My twin, joined since birth.  
Same mother we share, sisters, even have the same finger prints!

My twin looks just like me.  
In fact, only way anyone can tell us apart is by what we say or do.  
Many years ago, we had a revealing conversation – over coffee as I recall.  
I sat at the family table one morning, sipping my brew when in he strolled.  
"Wow, you look tired!" I said, voicing some concern at his baggy eyes and ruffled  
up hair.  
"Oh, I am just fine – don't need much sleep these days.  
So many amazing things happening!  
Who can sleep at such an important time as this!"  
Important time?  
Wonder if I have been missing something here.  
"What important time is that," I quietly ask, trying hard to mask the deep concern  
for him I was feeling.  
"Why, God ushering in new insights and understanding – thought me none the  
less!  
I can't sleep with all the electrifying significance I feel!"

After a long pause, and another deep sip of joe, I quietly ask  
"How do you know this is so?"  
"Why, I feel it, I see it – don't you?"

While my twin had me confused that day, and I must admit for several months  
afterwards, I eventually came to realize that he was wrong.  
His lack of discretion and analysis can be dangerous!  
No perspective, just hard-charging spontaneity – which leads to who knows what.  
A good foundation for health and life cannot rest on such as this.  
I think I agree with my wife – I really don't like my twin best.

Ben Wellington

**PRAISE: AN ACROSTIC POEM**

Profound joy  
Raised arms in  
Adoration.  
Insightful glory.  
Sincere gratitude.  
Exhilaration given.

Susan

# WITHIN REACH

## *A Piece of Heaven*



## **AN EXAMPLE OF A WRITTEN MESSAGE OFFERING SUPPORT**

Just sending you this note to let you know that I am thinking about you today as you go through life's challenges. At times, life is hard and we don't understand why things happen. I have also been in the darkness of depression and sorrow. Even in your darkest hour, believe that you are not alone, and that your pet has/ can given/give you unconditional love. If you are feeling overwhelmed, please remember to take things day-by-day, hour-by-hour, or even minute-by-minute if need be. Always remember that it feels wonderful to allow the sunbeams to shine on your face. My shoulders are here to lean on. I'm here if you want to talk anytime.

"Writing for Recovery" Writing Group

Derrick, Celia Cureton, Stacey, Cindy, and Rebecca

## *TICK TOCK*

Frozen in place.

Suddenly not knowing which direction to turn.

A sense of desperation permeating my heart and soul.

Plodding though, step-by-step, had worked for so long.

Dealing with one problem at a time, keeping on top of the big picture.

But today – frozen in place, tears starting to fall very slowly.

Feeling so very alone, everything is crumbling, nowhere to turn

The fog is dense, my eyes are blurred, my heart is breaking.

I haven't felt such despair for years, I want to just stop.

Stop fighting, stop trying, stop, stop, just sit and stare.

Frozen in place.

Tick tock.

Diana Spore

## *MEETING THOMAS (MY BOYFRIEND)*

I was helping give a birthday party for a friend, who could not remember having had one in 56 years.

It was at a friend's house, where I was staying to help financially. I needed to be needed at that time. Also, a little depression was going on.

I had heard several things about Thomas. Some were good, some I didn't agree with. Aren't we all human with different flaws, things that we need to work on? I was going to make my own decision!!!

When Thomas arrived with other friends of the birthday boy, Tom was very quiet, almost distant. He may have been using a coping mechanism.

His eyes were like blue pools or windows to his hurt kind soul. Tom's eyes and mannerism reminded me of a lost child or puppy that needed to be loved. I liked him right away.

It came time to eat so I asked Tom if anyone was sitting next to him. "No, you can sit there if you wish." I tried to flirt with him while sitting there. Tom would answer questions briefly. Finally, the friend I threw the birthday party for said "What is wrong with you? Are you blind? She likes you." Tom got a pep talk about me and love.

Tom has never been treated fairly in his whole life by anyone.

When Tom decided to move, we moved to my house. It was to help everyone out plus where Tom was living was not a good situation. I was thrilled. Our relationship started blooming like flowers in a garden. The relationship became stronger and deeper, then changing to love.

This happened on May 12, 2015. Tom and I are living at our house in Ashland. We take care of each other and three dogs.

I feel God sent an angel to put Tom in my life. God will answer your prayers but in his time, not yours. He knows when his children are ready!

There are so many lessons I have learned from this experience. Here are the ten most important to me:

1. It made me believe without a doubt that there is a God [Almighty]
2. There are angels; you don't see them until you are ready and can understand.
3. My husband is happy for me! He is in heaven watching over me, forever
4. You can love again in a different, deeper way than before.
5. Everyone is worthy of being loved, no matter what!
6. When you do for others, it counts to God. You get blessed more than you gave out.
7. Use my abilities instead of complaining, and thinking of my disabilities [I can't because....] or [I don't deserve because....]
8. Stand up for yourself [not a doormat because!!!]
9. Have confidence and show it, without taking from others.
10. Getting your point across without a lot of fluff! [simply]

In conclusion, take the leap, then you can reap the benefits. I did and I am better for it.

Cindy

## **RECOVERY**

The sense of grief can be dark  
But with love, caring, friendship  
You get light and joy.  
Feeding your hunger for wellness  
Exercising your compassion for others.

Cindy



## **RUNAWAY TRAIN**

The train crested the mountain and began its precipitous descent. The engineer guided the metal beast down the steep incline when the brakes suddenly let go. The locomotive's velocity quickly escalated. In reaction, the train tilted dangerously from one side to the other as it rounded each sharp curve. The emergency brake screeched when it was engaged. The size of the population of each town being passed by increased the further the train went down the track. The runaway train sped and reached the bottom, skidding around the sharpest turn in the track. Was a massive crash into civilization about to happen? Or had the emergency brake held long enough to arrest the disaster?

Similarly, after a decade-and-a-half of substantial drinking, I decided to stop. I was uncertain if I could navigate the curves of getting sober without plunging over the edge. Not knowing if I would make it to the bottom or how many casualties there would be along the way, I embarked on one of the most arduous journeys of my life.

Like that train, I did derail. And yet, the emergency brake held and slowed the beast so that a massive crash was averted. Personally, I landed hard but was alive. After the physical withdrawal, there were numerous issues to examine and plans to be made. Eliminating former friendships, ones that had become toxic, and needing to totally change my way of living were my inescapable casualties. However, after years of new friends, renewed relationships, countless meetings, and a healthy, empowered lifestyle, I am sober.

Susan

## *NIGHT*

The voices of the night  
Cannot hurt you anymore.  
I'm right here beside you.

I love.

Your fear left.

I hold you.

As you.

Do not fear your memories.  
Your enemies.

Rose

**SHHHHH**

carefully, carefully she whispers  
don't Wake up the cruel demons  
that frolic in her mind.

a fairytale castle  
houses them carefully  
as though beauty could hide  
the restless demons  
or maybe appease them  
and keep them from devouring  
every happiness, every hope,  
her very soul.

softly, softly she whispers,  
fearful to disturb the slumbering Giants  
that she hides behind her eyes  
she looks, and sighs a sigh of relief,  
the evil still sleeps,  
the face of its rage silent still.

and the tears fall down her face  
for she lives in her world  
of beautiful castles  
and slumbering giants

par

## *WHAT PEER SUPPORT MEANS TO ME*

In my opinion, peer support is the way to go because you can discuss what or how you feel openly.

So many times, when I went to a counselor, the professionals weren't into their jobs.

For instance, I had a psychiatrist fall asleep while I was talking about something very important to me. I have been screamed at that it was time for them to go home, that I needed to leave. The medical staff didn't care if I had a place to wait or not. They needed to close to go home and I did also.

Peer supporters aren't paid most of the time. So they want to be there when needed. With peer support, you can vent forever or until you get your point across to the other person. This means the peer supporter can have similar experiences to pull from, instead of having to pull from books. They are so outdated, dry, you don't understand what the professional is talking about anyway.

When you talk about emotions, you need to get into the muck with people, and get dirty. Professionals don't. It is hard to explain why and how you are wanting help.

I went to a recovery center for six months, and saw the same counselor as well as 15 different psychiatrists. Some could prescribe medications to help me with what I was going through, some not! I got some help seeing the counselor but no benefit from the 15 psychiatrists.

Peer support does not use medication; it shows you many different ways of helping, recovering naturally from a situation.

You know the peer supporter cares about you, and is trying to help you find the best way through your problems.

Cindy

## *RISING LIKE A PHOENIX*

As she approached the locked door,  
Watched her escort key in numbers,  
Feared what she would find inside,  
Was she about to enter a living hell?  
Her thinking unclear, confused  
Tears began to trickle down her face.

After being taken to her room,  
She was asked a plethora of questions,  
Struggled to make sense of them.  
Received baffling information, papers.  
Hospital ward rules, admission status,  
Why might she need a patient advocate?

After she was left alone, she glanced around,  
Stared at the floor, suddenly numb.  
She looked out the door, saw people like her  
Wearing street clothes or robes.  
And knew they were all locked in.  
Dependent on someone to let them out.

She couldn't block out the voices,  
Taunting her that she was a failure,  
That she deserved to be locked up.  
Feeling as if her face was being  
Sharply cut with precision.  
The room was strangely distorted.

He brought a cup filled with  
A mosaic of different colors,  
Shapes and sizes, all for her.  
She swallowed the pills rapidly,  
Without knowing what they were,  
Or what they were meant to do.

Later she emerged from the room  
Surrounded by other “inmates”  
As confused as she was, not  
Knowing why or how long  
They would be members of an  
Unchosen locked-in community.

Days passed so very slowly,  
Therapy (?), meds and more meds,  
Activities, meds, and group meals.  
Finally met with family members  
Feeling awkward and uncomfortable  
Wanting to walk or run away.

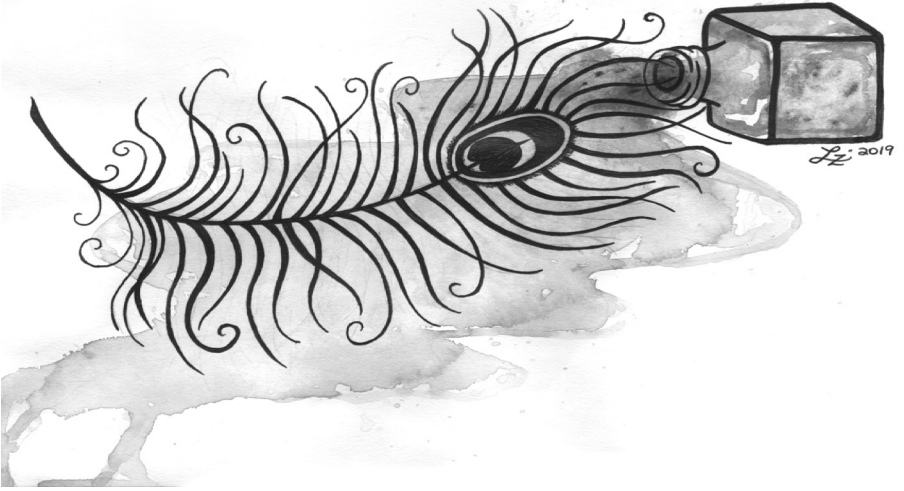
Heard desperate outcries for help,  
Arguments between patients,  
Harsh words from some staff.  
Dealt with a prescriber of drugs who  
Did not talk with her about what she  
Needed to do to remain well, to recover.

Learned that she was to be held ...  
A 72-hour stay for many others.  
For her, a three-week “forced” stay.  
Finally to be released back to  
A family who played a role in why  
She was admitted in the first place.

In spite of all that she encountered, before  
And while she was in this nightmarish world,  
She moved forward in her recovery journey,  
Rising like a phoenix from ashes  
Which can only represent traumas,  
Resulting in empowerment and healing.

Diana Spore

*River of Words*



## WORDS

Some people will get it  
Some people won't  
That burning need to write  
A unique hunger for prose  
A quiet time to think and write  
Fitting words into their place  
Word after word upon a page  
That concurrently embrace

I love the simple sound of words  
As they fall into a rhyme,  
Stringing thoughts together  
Like any puzzle, it takes time  
A riddle that is challenging  
With the pleasure and the pain  
Of making words flow like magic  
Over and over again

A river of words in the wind  
Sit back and ride the breeze  
With your mind filled with ideas  
And endless possibilities  
In every single stage of life  
I found words that are just right  
To soothe the savage beast in me  
And help me through the night.

par



## ROSE

The rose as beautiful as she was.  
The thorns grew. The sharp prick of the rose to avoid.  
The scent sweet, as no other could possibly compare.  
Many, many colors, of petals encompassed there.  
Time among roses was by seasons.  
Always they are remembered, their beauty in life and meaning.  
Those beautiful creations, they are roses to be seen.  
Beauty does fade; among roses, they are not forever young.  
Roses remind me of many types of love.  
In bouquets, or singles, why do they mean so much?  
The rose is a symbol, never to be trampled.  
Never to be remembered as downtrodden.  
Never to be stunted in their growth.  
The roses reach new heights.  
This year they grow and next summer and spring.  
Their master watches over them.  
They feel the sun, the rain, and the wind as it passes.  
The rose, in all its glory and truth, is loved by some and not by some.  
The ones loved by scent so rich and color.  
The ones who are scorned by jealousy.  
The rose single or in company reaches to the sun and comfort in shade.  
She, the rose, finds company among her sky, day and night,  
She is the rose.

Rose

## *A CHILD FACING TRAUMA*

Her parents were talking loudly at the kitchen table. She couldn't block out the words. They started to yell about not being able to pay bills, about living in a hell-hole, about the car needing repaired, about running out of money for groceries. Holding his beer in his one hand, her father shouted about her bitch mother not having a job. Noise surrounded her, penetrating deep within, suffocating her. The confusing cacophony of sounds felt like hammering on her head, throbbing in her ears. Her heart began to race, and she could feel tingling course down her arms. She tried to swallow a bite of her ketchup sandwich and started to gag. She squirmed in her chair, trying to make herself as small as possible, hoping that they wouldn't notice that she had just placed part of her uneaten sandwich underneath the edge of her plate.

She prayed that they wouldn't see her try to escape. She slipped away from the table, quietly trembling. She approached the large closet, the one with a plastic container that she could sit on, and turned the light on. She closed the door, only leaving a narrow opening so that she could peek outside once in a while. Within these walls, she started her magical journey. She read her cherished, well-worn book. In this world, all was silent. She was safe. At least for the moment.

Diana Spore

## **LIVE AGAIN**

Nineteen again with guilt and shame; a darkness that has come again.

Please, this misery, do not remain.

Let go, little Child, it's not your fault...

Time to Live again, He tells me with His loving heart.

Your life is in My hands so choose life and live again.

Remain in Me and I in you; much fruit you will bear and see...

That your life has purpose and no longer this misery.

Stacey

## SEASONS

The sun burst orange. Rays of sun danced.  
The day warm, slightly breezy.  
Dreams come true.  
The sun at peak displayed itself.  
Soon it was time to rest.  
Moon cast a pale shadow.  
Dark like night.  
The moon was like a star with no light.  
I watched for falling stars.  
Now the seasons did change like sun and moon.  
Winter – was like frozen tears that fell as snow.  
Fall – leaves danced in the wind.  
Spring – new growth came forth.  
Summer – kids feel safe again to play.

Rose

## *YOUNGER YEARS*

Leaking drops like gushing waters down the much older face now  
    Yet tears of younger years surface  
Feel the pain of younger years; let the teardrops fall, healing within  
    Much sorrow contained; let the tear drops reign  
Time has surfaced the November rain .... Older gal now wanting  
Release, purge out the younger years, the so deeply contained tears.  
    Joy comes with mourning, I'm told; this Hope to behold  
    Wait and see the healing unfold from years of old.

Stacey

## DEATH

I've seen death up and personal  
Though I was too sick to really see  
I stared at it right in the face  
And it looked like an illusion to me

I know that it was real  
Somewhere inside my mind  
Although I couldn't really feel it  
I couldn't comprehend it at the time

I watched it slowly lean on me  
I was dying without a doubt  
The shadow of death was peering at me  
I could feel it hovering about

I sometimes watched it quietly  
Waiting for it to strike  
Wondering if when I drifted to sleep  
I would make it through the night

I didn't expect to live this long  
I didn't expect to survive  
It surprises me to be writing this  
I'm amazed that I'm still alive

I wonder if death's illusion  
Was a protection for my mind  
Keeping me from the scary truth  
That I was about to die

Could it be that other people  
Have perceived death just like this  
In a cloud of hazy illusion  
One in which death doesn't really exist.

par

## *A LIFE OF ME*

Hey, I am me. I am here. I am alive....sort of.

I am me....you can't see through me like air. I am not air. Light rays bounce and bend at my surface. Water parts when I step in. Sand responds as my foot passes on the beach. I carry weight and matter ....In fact, I matter.

Why do I matter? Because I hold an opinion. I have a perspective, a vantage point, an observation....and it is needed.

I have a choice, each and every day. Do I engage, bend the light some more, create a splash in my puddles....or neither reflect nor refract but just let the light pass....right through me onto somewhere beyond, with no imprint from my being casting hues?

I have a choice, I have a life....if I choose to step into the light and bend the beams. Not the shadows. Not the dark. Not the chilling grey. I have a choice, a cross roads, each and every day. Do they find me on that beam of light, or engaging in and sharing forth the darkness of the night?

I have a choice....and thus a life of me.

Embrace who you are and how you have been made. Appreciate, really appreciate, your strengths and abilities. Celebrate you! Value what you have to say and think. Your opinion is you, and you matter to the equation of life. Your value, like a number, is NEEDED for the sum to all add up. Don't rob yourself, and others, by not even showing up for your own life!!

I have a choice.....for a life of me.

Not all about me or centered on me, but certainly including me. I am in my own peanut gallery. I am in my own gallery, rooting myself on! I am waving my flag, going wild about me and what God has enabled and gifted me to do. I AM PART OF THE VICTORY!

Let that sink in for a while.....You, Me.....in the equation of Victory.

Choosing to speak or not to speak. Sometimes it is not so much of what you say as it is you had the choice. You were validated, stamped "approved" ....by the big, cosmic Quality Control department. You fit. You have value; your voice is heard.

The needle of the phonograph was lowered and your song played....and the dancing started....and what a dance it was!

.....I'm glad you didn't smash the record....of you.....

You have a choice.....for a life of you!

Ben Wellington



## *TIRED*

Grown weary over the years; these tired, stained tears.  
Putting up veneer to keep the plastic front shining when inside, I've truly been dying.  
Do they see? This tiredness in me? Tired of pretending everything is okay  
Tired of reaching out to be seen, to beam. The Lighthouse in the dark, showing the way  
He says, I beacon you to come and to stay. To stay close to me and relinquish your front.  
See, I see it all anyways and want you to see it too –  
The way I intended you to be before life got to you.  
Just follow the Light path on your way ...  
And realize this tiredness was and is not intended to stay.  
But the choice is yours whether or not you let go or hold on ...  
Come, my little one, let's begin to shine like the Son.  
He will be your delight and refresh your soul.  
He never grows weary nor do you become bothersome ....  
So choose my little child to let go and journey toward the light  
Into the trueness of who you are; how I created you to be.  
Then tiredness will melt like a willowing tree.  
And you will begin to see the treasure of you  
Created by Me.

Stacey

## **STREETS**

Memories walked uninvited through my mind  
With the thoroughness that made cruelty seem kind,  
Every piece of pain, every moment of shame  
Reached into my heart to hurt me again

I walk with a mind as heavy as a stone  
There's no place to go when there isn't a home.  
I wander in circles, dreaming and pretending  
The dreams of a child with hope slowly ending

I wanted, I wanted and that want was in vain  
I needed it so much that need became pain  
The streets were my bed, the place I called home  
And I knew the true meaning of being alone

Every day, every moment, I lived life in fear,  
I knew there was danger constantly near,  
Running into violence was a common sight  
It was everywhere I went, morning or night

There was no protection, there was no relief  
We were the scavengers, us kids on the street  
We were easy prey, just throw away toys  
A disposable commodity, just street girls and boys

My chest hurts with memories, humiliation, and shame  
And when I remember it, it's always the same  
I try to get beyond it, I try to break free  
Of that kid of the streets, that child was me

par

## ***STORY TIME – LET’S SEE ... A LOOK INSIDE OF ME, OF US.***

### ***“SMILES”***

In the land of the Pretenders, baby “Smiles” lays in her crib with faces lurking over the edges. “Smiles” wonders, “What do they want?” We do not know their motives behind their happy faces of fake Varner. I’ve been here before, Smiles thinks. Nice on the outside but hurt felt already, motives not trusted. But Smiles keeps smiling in return, in hopes to feel accepted for the first time. Yet their happy faces don’t match. Confusion felt, but look ... The more we smile, the bigger they grin. Why do I not feel their love within? Separation – this family is not my own, “Smiles” concludes as she grows. I MUST be adopted, she surmises. “No,” the childhood friend would say “You look just like them.” Much to my dismay, she was right. Now what to do? Such feelings of blue and despairing disappointment. Smiles keeps on smiling even though her tears inside ravish her being. Let me not digress ... as Baby Smiles is thrown down the stairs in her play pen by the boys of red. Anxiety, fear and the unknown, all balled up in one, grip her heart, her mind. A familiar feeling emerges when the Carrier questioningly “fell” down the stairs when Smiles was only a cell bean. Not really wanted, not “good timing,” she was told. Foundations laid for this little lady. Anxiety, fear, uncertainty, rejection and abandonment were what little baby, “Smiles,” felt in that crib that day. “Trust?,” she thinks not.

Days would soon turn into moments of unknowns. The Carrier would sigh in disappointment, let downs from Smiles. Smiles learned that performance was her acceptance in the Pretender family; she would pretend along with them ...

Until one day ...

Smiles said, “No more pretending!” She turned into a Beaming Light as the truth revealed a Warrior Princess, no longer defeated by the Pretenders, no longer a Pretender. Truth was her weapon and love defeated all lies and fears. The boys of red turned into little Gremlins that scurried at the sound of her voice, the thunder of her sound. They became small as ants, no longer able to corrupt, hurt, or steal from this new Beaming Light of Warrior Princess again. She found her voice. She waltzed around the old Smith Road home, spreading her Light of truth into every dark crevasse of every dark room in that house. The Light exposed the darkness and Warrior Princess began to live as she was really created to be. This New Creation was her dream, her anthem. No longer a Pretender, she was a truth seeker and she found solace in her true Maker. He was also her Prince. He showed her the way, the truth and the life. She left Smith Road behind onto new adventures with The Realities, the new people who walked in truth with her. They gathered together often, sharing love (the antidote of all the fears of younger years). Warrior Princess

and her Prince walked step-by-step, hand-in-hand into all the unknowns. The darkness of Pretender years faded away day-after-sun-filled-day.

Forevermore.

Stacey

**THE EPITOMY OF RECOVERY: An AlphaPoem**

Alone and afraid  
Being on a road I've been on before  
Courageous this time  
Despite failing before  
Expectations being higher due to the enormous tasks ahead  
Feeling that they may be unattainable  
Gravitating toward the unknown  
Hopes and dreams renewed  
Inwardly inspired  
Jousting with the demons yet  
Keeping hope alive  
Looking back and wondering,  
My mind is swirling,  
Now I know the battle within  
Overcoming the fears  
Persevering to survive  
Questioning the doubts of how to thrive  
Resolving to fight and win  
Sincerely making the effort  
To  
Untangle the web of lies  
Victories large and small  
Welcoming a new beginning  
EXhaling the breath of a new tomorrow  
Yesterday has come and gone, promoting a  
Zest for life.

“Writing for Recovery” Writing Group  
Susan, Derrick, Celia Cureton, par, Stacey, and Rebecca

## **ON THE WINGS OF RECOVERY**

**W**isdom to choose a better path on your way to recovery.

**I**nsight to choose better coping mechanisms along your journey.

**N**ever allowing someone to hold you back from obtaining your goals on your way to recovery.

**G**rowing stronger and healthier as you spread your wings and learn to fly along your path to recovery.

**S**oar higher and higher as the beautiful butterfly you have become and continue on your your journey to recovery.

Rebecca

## **WHAT RECOVERY MEANS TO US**

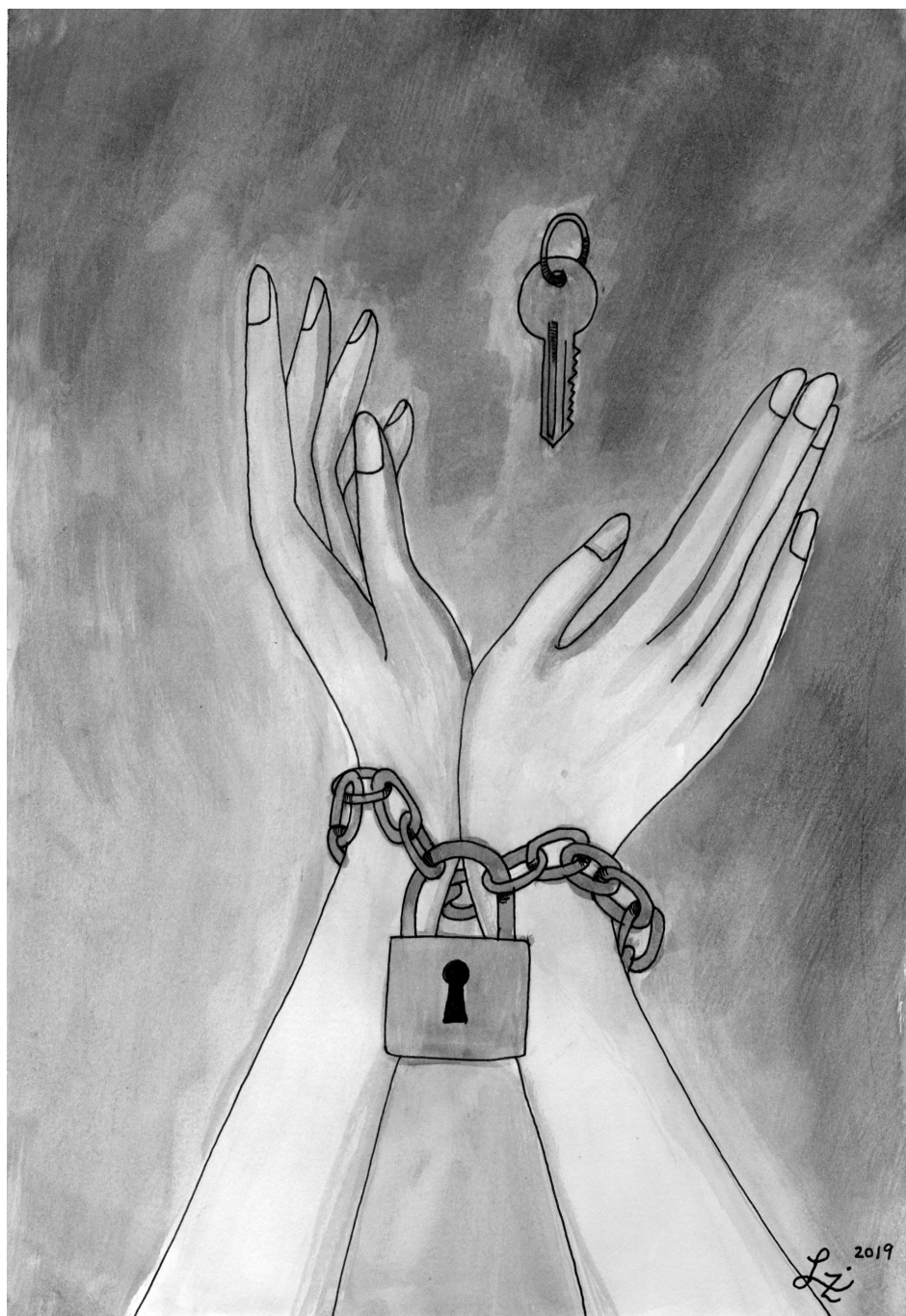
Reaching out to help each other  
Embracing challenges, adapting to change  
Connecting to others even if the feeling isn't there  
Opportunities to help us grow, to heal  
Victory will be the end result –  
Engaging in group activities, receiving support  
Realizing it makes me think about different ways to do some things  
You can learn from the help and support of others

“Writing for Recovery” Writing Group

Susan, par, and Cindy

# BREAKING THE CHAINS

*Unlocking Potential*





## **BREAKING THE CHAINS**

You stand in front of me with your arms akimbo, eyes ablaze, venom spewing from your lips. All is well ... You have no power over me.

You scream, you shout. You demand, push buttons, and make ultimatums. All is well ... You have no power over me.

I throw my head back and scream, let it be known from shore to shore, river to ocean, every corner to corner. I am now free! You have no power over me!

You stand there in your self-righteous glory, the putrid hate still seeping from your pores. You cannot stop time, and time will pass, and in time you will learn...

You have no power over me!

Rebecca

## **EMPTY PAGES ... NEW PAGES**

Empty pages full of thoughts.  
Empty heart full of pain.  
Prisoner of the night.  
Hostage of the day.  
Will things ever be okay?

Empty pages full of life.  
Empty heads full of blindness because few wanted to look this way.  
Prisoner of the past.  
Hostage of their hate.  
Will things ever go away?

Empty pages full of blood.  
Empty hands full of rage.  
Prisoner of the violence.  
Hostage of my innocence lost.  
Will I ever be whole again?

Empty pages full of sadness.  
Empty eyes full of tears.  
Hostage of the dead.  
Will new flowers ever grow?

Empty pages full of silence.  
Empty house full of chains.  
Prisoner of their past.  
Hostage of lost hope.

Will I ever be set free?  
Only with two words: NEVER AGAIN!

I asked for help.

New pages full of help.  
New work to do, step-by-step.  
No more a prisoner of my past.  
No more a hostage of hopelessness.

New life full of self-respect.  
New ways to cope.  
Forgiveness replaces rage.  
I have a voice. I am setting myself free.

New life full of joy.  
New body seen as beautiful.  
I let others in and break the chains.  
I live as the grown woman I have become and not a broken child.

No more a prisoner of the darkness.  
No more a hostage of the past.  
New flowers have grown.  
I am free.

Kathleen

## **PARTS**

*Process:*

*Is sometimes changing  
One word at a time  
Until everything fits  
In your own rhythm*

We are all composed of different parts  
We refuse to recognize  
We slide them behind our secrets  
We hide them within our minds

We are taught what's unacceptable  
We're shamed and forced to hide  
Or some very human part of us  
Will get belittled and denied

The burden is exhausting  
So much work to hide those parts  
It keeps nagging at our well being  
As it weighs against our heart

We reject those parts of us  
That we've been told are wrong  
We don't want to be abandoned  
Or made to feel we don't belong.

Then there are those parts of us  
That are frightened, sad, alone  
Cranky and unreasonable  
Unmastered and uncontrolled

Sometimes you will notice  
In the corner of your eye  
Another person hiding parts  
Just trying to get by

We are taught a set of patterns  
A crazy set of rules  
We cling to them like life lines  
Ignoring the damages that accrue

We have to change the patterns  
Because the shadows that they cast  
Have locked us into habits  
That can chain us to the past

par

*Note by Editor-in Chief: This work is a response to an exercise in which identified words were selected by writers in a writing group, focusing on topics that could be addressed in their writings.*

### **EXPLANATION OF THE WORD GRIEF**

I picked grief for my word because I had two people, who were very important in my recovery, who went to meet the Lord. Anyone who has had one or two people die knows what I mean.

One was my grandfather on my mom's side. Grandma and Grandpa would let me come every summer since I was 10-years-old. I had siblings at home who thought that I was stupid, couldn't care for myself, and was a slave to my father when he was home.

My grandfather had a farm with a huge garden that included raspberries, cherries, grapes, pears, blackberries, etc., and chickens. We went to my great-grandfather's house. Great-grandpa had cows, pigs, and horses. So I learned how to talk and work with animals more than with humans.

I remember tarring the church roof with black hot tar and mops; what a mess that was. Afterwards, Grandpa and I went for ice cream cones. There was nothing better than a sweet treat with your grandpa after such a hot, sweaty job.

The second person was my husband, who had a big influence on my recovery journey. My husband taught me many lessons, ones that I still use to this day. I am going to talk about the three lessons that are most important to me.

I learned that I was worthy of being loved by someone of the opposite sex, without it hurting. In your life, you may constantly hear that you are stupid, don't know anything, keep your mouth shut. I have been abused several ways by men; you begin to believe it! Not so! Everyone deserves to be loved, no matter what!

Another lesson was that I was worth loving, even though I couldn't have children. We decided to raise wiener dogs and make them our children. Our first momma dog had 14 puppies. My husband and I studied because of our love for wiener dogs. We bought a female and took her to a breeder, who had been recommended by our vet. We had a desire to have a family, and found out that people could bring their females to us and we could charge them a fee for mating. If you decide to breed dogs, I suggest that you check out the idea as well! The dogs taught us about raising other creatures and having a family.

In the meantime, I had an accident, got a brain injury which caused me to have seizures. After a few months of seeing a neurologist and having testing, I was diagnosed with epilepsy. My husband loved me totally. He accepted the responsibility to love me unconditionally, including all of my limitations.

## What a Man

The first time my husband went for exploratory surgery, I was so scared. They told me it would be several hours before the doctors could tell me anything. I went to the hospital gift shop, was gone about 30-50 minutes, and got a page. So I returned to the desk in the surgical waiting room. The volunteer called "recovery." The doctor was in surgery so I waited.

After about an hour, the volunteer came up to me and said, "The doctor will come to speak with you in person, in a few minutes. The doctor will explain what is going on with your husband." When the doctor came, he sat down in a chair across from me. His face was so down and his eyes looked into mine. He said, "I need you to listen very closely!" He took my hands which were shaking so badly that the doctor's hands shook. The doctor said, "Your husband is alive, but very sick and over 75% of his liver is affected. He is in recovery now, asking for you, and doesn't know." I just stared at the doctor with a blank look on my face. "What could you repeat that, please," I replied. The doctor replied, "We had to close up your husband because he was pouring out blood as fast as medical staff was putting it in his body. So he would have died on the table if we hadn't stopped the surgery."

I knew my husband went in to surgery with a clotting problem. He was given frozen platelets, and whole blood before all surgeries. When I got to see him, it was several hours later. He was given more frozen platelets plus whole blood in recovery plus more when the medical staff moved him to a room.

At that particular time, I didn't know if I believed in a higher power or not. I remembered our wedding vows, "For better or worse, in sickness and health." It was a promise before God and the whole world that I loved this man enough to fight to my last breath for my husband.

So yes, I believe there is a God, and God puts things like grief on us to have us work it out in our way. Then we need to take action – to show people His word, help them to process their own plan, to be able to handle the hurt and confusion of the reaction called grief.

In conclusion, grief is a reaction of feelings that we as people have to go through, as a result of someone or something passing on! Isn't it nicer to help someone or several people understand grief. It makes me feel stronger and better in my recovery to help people understand grief in their own way; knowing it will get better but it is okay to have bad days also.

Cindy



## *THE STRANGER WITHIN*

Writing provides me with the freedom to express my thoughts, ideas, and dreams openly. Writing allows me to reflect, to gain insight, to learn from past experiences, and to let go of pain, sadness, distrust, jealousy, and hatred. Along the way, I find that I increase knowledge about all aspects of myself in greater depth. Writing reveals (1) the person I once was before everything changed, (2) the person I was when a psychotic break truly made me a stranger to those around me and to me, and (3) the person I am becoming who is also a stranger.

Perhaps the “me” who was most strikingly a stranger emerged almost 25 years ago. The stranger is revealed with increased clarity when writing down memories, memories that become almost concrete and tangible. Who was that person who heard sounds from appliances that were turned off, who heard her computer speak words shown on her screen, who was surrounded by perceived room distortions, who heard voices, who believed she was in contact with the FBI, who believed she was a psychic’s psychic? Who was that stranger who had to leave her base of operations, ran from hotels to hotels, always keeping one step ahead of those searching for her? Who was the stranger who was missing for days on end, who literally ran through one section of Providence, Rhode Island? Who was that stranger who felt electricity surging through her body, who found that she could speak by blinking her eyes? Who was this stranger who could create waterfalls on hoods of cars with the power in her eyes? Who was that stranger who somehow remained safe? That stranger was me in disguise. Everything I experienced and learned so long ago influences the decisions I make now about the amount of stress that I will subject myself to, about what boundaries I need to set with those who are toxic for me, and about when I have to say “no” or “that is not OK.”

And yet the “me” who I am becoming – identified as another stranger – is stronger, more resilient, more competent, more empowered than was the case before, during, or immediately after my severe psychotic break. Each time I write about my recent experiences, express my thoughts, and reflect on past memories, I learn something new about the person I am evolving into. With my writing, I feel less like a stranger to this new, better me.

Diana Spore

## MUSE

My mind thinks of things to write  
Really late into the night –  
When I'm so tired and ready for bed  
Too many thoughts dance in my head.

My head rests on my pillow,  
My sweet puppies snuggled near  
I'm already more than half asleep  
When my brain goes into gear

It is just when I can't stay awake  
That the muse rears up its head  
When all I want to do is sleep  
All cozy in my bed

It speaks to me enticingly  
Not giving up the fight  
It whispers teasingly in my ear  
That it will be worth it, it's alright

It tickles at my weary mind  
With challenges hard to ignore  
Ideas and thoughts new to me  
Ones I've not considered before

I'm so tired I can't see straight  
And yet I can't resist  
The thoughts that visit me at night  
Because my muse insists

I can't ignore the chance I have  
To write the feelings down  
They are the thoughts that are in my heart  
That usually can't be found

That fickle muse, while here today  
I'm certain is not here to stay  
It only comes to tease at night  
Whispering it's time to work – It's time to write.

par

## *THE BEAST*

The beast who says “ditch it” is lurking.  
Wandering the hall, rattling doors.  
Looking for an unguarded and open place  
In which to enter and set a spell.  
He wants to talk, join your conversation,  
Give his point of view.

“Come, let us talk.  
Drink my chocolate, hear me out.”  
I am reason, I am feeling ....  
Fueled by hurt and rage and unmet needs.  
We can talk.....and then I can yell.....and then I can dominate.....you.  
So, let me in. Leave the door unlocked.  
We can talk. Converse a spell.  
Want some hot chocolate?  
It comes with marshmallows, just like you like it.

Ben Wellington

## *AM I DYING?*

I remember that you asked me, "Am I dying?"

I tried to reassure you, to let you know that you'd be well enough again to come home.

But I look back and realize that you knew something deep within, that something was not right.

Then your health status rapidly deteriorated, shockingly so.

I was unable to make it possible for you to be able to die at home.

They said there wasn't time to move you, there wasn't time --

Now, I understand that I may not be able to follow through on meeting your final request.

I wish you were here so that we could talk about this once more, what you asked of me.

I cannot forget that you asked me, "Am I dying?"

I remember moments shared, our long discussions, our disagreements, and our love.

You will never be forgotten.

I give you my word.

Diana Spore

## **RECOVERY**

Reflecting on one's self  
Encouraged by others  
Concentrating on life's challenges  
Overcoming negative behavior  
Valiant effort made each day  
Exploring new environments  
Reveling in new found soundness  
Yielding to restoration.

Susan

## *THE LIGHT*

Depression is a large monster  
Lurking in the shadows  
Peering through the dark  
Waiting for any opportunity to invade again  
Filling my mind with sadness and irrational thoughts  
Consuming my heart with sorrow and grief  
Possessing my life with his darkness  
I am not giving in, not letting my guard down  
My life is too precious to succumb to the monster  
He will not have the power to force thoughts  
Of dying and hopelessness into my mind  
He is not allowed in anymore  
And when he slowly and quietly creeps in,  
The light my God has given me will scare him away  
It's a light that fills my life, a gift,  
More precious than anything else,  
My Jesus, He battles the darkness when I am weak.

Celia Cureton

**HOPE: AN ACROSTIC POEM**

Higher power sought  
Open and straightforward  
Prayer and praise lifted up  
Essential for splendid anticipation

Susan



## CONCLUSION

### WHAT I WISH FOR YOU

Diana Spore, Ph.D.

This anthology, *Tapestry of Our Lives*, interconnects powerful, thought-provocative, creative, and beautiful works, intertwining unique designs that emerge from diversity in terms of themes, forms of written and artistic expressions, and lyrical undertones. When one views this anthology in its entirety, the overall message is one of hope, rediscovering and embracing the light rather than being “prisoner[s] of the darkness” (“Empty pages...new pages,” Kathleen, p. 84-85).

Liz’s illustration, on the inside of the back cover of this anthology, entitled “Release” reveals her thoughts about being released from all that has been locked up inside and stirred up, wanting to be freed. The release is one of letting go of past traumas, negative feelings, and emotional pain. It is Liz’s perspective that her blue jay image represents hostility and anger, despite the fact that others may look on it as beautiful when taking a quick look at her creation. Liz’s artwork reflects the moment when one realizes that it is time to let go.

I have a message of hope for those who are facing significant life challenges or traumatizing experiences, who are struggling in their journeys toward recovery. Always remember that recovery is possible, and “within reach.”

In closing, what I wish for you:

May you find peace, hope, and resilience  
As you traverse the pathways to recovery  
May you find strength to overcome challenges.  
May you “hold on” during dark moments  
Drawing on support from peers and others  
May you remain open to a plethora of possibilities  
Without erecting totally “unapproachable” walls  
That block you and others from connecting well  
May you remember that recovery is possible,  
Even when you struggle – or even battle within –  
As you stumble, crawl, walk, or run on the pathways.  
What I wish for you –  
A journey in which you are encircled by love and support.  
An awareness that you are not alone.

Diana Spore

# APPENDIX I

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

### EDITORIAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

**Kailey Bradley-Thomas** received her Master's degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Ashland Theological Seminary. She is a licensed professional clinical counselor (LPCC) in the State of Ohio. Bradley-Thomas is coordinator of bereavement services at Hospice of North Central Ohio, and specializes in grief counseling and grief education. As a counselor, she is interested in the power of narrative and has worked with all age groups on the benefits of therapeutic story-telling. She has facilitated groups on addiction, anger management, self-care, grief/loss, depression and anxiety. Bradley-Thomas is a Board Member of the Ashland County Council on Aging, and is a member of the Older Adult Behavioral Health Coalition, the Ashland County Trauma and Resiliency Collaborative, and the Suicide Prevention Coalitions in Ashland and Richland counties. Bradley-Thomas serves as a facilitator for a caregiver support group for the Alzheimer's Association, and is a member of the University Hospitals Bio-Ethics Committee in Ashland. She has presented on issues surrounding children's grief, legacy writing, writing and sharing your story of recovery, and end-of-life. Currently, Bradley-Thomas is working towards certification in thanatology. She loves living with her husband, Stephen, and their golden doodle, Scout, in Ashland.

**Chris Duggan** is a loving father of three children, a girl and two boys, with his fourth child on the way. He is a US Army veteran who served honorably for 10 years. Duggan is a student at Ohio State University-Mansfield, studying Middle School Education with a primary focus on Science, and a secondary focus in Social Studies.

**Andrew Kinney** lives in Savannah, Ohio, with his family and four dogs. He's the proud father of four boys (Daniel, James, Jackson, and Henry) and husband to his inimitable partner, Tina. Andrew and Tina enjoy gardening, spending time with family, and watching their kids play ball. Andrew is faculty at Ohio State University-Mansfield, where he teaches writing and literature courses. Recently, he joined the Ashland County's Mental Health and Recovery Board with the goal of increasing access to recovery and working to address the needs of Ashland families.

**Pamela Mowry** has been an active participant in the Ashland County community since moving here in 1985. Her interests have always included better serving the individuals and families in Ashland County. She has been a member of many boards and advisory groups, such as United Way and Hospice of North Central Ohio, Ashland. Pam graduated from Leadership Ashland in 2001, and is a former Director of the program. She is a 2005 graduate of the JoAnn Davidson Ohio Leadership Institute. For many years, while raising their three sons, Pam and her husband, Mike, were deeply involved in the Ashland City Schools, its sports teams, and academic activities.

Mowry served two terms on the Mental Health and Recovery Board of Ashland County, chairing the Board for two years. She was a coordinator for The Welcome Johnny & Jane Home Project, a veterans' outreach program. She is the current chair of the North Central State College Board of Trustees, and serves on the Foundation board for NCSC, as well.

Pam is the founder of Ashland County Veterans Appreciation Day, an annual event that honors our area military veterans, now in its sixth year. Pam and Mike are members of Trinity Lutheran Church. They will celebrate 40 years of marriage this year.

A special source of joy for Pam is her role of “Grammy Pammy” to her two grandchildren, Cora and Logan!

**Diana Spore, Ph.D.** is editor-in-chief of the Anthology Project. She is an advocate for individuals facing mental health challenges, a writer/editor, and a mental health consumer in recovery. Spore received her Master's degree in Gerontological Studies from Miami University, and earned a PhD in Human Development and Family Studies, with a concentration in aging, from the Pennsylvania State University. She completed postdoctoral training at Brown University. Spore's areas of expertise include medication optimization, mental health recovery, mental health and aging, long-term care, psychotropic and inappropriate drug use among older adults, and caregiving. She is a former Board member of the Mental Health and Recovery Board of Ashland County (MHRB). Spore served as Project Lead for a “Wring for Recovery” initiative (MHRB) and engaged in all aspects of the project (including grant writing, design and evaluation of the program), which has resulted in sustained spin-off efforts. Currently, she is a consultant at the MHRB, writing articles for a local newspaper about topics of interest to seniors. Spore is serving as a facilitator of a “writing for recovery” group, which is under the auspices of Catholic Charities' Pathways Peer Support Program. She has expertise in addressing the process and benefits of

different forms of writing for recovery, self-empowerment, emotional well-being, and healing. Spore has presented at and co-facilitated workshops on writing for recovery, journaling for caregivers, and legacy writing.

**Diane Switzer** worked for the Mental Health and Recovery Board of Ashland County for 10 years as the Office Manager, and for one year as the Special Projects Coordinator. In her current role, she assists with: coordination of project collaboratives; coordinating trainings/meetings; publishing the monthly newsletter; community outreach; maintaining MHRB's website and social media; managing grant-funded projects. She is involved in the Older Adult Behavioral Health Coalition, Ashland County Suicide Prevention Coalition and Youth-Led Prevention. Diane graduated from Leadership Ashland in 2017.

Switzer has lived in Ashland County for 23 years, is a member of Trinity Lutheran Church in Ashland, and has been married for 39 years to her husband, Dave. They have three children and, recently, became grandparents. Being grandparents has brought them a new sense of pride and joy! In her spare time, Diane enjoys spending time with family, attending concerts/events, traveling, and flower gardening.

### **AUTHOR OF DEDICATION, WORD OF CAUTION, AND FOREWORD**

**Steven Stone** is the Executive Director of the Mental Health and Recovery Board of Ashland County. He has worked in the community mental health field for over 35 years. Stone holds a Bachelor of Arts in religion/education and a Master of Arts in counseling and psychology. He received his clinical training at the Cleveland Psychiatric Institute and Case Western Reserve University. In addition, he completed extensive post-graduate studies in Public Policy and Social Change at Union Institute and University. He completed the Mental Health Executive Leadership Program at Case Western Reserve University and is an approved Mental Health Mediator.

Stone was licensed as a Professional Clinical Counselor with a Supervisory endorsement in 1989 and maintained a private counseling practice in Ashland for 15 years. Mr. Stone has served as the director of a not-for-profit behavioral health agency and directed a mental health program for a county juvenile court. In addition, he has been an adjunct faculty member at Ashland University and Franklin University.

Steve has been an active member of his community in Ashland, Ohio, since moving there in 1979. He is the co-founder of the Annual Pat Risser RSVP Recovery Conference, past-president of the Rotary Club of Ashland and past-chair of the Leadership Ashland Advisory Council. He is currently on the board of North Central State College where he served as board chair and has served on a number of other community and non-profit boards. In addition, Steve is on the Board of Directors of the Academy of Violence and Abuse, an international healthcare organization whose mission is to address the long-term health effects of violence and abuse and to prevent their occurrence. Steve is a member of the board of the National Association for Rights, Protection and Advocacy which exists to protect the rights of people who experience the world in ways society often calls “mental illness.” Much of his advocacy work has focused on the elimination of force, coercion, seclusion and restraint in mental health care. Steve and his wife, Marilyn, have two adult sons and one granddaughter, Josie, and live in rural Ashland County.

## **ILLUSTRATOR**

**Liz Krivich** serves as an illustrator of this anthology. She is a visionary, an individual in recovery, an active participant of Pathways Peer Support in Ashland, and an Ashland County resident. Liz is a talented artist, working in multiple mediums, and is a creative writer. Liz’s work is imaginative, unconventional, inspired, whimsical, insightful, and original. Those who view her works are captured by their beauty, innovativeness, and power.

## **CONTRIBUTORS OF WRITTEN WORKS**

**Cindy** has lived in Ashland for over nine years. She has received a peer support certificate and helps others find their voice. Cindy is still on her recovery journey through writing, life experiences, and learning from others every day! Would you like to join her and others in the journey toward recovery?

**Celia Cureton** is an active participant in the writing for recovery group and she is incorporating writing into her recovery toolbox. She enjoys spending time with her family and friends.

**Derrick** has lived in Ashland County all of his life. He is a participant of Pathways Peer Support and helps run the sewing group. He is working on his recovery every day.

**Kathleen** was repeatedly molested by her best friend's family when she was six-years-old. She was afraid to tell anyone about it so she made herself forget that it had happened. In 1990, she started seeing a therapist for depression and the truth of what happened was remembered. She has spent many hours in therapy remembering what happened, learning how to cope with the pain, and now she's learning to let go of being a victim and thriving instead. She's learning to love herself. Childhood sexual abuse is crushing but it doesn't have to run your life every day for the rest of your life.

**par** is a person that lives on the other side of the tracks in an older city in a small house.

**Rebecca** was born and raised in Ashland. She still lives in the area with her dog, Tigger. Rebecca has been a part of the planning committee for Pathways Peer-to-Peer Support, and helps to teach classes to promote empowerment and recovery. Also, Rebecca has earned her Peer Supporter Certificate, which she hopes to use to further her education and work more within the community. She enjoys reading, music, writing, needlecrafts, and spending time with friends.

**Rose** had her first lapse at seventeen, which was followed by a very hard road toward recovery. She has been very happily married for one-and-a-half years. While it has taken a lot to get where she is, things are much better. She has balanced family, friends, medicine, coping skills (like writing), and her spirituality. Every day in her journey is not easy, but she takes it one step at a time.

**Stacey** was born and raised in Ashland. She graduated from Ashland High School in 1990. Afterwards, she attended Indiana University; however, she earned her Social Work degree from the University of Akron in 1994. Stacey is a licensed social worker. She has worked in various skilled nursing facilities, hospices of Morrow and Ashland Counties, and the local hospital as a medical social worker. Stacey has lived experience in trauma, uses her writings in recovery and for advocacy, and encourages others to tell their stories.

**Susan** is 59. She was born, raised and lives in Ashland. Susan has dealt with significant life challenges her entire life. She is also a recovering alcoholic. Susan has had numerous careers over the years. In 1994, she earned an Associate degree in Computer Science. Susan continued her education and, in 1999, she received a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration.

**Ben Wellington** "You see, it doesn't really matter who I am specifically. I could be your dentist, your landlord, your mechanic....I could be anyone you know

writing this stuff. I am invisible on the outside, being anyone you know. And yet I write.....about an experience many are afraid of, becoming the labeled person some are even terrified of. And yet I fix your teeth, your brakes....I could watch your child at the daycare.....I could save your life someday as you drown. And yet I write.....about something that you might think unspeakable. That is my bio.... the bio of every person you may ever meet.”

**“Writing for Recovery” Writing Group** is structured to and aims to help individuals use writing as a constructive outlet for expressing thoughts and feelings, for promoting recovery. An atmosphere of respect, trust, and confidentiality is maintained. Participants reveal a willingness to listen, learn, engage in a collaborative group process, and write creatively.

## APPENDIX II

### RECOMMENDED RESOURCES- WRITING FOR RECOVERY

The listed resources will be of interest to individuals who want to learn about writing as a therapeutic tool for recovery as well as to explore the process and benefits of written expressions. Examples of works of written art by individuals in recovery are sprinkled throughout these recommended readings. Resources that may be primarily of interest to professionals and to those who wish to develop therapeutic writing groups or design writing workshops are provided on the website for the MHRB ([www.ashlandmhrb.org](http://www.ashlandmhrb.org)).

Bolton, G. (2011). *Write Yourself: Creative Writing and Personal Development*. London and Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Bolton, G. (2014). *The Writer's Key: Introducing Creative Solutions for Life*. London and Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

DeSalvo, L. (1999). *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Marinella, S. (2017). *The Story You Need to Tell: Writing to Heal From Trauma, Illness, or Loss*. Norvato, CA: New World Library.

McAdoo, P. (2013). *Writing for Wellbeing*. Dublin: Currach Press.

Mental Health and Recovery Board of Ashland County. (2019). *Leaving a Legacy: Exercises to Guide You Through the Creative Writing Process*. Ashland, Ohio: Mental Health and Recovery Board of Ashland County.

Pennebaker, J.W. (2013). *Writing to Heal: A Guided Journal for Recovering from Trauma & Emotional Upheaval*. Wheat Ridge, CO: Center for Journal Therapy, Inc. (2004 edition was published by New Harbinger Publications).

Pennebaker, J.W., & Evans, J.F. (2014). *Expressive Writing: Words that Heal*. Enumclaw, WA: Idyll Harbor, Inc.

Pennebaker, J.W., & Smyth, J.M. (2016). *Opening Up by Writing it Down: How Expressive Writing Improves Health and Eases Emotional Pain (Third Edition)*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.



Ridgway, P., McDiarmid, D., Davidson, L. et al. (2002). *Pathways to Recovery: A Strengths Recovery Self-Help Workbook*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas School of Social Welfare.

Schaefer, E.M. (2008). *Writing Through the Darkness: Easing Your Depression with Paper and Pen*. Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts, an imprint of Ten Speed Press.

RELEASE



***TAPESTRY OF OUR LIVES*** is a powerful and creative collection of written works and striking illustrations by individuals in recovery. The interwoven tapestry, revealed in the cover art, reflects a beautiful merging of individuals' expressed thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. The threads represent connections forged when writers share their stories and express what they have learned from lived experiences. Readers become part of the tapestry - as writings challenge them to think, to empathize, and to fully realize the power of the pen. The recovery journey is nonlinear, can be one of light and beauty as well as darkness and pain. Written works, included in this anthology, provide a realistic picture of what the recovery journey entails. However, the overall message is one of hope, underscoring the fact that recovery is possible and within reach.



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Liz 2019