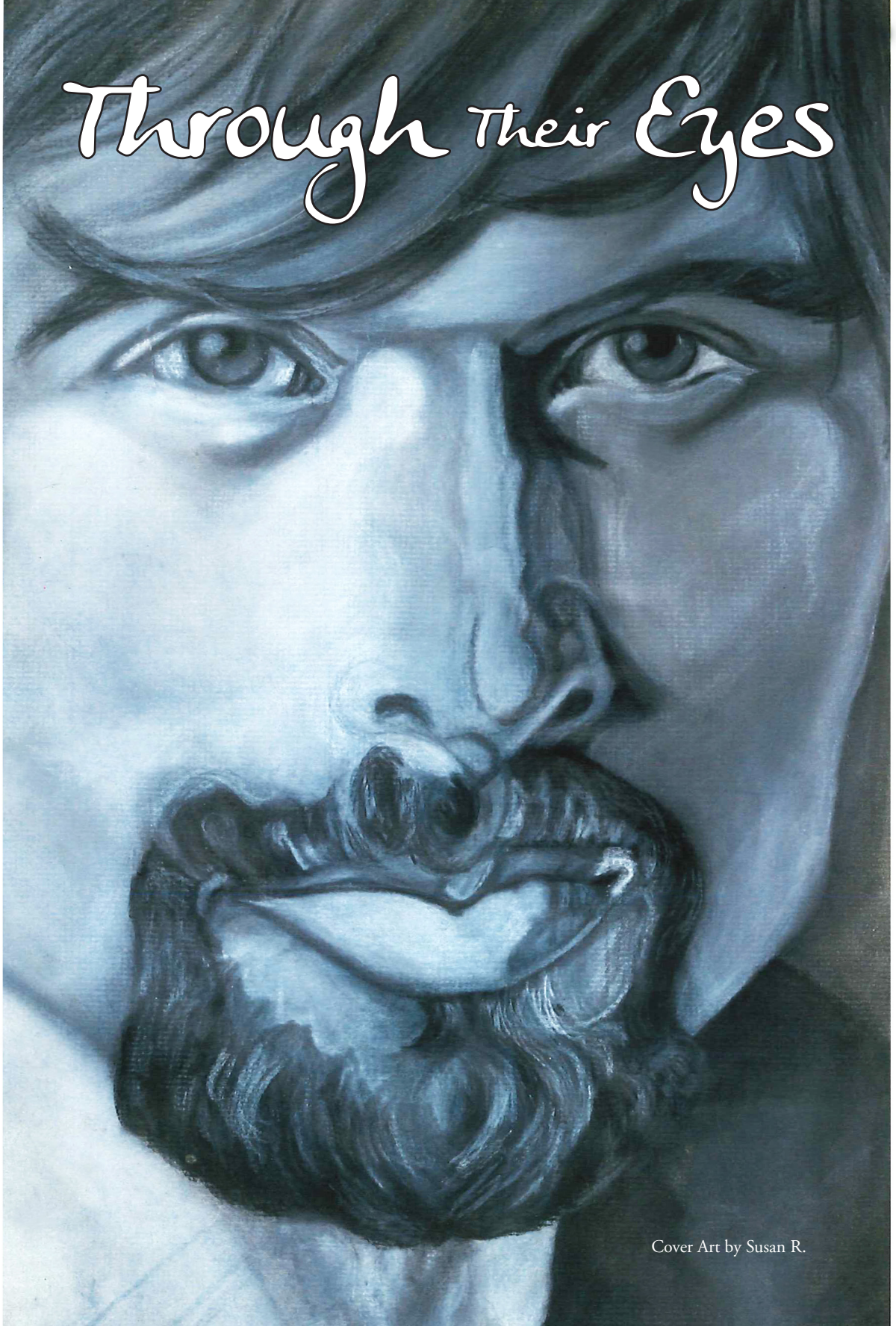
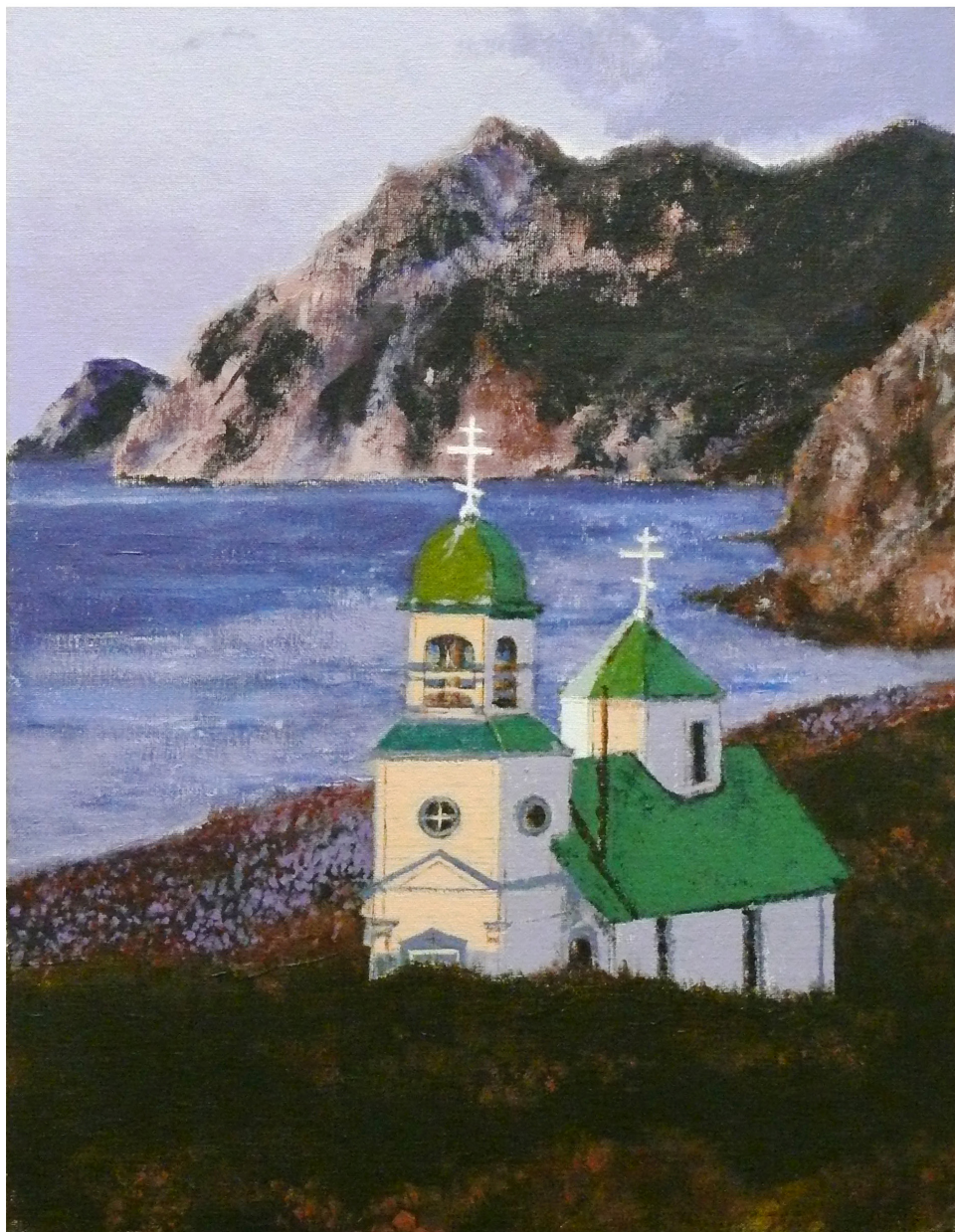


Through Their Eyes



Cover Art by Susan R.



acrylic on canvas, Evelyn R.

Introduction

As I contemplated ways to celebrate Mercy Haven's 30th year I was visited over and over again by the idea of having the residents write their own book. Could we ever create one that could contain some of their own hopes and dreams, fears and accomplishments? One that would show how much we have in common? One that could bring the reader a step closer to understanding what it is like to live with mental illness or with poverty?

Some residents received a letter from me inviting them to freely participate in a program with myself and staff member, Margo Bosch . I described the time as one that, through reflection and time for writing and art, would give us the opportunity to have others understand some of their hopes and dreams. I brought to them the booklet I wrote for the 25th Anniversary of Mercy Haven and spoke about how deeply I yearned for others to have the opportunity to know them and love them as I do. That simple invitation gave birth to this booklet. I'm very grateful to the 50 residents that were able to participate at this time. I learned so much from their generosity of time, of heart, of truthfulness and humor. You'll find in their work an invitation to visit some of the hidden parts in your own heart, as I did and to see life *Through Their Eyes*.

Some met for 8 hours and continued their writing at home. Others simply wrote from home. We did very little editing of their written work. The words they used were chosen purposefully. Most of the artwork belongs to many of the authors of this publication and some from other residents' past art classes and correspondences with me. I'm sure you'll enjoy these as well.

I really don't want to get in the way of what they have accomplished, hence, this brief introduction. Nothing would make me happier than to know that through their generosity a little more of the misunderstanding and stigma about living with mental illness has now been chipped away by their words.

*"Could a greater miracle take place than for us to
look through each other's eyes for an instant?"*

- Henry David Thoreau

I expect no less than this miracle myself, the kind Henry Thoreau referred to in this quote.

Sister Pat

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Robert G. ♦ Sanaiha G. ♦ Shania H. ♦ Sheila F. ♦ Stephen L. ♦ Susan R.
Tom E. ♦ Tom K. ♦ Thomas P. ♦ William C. ♦ William D. ♦ Yvette R.



Look Up From Your Life, paper collage, Karen K.

My Home

**home is not a place
it's a feeling**



When I was first accepted into Mercy Haven, I did not expect to last. Like everything in my life, everything that seemed too good, it somehow ended; either by my actions (I sabotaged myself) or the actions of others.

I knew I had a nice apartment, but I did not allow myself to enjoy it. It was a place to sleep, to be. At first I just treated it like a place to go at the end of the day and leave again early in the morning. It took me awhile to decide that it was a home.

I remember exactly the feeling but not what it was, but I remember buying something and that feeling of accomplishment when you do something nice. But then I remember thinking that in six months it will be old and the feeling will be gone. So in that moment, I had a breakthrough. I decided to buy everything (yes everything) at the same time - so everything will be the same age at the same time. So my apartment will be the way that I wanted it to be, not the way it was.

It became a goal, room by room, every wall, every inch of my apartment became a reflection of myself. Things will be there because I wanted them there. And in the process (it took me almost 5 years) I turned it from a dwelling to a home.

A place where I could feel completely at peace and the sense of accomplishment that I felt that first time (I still don't remember what I bought) will last forever. It might seem a material goal but it was an accomplishment that I'm proud of. I finally have a home.

JSR

I Could Have Been a Contender

I want people to know that I could have been a contender. I could have been somebody. My mental illness is always waiting for me. It still scares me. Lucky for me, I came from a good family. They were like the marines, always faithful.

I am changing now. I look at myself and I see an old man not young. I really don't want to share too much of me with others. I've had my share of second chances, I believe in them. The mores in the world should share with the lesser. I wish for more cooperation among everyone.

My dream is to get to Heaven with my Jeannie.

MM



Peace, acrylic on canvas, Christine S.

I Choose ...

*To live by choice
Not by chance.*

*To make changes
Not excuses.*

*To be motivated
Not manipulated.*

*To be useful
Not used.*

*To excel
Not compete.*

*To have self-esteem
Not self-pity.*

*To listen to my inner voice
Not the random opinions of others....*

My life is on the right path even with my mental illness. I can think, speak, care and be kind. Don't label me. I hope to share the message that people with mental illness are still human.

MB



God's Light, acrylic on canvas, Marlena B.

A Chance

It wasn't that long ago my life was filled with sorrow.
Confusion, doubt and fear filled my every tomorrow.

I became angry and rough around the edges; some people told me they were afraid of me!

That always hurt because I wouldn't hurt a fly.
You have to adapt to your surroundings so people let you be.
Life hurt so much no matter how hard I tried.

There were times when I could not see ahead,
So close to not having my own bed.

I was labeled just sick and crazy,
Out of my mind and lazy.

Every day asking God *"Are you serious? What am I supposed to be doing here?"*
Convinced He made a mistake, I carried my days out in fear.

It wasn't that long ago, I almost didn't have a bed.
Confusion, fear and doubt were seated in my head.

I was angry and nurtured a hard exterior so no one bothered me.
I needed to act tough, but on the inside, it was just that I was not free.

My whole life, people just called me crazy and out of my mind.
I was treated like a low life. People were very unkind.

One day I got a call,
one that changed it all.

To my surprise, they said I could live and sleep here. My heart jumped like never before.
It was such a blessing to open "my own door."

I was in shock that now I could LIVE
Thanks to Mercy Haven and all they could give.

Suddenly my mind was clear
My heart held no fear...

My soul felt like I was a person again.
I found out what it was like to make true friends.

I am able to go to doctors who treated me right,
And with all this, I saw a little light....

(Eleven years later, I still have so much joy and gratitude for what Mercy Haven
has given me, this chance to live a life without chaos. I really don't know what
would have become of me had I not gotten that call when I did.)

KL

The Opening

First, I'd like to say being in the moment (now),
I would like to give all the glory to God for me being alive
and here at Mercy Haven today (thank you).

My life has, or is, truly an experience worth expressing.

There has been experiences of darkness and light that
could only be given to me by God to teach me that
“Life when it's looked upon as good is a gift,
as a man or woman thinkest it is who you become.”

So how I think and feel and see life today is my destiny.
My future is determined on the lessons life teaches today.

EG



Found: Now Free and Joyful

Since coming to Mercy Haven, having been turned down by two agencies and feeling broken, I began to live and have a sense of freedom. I am able to live beyond my wildest dreams of making my life matter and count. I choose to share my testimony and how I live with mental illness. My mental illness does not define me, but I can't tell you that I am ill because of fear that you may judge me. I wear a mask to hide the story behind my past.

Coming into Mercy Haven, my life has changed for the best. With a safe place to call home, I have been able to return to school and obtain my GED. I am Chairperson of Mercy's Angels which is a group of my peers who also live in Mercy Haven and have been blessed by Mercy Haven as I have. We pay it forward by giving back. We have started a food pantry, a welcoming committee and we have a REAP calendar full of great activities for the residents to take part in and enjoy.

Mercy Haven also has a Breakthrough Program that provides mentors. My wonderful mentor was such a delight to work with. I was so happy and relieved to be paired with someone on Mercy Haven's staff that understood me and the way I felt. Before I entered Breakthrough I was angry, bitter and unwilling to forgive. Little did I know that God and my mentor had other plans. He worked with me and helped me tear down the wall that was on my heart. Now I am willing and able to forgive, not forget, but not hold onto my troubles. "You are not forgiving the person for his sake, you are forgiving the person so you can heal and be at peace."

I am also a part of Mercy Haven's Supported Employment Program. Mercy Haven was able to expand this program to give us the tools to return to the workforce: how to fill out job applications, put together a resume and learn the do's and don'ts when you go on a job interview. Through the Supported Employment Program, I have landed an internship at Phoenix House as an overnight monitor. I am continuing my education in the Supported Employment Program, learning the computer and how to type. I am learning Word and Excel which will help me secure a job at the end of my internship.

My hopes and dreams are to be a part of Mercy Haven to help set up a program and help with resources and referrals. There are a lot of things people just don't know when it comes to seeking help. I self-educate daily on what resources and what referrals are out there to help people with disabilities and just people in general. Everyone needs a little help and they don't know who to ask. Well, I want to tell everyone where to look.

Happy 30th Anniversary to Mercy Haven! I am found, I am free from the darkness, the loneliness, I am safe in Mercy Haven's community. God saved me, I am no longer lost! I am just happy, joyful and free! Mercy Haven is a melting pot for all the people who thought they did not fit; we fit right here at Mercy Haven, our own little community.

MB



acrylic on canvas, Marlena B.

To Love the Unlovable

I feel my daughter Alex may be more compassionate because of my illness.

She can see that I am just a person with a bipolar illness. I am an artist. I

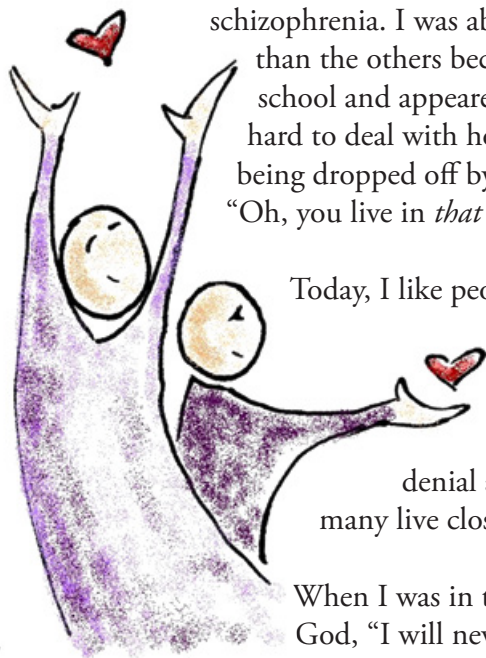
am very sensitive. She loved our roommate Irene as a person with

schizophrenia. I was able to know the neighbors a little more

than the others because I had a child who did very well in school and appeared to be very normal. The prejudice was

hard to deal with however. I remember my daughter, after being dropped off by her coach, telling me that he said,

“Oh, you live in *that* house?”



Today, I like people from all walks of life. Alex does

too. She liked a boy with bipolar

illness. He did kill himself however

and this upset her a lot. At the

funeral, his family was filled with

denial and unacceptance of his illness. You see

many live closeted with their mental illness.

When I was in the hospital due to depression, I said to

God, “I will never go through this again – it’s too hard,

I’d rather be dead.” God said back, “There’s a reason

this is happening. You can help others with the same problem...those around you need your love.”

So I am needed, I am loving. It changed my life! I have been in 3 serious

accidents, had appendicitis and ovarian cancer also. God has given me 5

second chances! I believe God has given me all these chances because He

knows how much compassion I have and He uses me often in loving the

“unlovable.” I pray for all people I know, to love the unlovable.

ER

Good does come from bad.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Reflections

I'm so happy to have my roommate Christine in my life. She is my best friend. We do everything together. We are always there for each other through thick and thin. She's a great person; she always has a shoulder to cry on if needed. I don't know what I would do without her. She's very special and caring in so many different ways. Thank you Chris for our beautiful friendship.



"Love, Care, Trust", acrylic on canvas, Melissa C.

My dreams are to go back to school and become a nurse's aide. I would love to work with the elderly and go back to driving. When I fulfill my dreams, it will make me feel so good about myself.

I've had some bad experiences in the ER when I was having mental health issues. They were not compassionate. I was left alone on a bed in the corner of the ER. Hours would go by and nobody would stop by to see if I needed anything or ask how I was feeling.

There were times I would call out to the nurse and they would walk right by me. I think ER doctors and nurses should be educated about mental illness and not treat us as if we are inferior. They always say if you are having a crisis, go to the nearest ER, but if you get treated like you did something wrong, how can you go and get help? Police need to be trained and educated as well on mental illness. When they take people to psychiatric hospitals, they shouldn't be handcuffed. It makes you feel like you committed a crime. I wouldn't mind educating the doctors, nurses and police myself.

I wish the world could stamp out the stigma of mental illness. We are all human beings with feelings. My hope is that people will stop putting down people with mental illness; that we get treated the same way people with other illnesses get treated.

I've learned that my illness does not make me weak and that I can do anything possible.

MC

A More Fulfilled Life

I see myself lonely lost and depressed at times. I sometimes have to force myself to do daily tasks. I always doubt the things I say and do. Sometimes I just feel lost.

I remember as a child my family being so close together. I am so proud of my son, living on his own and fighting physical disabilities. I am proud of my daughter for holding down a job and going to school for social work. She has a boyfriend now, too. My children were Mercy Haven's first family!



Flowers, acrylic on canvas, Linda F.

Due to my illness, the State will not let me drive, and I have to be careful of certain places and things that will bring on seizures. Being in Mercy Haven and talking to the other residents helps me realize they have the same fears I do. I enjoy being on Mercy Angel's food pantry committee. I also enjoy doing more activities and meeting people. Ceramics is relaxing and like therapy. It lets me think. I have learned a lot being employed by MH to do mailings for the past 14 years. I am in a volunteer program learning clerical skills. I enjoy being with a friend of mine

every Saturday. I lived with her in Mercy Haven and then she moved out. We still get together.

My hopes and dreams are to stay with Mercy Haven. I have been with Mercy Haven 24 years. I am grateful because I don't know where my daughter and I would be living.

LF

A Dance: One Step at a Time

The gift I have received of living a day at a time is so spiritual for me. I understand/believe that in my journey, fear is the absence of God. Anxiety is the absence of faith. Prayer and songs of praise increase my contentment, my peace of mind. I have learned to put abuse square on the shoulders of the abusers. I have also recognized how discombobulated things are for me because of childhood abuse and being a child of an alcoholic.

My shame in exploring different sides of the coin is hard for me. It is my struggle. I know my home was violent when I was a little girl. I also know the love of both my parents. The laughter was real. The hugs were tight. The compliments were sincere. You cannot blame a person for doing their best at any given time because your best changes when you are sick, when you are tired.

I learned through counseling that I cannot take peoples' criticisms personally. I learned that love comes from an unconditional space, that love is discipline and abuse comes from adult children who have zero insight into self-respect, wellness or in using the best part of yourself to benefit your children.

I have a deep appreciation for faith because Jesus never leaves me. He tells me it is finished, you are forgiven. The remembrance that I am made in the image and likeness of God strengthens my trust. The attitude of gratitude increases the positivity, the respect I have for God. Lord, you know my heart, remember me. Lord, you know my soul, help me. Lord, give me wisdom.

My greatest hope for the future is reconciliation with my children and an end to a pattern of abandonment, abuse and addiction that occupied my siblings, parents and my children. I can handle life one day at a time, I can excel. I am unafraid to voice my self-assertion. I am unafraid because I can overcome anything the Lord puts before me.

Thank you Mercy Haven. It feels lovely to dance and dance and dance...Lord, one step at a time, one step closer to healing from a phobia, not a disorder not a syndrome...just me. I can work it; I can work right through it.

I'm grateful for today. I'm grateful for company. I'm grateful for trust in the process of life to lift me to my highest good. I'm a work in progress who is living in this moment.

KK

Happiness = Mercy Haven

When you have a second chance, you have to reach out and grab it. Mercy Haven gave me a second chance and I grabbed it.

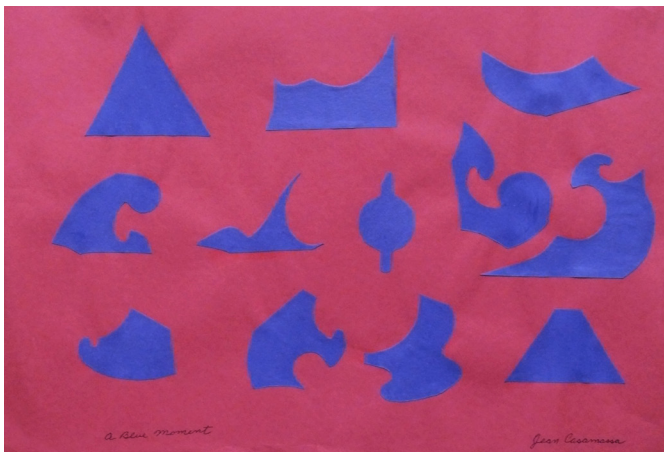
I was once homeless and lived at Crisis Residence on the grounds of Pilgrim State Hospital. Mercy Haven gave me an interview and accepted me. My world changed for the better. I've learned my illness is treatable. Mercy Haven understood my problem in receiving housing. I started in the Community Residence and then moved to the apartment program. Now I have a wonderful and complete life in couples housing and spend it with the man I love, Michael, for the rest of my life!

I want people to know how happy I am to be in Mercy Haven. I hope that Mercy Haven will be around another 30 years because they have helped a lot of people. I hope they continue to have great programs, such as cooking class and book club and continue to hire great dedicated staff.

I hope Sister Pat and Sister Kathy never retire. I hope that when I am too old to be in supported housing, I will be able to go and live at Pleasant Gardens.

I see myself 20 years from now still with Mercy Haven, God willing. I am the happiest I've ever been and I will be happy in the future. Being with Mercy Haven gave me dignity and pride. I have no dreams because I have everything I have ever wanted. My dream has come true. My dream is Mercy Haven!

JC



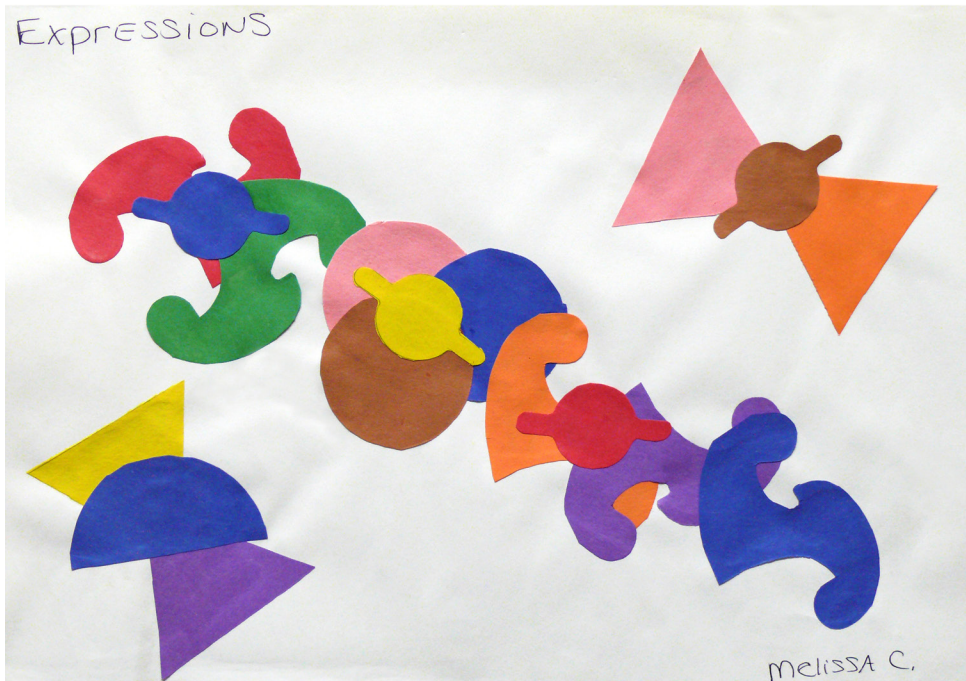
A Blue Moment, paper collage, Jean C.

Caring Assistance

When I needed a place to live after 19 years of abuse from my 2nd husband, Mercy Haven helped me and put me in a condo with 2 other roommates in Medford. Then Mercy Haven found me couples housing where I am now.

I've been living in Port Jeff Station with my fiancé Eric very happily for about 6 years. Mercy Haven gave us a wonderful roof over both of our heads. We live near the pool, the clubhouse and the gym. The Superintendent lives across the way, so we feel safe! Mercy Haven has given us happiness, safety and made us richer just by being part of Mercy Haven. We don't pay an electric bill because Mercy Haven has taken over paying our electric bill, so it's 1 less bill we have to pay and more money in our pockets. I can't thank Mercy Haven enough for everything they have given me! The 2 bedroom apartment was fully furnished. I have lost so much in my life, but Mercy Haven makes me feel like I gain so much!

MAS



Expressions, paper collage, Melissa C.

A Wonderful Breakthrough

My main objective today is to be of service to others. I truly believe that if everyone does one nice thing for another person every day, eventually, there will be clarity with a renewed spirit in each and every one of us.

As I reflect on my hopes and dreams past and present, I realize they don't differ much in the fact that they were and are to be served with good intention. As I approach 60 years of age, I find that I'm asking myself multiple questions. The answers that I receive from myself today differ from what I expected when I was arrested by the disease of alcoholism. It is at this time that I'm considering what direction I want to go in.

From the time I was 13 and having lost my father to cirrhosis of the liver, and being the oldest of my mother's three children, I became a precocious teen. Aiding and protecting my family's needs and tending to my own responsibilities provided me with self-confidence and purpose. Although, those days were bittersweet, bitter in the sense that some of my youth's activities were deprived and sweet in the sense that I received respect and admiration from family outside my own, and anyone who acknowledged my contribution. At this period in my life, I felt my hopes and dreams began to radiate.

It didn't take long for all that I had earned to dissipate. What I didn't see coming was alcohol standing at the threshold of my young adult life. Once I opened the door, I was taken in. This life of hell lasted 41 years. During this journey, I lost all hope, my dreams were no longer welcome. I had never lost faith in God, only me. I experienced the infinite depths of disparity and hopelessness and the feeling of rejection from family and friends. As I tried to find a way out with little hope and prayer, I became trapped in a world I thought no one could understand.

Today, hopes and dreams are mine to fulfill. After having a homeless situation from 9/2008-2/2009, and losing a possible career ending position in the company I worked for, something positive transpired. I put the drink down on January 3rd 2009. Hence, this gift of sobriety is not predicated on my own will, but, by God's will for me. I learned that my illness with alcohol could be arrested one day at a time, contingent on support groups, eliminating my denial and self-centeredness and by giving the gift that I received away to other suffering addicts. Second chances are a gift that doesn't occur to everyone. I can attest that I am truly blessed that I received my opportunity through the help from others and my increased faith in God and myself. For me, I must tell myself daily that there might not be a third chance.

Currently, I'm a mentor for Mercy Haven's Breakthrough Program, which has inspired me to work more with others in their pursuit of developmental skills. That has always been of interest to me. Now I'm not a participant, but a mentor for others. It's just the beginning of where I see myself. I've more capacity on which to work.

Thank you Mercy Haven, for extending your gracious gift to me. You have impacted my life beyond words. Today, I have a renewed spirit, one that has afforded me the ability and the opportunity to pursue new goals. I am more confident, more at peace with myself. Yet, I am still fighting with the guilt and shame of what I did to myself. Today I receive help, and someday, I will forgive myself and accept what I did to myself and others. Thank you Mercy Haven for not only providing me the essentials and common amenities of everyday living, but for believing in me and giving me a purpose to see a more positive outlook.

RG

"Dream as if you will live forever; live as if you will die today."

~ James Dean

In Search of Peace

I remember as a child riding my little red tricycle around the streets of Brooklyn. I was safe there. Most of my childhood was spent listening to violent fighting. Dad would beat mom up. Mom would say she walked into a door, when in actuality she was thrown down a flight of stairs. Every day was a drunk day, and the days he didn't drink were even worse.

This of course affected my school work. Mom showed me a drawer Dad had that was full of cash. I knew as drunk as dad was there was no way he knew how much was in that drawer, so I helped myself when he went into the bathroom to get ready for work. He had no idea I took \$100, and off to school I went.

With that money, drug people loved me. First it was marijuana, then it was Quaaludes, ups-downs-and the best – COCAINE. I started running delivery for an older guy, so I always had some. I was 15 and addicted to cocaine. Going to clubs, staying out till 4-5am. No one cared at home where I was. School went out the window. I was asked to leave in a very nice way. I was then placed in a “therapeutic community” for 1 year; that is where I obtained my GED.

After that, I still couldn't go home, just because I changed didn't mean the chaos at home did. So I went from place to place and job to job. This was also about the time I was diagnosed Bipolar and started taking meds. The meds kept me leveled so I took them and still do. At this time, a friend from work took me to church. On the night she called me, I was contemplating suicide because I had to leave where I was staying in 2 days and had nowhere to go. Anyway, at the end of the service, I was compelled to run up to the altar and really didn't know what happened but all the burdens and suicidal feelings were truly lifted. A little old lady asked me if I just received Jesus. I replied “I don't know man but this feels good”. So I left there knowing there was a God. But I still had no place to live. Two days later, my grandmother called my mother and said I needed to come live with her in Florida. I sold my car, bought a ticket and I was gone.

I was hospitalized once while in Florida, because I just couldn't find that “feeling” I felt in that church that night. I was searching for the “feeling” and not God. I know that now. I spent several years running around even after all that I knew, on/off meds. Returning to Long Island, it all crashed in on me when I was being evicted again and really had no place to go. It's a lot harder as an adult to crash on friends' couches.

My therapist had been coming to my home and watching me deteriorate. I was drifting further and further away. I stopped eating and the holidays were coming up. She had me on suicide watch – sent people to come to my apartment and check on me.

Then one day, I got a phone call that changed my life. The woman at the other end said “You have been approved for our housing program,” and for the first time in a long time, I smiled and replied, “Thank you – you made my Christmas!” That was 11 years ago – my life has never been the same.

Having not to worry where I’m going to lay my head at night, learning how to cohabitate with others, making true friends, becoming stable mentally, and taking meds because now I’m not running around, I am not scared of life anymore. I used to be filled with confusion, fear and doubt. Now, I pray every day and actually have peace. As a result of living at Mercy Haven, my mind is not being tortured. My heart is no longer filled with anger. I always had to put on a tough exterior to ensure I stayed safe. I actually scared a lot of people, but truly I would never hurt a fly, unless he was on my nose!

KL



At Peace, paper collage and watercolor, Sister Pat

Mercy and Serenity



paper collage, JoJo D.

I remember as a young boy dreaming of growing up and becoming a policeman, a fireman, a postman, astronaut or doctor. I never once dreamed of becoming an alcoholic or drug addict. I never dreamed of being a chronic depressive with a penchant for suicide. I started out normal and somewhere along the way, I got broken. It's not my fault. Today, I'm

different. I look at things differently, I'm not as angry. At 58, I still have some aspirations, but mostly, I want to be known as a decent man; friendly, generous, honest and trustworthy. I'm happy to say I'm on my way.

When I turned 50, I became homeless. I was 5 years without a drink and yet not sober. My family didn't want me anymore, nor I them. My wife divorced me when I was 41 and I was supposed to see my children every other weekend. I was so angry then and would fight at the drop of a hat. The saddest part was I had a life of much fortune. I had money, women, a new home, good jobs, children, lots of travel, etc. How did I become broke and homeless, not caring if I lived or died?

I ended up in a rehab, not because I was drinking but because I had sunk into morbid depression for months. The idea being I would be under psych care for at least 30 days. Through the brilliance of others, I ended up in CK Post where I started a regimen of medicines.

After 35 days, I went to a halfway house with an outpatient program. It was a 6 month program that I would spend 20 months in. God has always loved me, even in my most hideous of times. Eventually a counselor there got me a housing application and I was placed at Mercy Haven. I expected to move into a filthy rundown place with lots of problems, always thinking the worst. I moved into a brand new gorgeous apartment. Something I didn't deserve, and to this day still don't. If I deserved it, it wouldn't be mercy. I'm happy to say I go to sleep with nothing on my mind anymore. I know serenity and peace of mind. Why did it take so much of my life to get to this point?

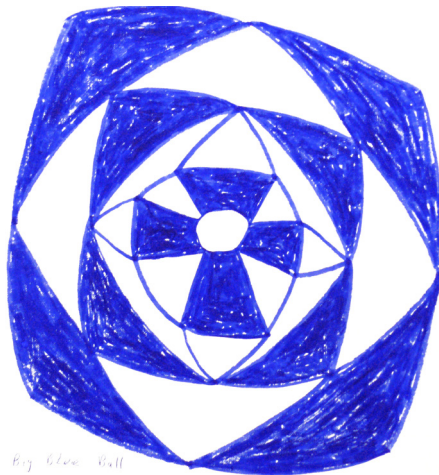
BD

*"Don't be afraid to speak. Be afraid what will happen
to the whole truth if you don't."*

Ode to Our Leader

Alluring yet unassuming
Quiet but assertive
Your gentle spirit
Pervades our group.
Guiding us through reams of poems
You keep our minds current.
You are very mysterious and sweet.
Our Thursday would not be complete
If we didn't meet
To discuss rhythm and rhyme
And pleasantly pass the time.
She drives by car, but not too far
To lift our spirits and renew our souls.
She brings us poets, both old and new.
We barely scratch the surface
Of the world's great literature
Not enough time to engage them all.
Words and phrases ending in rhyme
Captured on paper, frozen in time.
Surely a crime, we don't have enough time.
But somehow she will make it right
With endless happy hours spent in delight.

MM



Big Blue Ball, marker on paper, Mike M.

How Blessed

I wish people were a lot more kind to each other. I hope for no more mental illness stigma. All people with mental illness should be treated equally and get help to feel better. I have depression and schizophrenia. It's treatable and I will be fine as long as I take my medicine and say what I'm feeling. I want people to know that people with mental illness are not dangerous or crazy. When I was younger, I was bullied a whole lot at school and Boces for being different. I want others to understand that I am a nice, caring, good person who loves family, friends and animals. I really want people to understand my life.

When my best friend Mel and I met in the Babylon house, we became best friends. We would go places. Staff who worked there arranged for us to move into the same house. We had a housemate who was nice but moved. Debbie, my present housemate is really nice and sweet like Melissa. I am so glad to live with them both. I enjoy doing things with them. I love seeing my relatives whenever possible. They are all really nice and sweet. They have beautiful houses. I love to sleep over. The time goes by so fast and I don't want to leave at all.

When we moved to Holbrook, after living in Bay Shore and West Babylon, I was able to have a pet guinea pig. Staff took me to Petco two weeks after I moved in. I named her Peaches Precious Seymour. She was black, brown and white. I took good care of her. She passed away when she was a little over five years old. Scooter Snoopy was my second baby and he's only a year old. I love him too.

My life has changed by being part of Mercy Haven and their helping me to be more independent. I was given my own housing with two other great girls. I see myself now doing better mentally and not thinking bad thoughts all the time. I plan to continue to take my meds, talk to someone if something bothers me and to stay focused. There were times in the past I would stop taking my medicine and went into the hospital. When I was in two State hospitals, one in New York and one in St. Louis, I felt lonely. It's a terrible feeling. The challenge for me is to keep focused.

My dreams are that I lose weight and finally get a new kidney. I would love to volunteer at an animal shelter. I would like to get a part-time job also as a cashier or in a pet store. My hope for Mercy Haven is that they have more activities at night and that my roommate Melissa works for Mercy Haven again. She is very good and I am proud of her. I hope to never lose my roommates.

CS

*“To live life well, two qualities are necessary:
Compassion for the other and Spirit in the self.”*



My Slice of Life, oil pastel on paper, Robert G.

Don't You See Our Hearts?

I never asked to be born with this illness
The way people stare, it kind of kills us

I am a person with a heart, soul and mind
I am aware of what some people say, so unkind

We are the ones who cry inside
Who learn quickly that we need to hide

People act different around us
They change conversations and make a fuss

We are the ones who try to explain
That we really do have a brain

And we can hear you...
All the comments about what we can't do

It hurts us when you say things
Don't you ever see the beauty and joy we bring?

I'm not sure if people understand that we didn't ask to be born like this
Most of us are full of love and would love a kiss

We don't know why you think we are scary or not able
There's always that feeling at the kitchen table

We don't want to be misunderstood
If we could show you our heart we would

Finding and accepting ourselves is hard enough
Without trying to make you love us...

KL

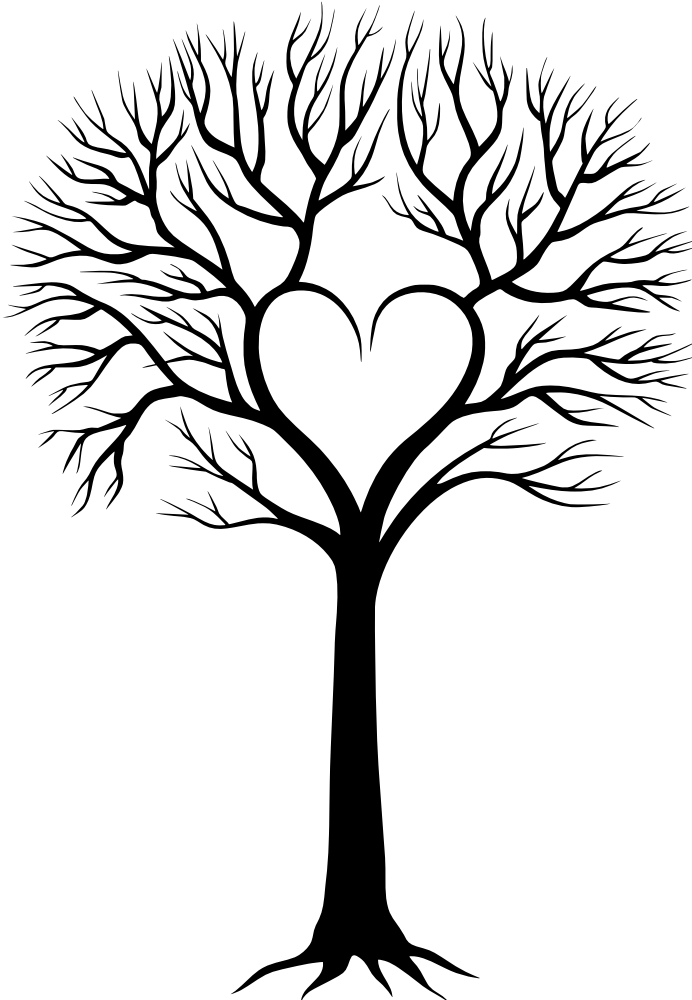
A Chance to Grow

The people from Mercy Haven gave me and my family the opportunity to live in descent housing with no bias and racism. It has allowed us the opportunity to settle down permanently and enjoy each other more. Each of us is free to grow.

There are people who don't and won't mean you well. Keep doing the right things. God gives me balance to override what cannot be seen by the human eye, an awareness of the creator which can keep you safe on all levels.

I hope Mercy Haven continues to give people a place to live and a chance to grow.

AG



“A Mother’s Love”

for my baby girl, Quiya Elizabeth

I never thought in a million years that my mother and I would have in common the deaths of our first born children. For my mother, it’s her son, my brother, your uncle, Tyrone. For me, it’s her granddaughter, my child, my first born, you.

Through our losses, an unbreakable, unshakeable, unstoppable mother daughter bond has formed. Now I choose to live to honor you and me. I have been surrounded with family, friends and siblings from near and far; they cover me like the wind.

Though there is no understanding, I have been given peace. The love I receive from my mother and the mother figures I have in my life, I owe to you. Through your passing, I have grown to find love for all. I hold you near and dear in my heart. I would give anything to hold you one more time and tell you I love you so you can look into my eyes and see your mother’s love.

I know you are up in heaven smiling down on me saying, ‘I love you mother.’

MB



A Mother’s Love, acrylic on canvas, Marlena B.

Dreaming

First, all nations should become one. No one is better than the other. Nuclear arms should be destroyed, not negotiated. No child should ever be hungry or sick. This would happen if all the world leaders came together to bring health and peace and love. It sounds funny saying 'love' with all the guns and violence happening right here. Get your head out of the clouds and bring it down to the real people. Work with us not against us. I know you have a lot to do. Rich people can keep all their luxuries and what's left over they should give to the poor. I know that some will say I am dreaming.

KL



Indian Rainbow, oil pastel on cardboard, Bob D.

My Life Has Purpose

For life to be life, I must do at least one thing a day for my soul, my heart, my mind. My self is the only thing of value that I really have to give away. My life has a purpose. I no longer feel that the world owes me a life. My outlook on life is what I can do to help others. I found that recovery from alcoholism and mental illness is the light I always wanted. My hope is to continue giving away what was freely given to me in A.A. My dreams are for happiness in my home and having my many wonderful friends and more. Recovery is a freedom that I cherish. In keeping my home, I'm living the dream of having a home. Thank God for Mercy Haven.

Each day no matter how I feel, I thank God. I spend some amount of time reflecting on what currently is going on in my life. At 7:00 am, I have one of my sponsees calling me to let me know what is going on in her life. Some days are happy and some I have to give more positive feedback before we say goodbye for the day. After I start my daily events, I paint when I have time, then attend my meeting.



Shadows are Now the Colors of My Life, paper collage, Madeline R.

Before moving into Mercy Haven, I lived with my mother for five years. I loved my mother. She was in a wheelchair and had a live-in aide. My challenges were mostly from my sister and we bumped heads more than I could handle. My anxiety was so high, I had to look for a different living situation. Terry was instrumental in getting me the information on housing. The day finally came when I was accepted. I knew the apartment was breathtaking. I wanted to live there the moment I saw it when I visited Terry. I still went every week to give my mother her shower and have the SCAT bus for doctor's appointments or shopping. On April 26, 2012, Terry passed away. To this day I will never forget the support of the staff. I had maybe one sponsee at that time, but I keep the support of my AA family. I had so much support from everywhere, I was amazed. For the first time, I really felt love for *me*.

I received many blessings from Mercy Haven and the advocacy of staff. I received my Medicaid and am in the buy-in program which continues to help me keep my Medicaid. I received a monthly check from the Medicare premium that Medicaid paid back to me. I hope the buy-in program continues for us. Having Medicaid is critical. I can only see dentists and vision care with Medicaid. Medicare only covers 80% of my basic medical care.

I survived two deaths of family and friends this year. I never lost hope and I never had to drink. I am genuinely grateful for the peace of mind I have in my home. I hope in the future I can eventually live alone and have a dog of my own.

MR



acrylic on canvas, Denise C.

Showing Up: No More Sabotaging

My life has always been a struggle from my early childhood to my teenage years to early adulthood. I always had more questions than answers. I kept looking for a role model that most of the time turned out to be the wrong one. After a long time of false role models, I decided to find the answers by myself and depend only on me.

Then another battle began. I was not ready or learned enough to find answers and sometimes I found myself following paths that took me nowhere. I did not have the tools to make positive changes. I keep falling into the same mistakes and failures. I began smoking, not taking care of myself – drugs and alcohol became the way out, the way to forget about my problems, the way to make them go away. All the time I knew that I was only making things worse, making me hate myself more and more because I knew deep inside me that it was only a temporary relief, not a solution, but I did not know what else to do.

After my second hospitalization, I was put in touch, through the services of the hospital, with a therapist. A condition of my release is that I keep showing up. Little by little it dawned on me that I did not need to go at it alone, that there were professionals who will help me find my way out of the despair that was dragging me along all of my life. It was not a realization that came to me from the beginning. There were days that I just showed up, just to get it over with, that I just went because I had to, not because I wanted to be there. But I kept showing up, hoping that I could find an answer, a cure to the questions of life with an illness.

One of the things that I learned was to take charge of my own recovery and I did that by telling my doctor the effects the medications had on me (some hurt my digestion, some made me too sleepy, some I did not like). Finally, we arrived on a medication that worked better than the others; that helped me think straight and not make me sick in the process.

By continuing to show up, even when I did not want to, by keeping a simple thing like showing up to my appointment, taking my meds and taking charge of my recovery, I saw hope. Hope that I (with help) could find what eluded me all my life, to have a semblance of a normal life and to have a life, if not without regrets, at least with regrets that I could live with. I have hope that one day, I can truly forgive myself and live without the same regrets of past failures.

I am not there yet but at least I don't sabotage myself anymore. I don't smoke anymore, I don't drink or take drugs and if I have a failure or a disappointment, like so often happens in life, I accept it and move on. Everybody deserves a second chance, and one day I will accept that this also applies to me. I see myself as a fighter who falls and falls but keeps getting up, because the fight is all I know. I might never be 100% whole, but I keep on trying and sometimes it gets easier. Sometimes I see the light at the end of the tunnel and there is hope.

My illness will always be with me, always be a part of me. Not a curse but a reminder of something I can take control of.

JSR



Three Monkeys in a Barrel, oil pastel on paper, James R.

Feeling Safe at 76

My life has changed being part of the Mercy Haven community. I've been part of Mercy Haven for approximately eleven years. I feel safe being in Pleasant Gardens. I hope to be able to live in Pleasant Gardens for the rest of my life. I am now 76 years old.

JT



Thinking, paper collage, Jean T.

Taking Care of Myself



*Helping Each Other, Working Together,
marker on paper, Janice S.*

Since becoming part of the Mercy Haven community, I seem to be emotionally or psychologically more normal because of the staff, residents and my own efforts. I'm good and I always try to help myself as best I can.

My hopes and dreams are to have good physical health always, keep up my appearance, keep up with my family in Westchester, continue with my chores, responsibilities, maintain new medicines, treat myself from time to time, and shop when I need to!

DC

Feeling Accomplished

When I first moved into CR705, I was nervous. I had to go to the hospital a couple of times, but staying here changed a few things in my life – like making me feel at home. They worked with me to remember my medication, and made me feel more comfortable. It made me feel proud of myself like I accomplished something. Also they are teaching me how to cook, making me feel like I can do something. They also teach me about my illness, making me smarter about myself. I appreciate all the support they've given me.

BC

Safe and Comfortable

It's not easy to describe the difference in quality of life. When you have a room in a boarding house or a sober house, you have to go to the shower with your wallet in your hair net. Leave anything by your bed and it's gone. It was such a pleasure to arrive at a Mercy Haven apartment. They're all beautiful places, anyone would be happy to live there.

Anonymous

Lamentations Up Close

I want people to understand that all my life I have been hurting, and today, I still hurt. I can always put a believable face up front, but I cannot fool myself. It continues to hurt more, and I am too scared to show it. My biggest wish is for someone to understand and to hear my heart crying, to reach out and stay by my side.

Growing up, I had no second chances. My parents kept me locked in fear. Fear that if I showed emotion, I would be locked away in a hospital. Fear that if I spoke up in objection, I would be beaten. Fear that if I left, they would die and it would be my fault.

Thanks to Mercy Haven, I finally feel that my life wasn't meant to be lived as a servant. I was given a second chance to grow, a second chance at life.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. You might find that one group of people are destined to follow at your side.

LI



acrylic on canvas, Mike P.

Dreams

My name is Richard and my aspiration is to be an owner of a franchise and/or small business. When I grow my business, I'll open up more businesses. This is what the American dream is all about isn't it?

My plan is to ask a woman if she's interested in being a part of my dream and I will eventually ask her to marry me if she has money. In the meantime all I ask is for room and board and to be at peace.

RS

"Challenge your most cherished assumptions."

*"Dare to dream, dare to try, dare to fail.
In doing so, you will succeed."*

~ G. Kingsley Ward

I think the world is in a good place. We have America, a free nation where citizens vote on a presidential candidate to represent them for four years. I think industries are magnificent in that these industries produce cars, microwaves, and anything else you can imagine. I feel elected officials are doing a good job. I think President Obama is trying to grow the middle class, though I don't think he's adding jobs. We seem to be in a decline with new jobs.

I took a big chance. I moved to a new city approximately 3,000 miles away. I took a full time job. I had to leave that full time job because it was too much. I found other work through education, and shorter work weeks. That works better for me. I'm moving on from the Community Residence program to supported housing real soon. I've a lot of anxiety and excitement about that.

SL

The Joy of Being, Doing and Giving

Crocheting blankets is a hobby of mine that I enjoy very much. I think Mercy Haven's residents should all get together and make a blanket, because Mercy Haven is not about just one person, it's about everyone.

JS

*"For life to be life, I must do at least one thing a day for my soul,
my heart, my mind. My self is the only thing of value
that I really have to give away."*

~ Joan Chittister, OSB



Janice S. with her work of art.

Looking Forward With Gratitude

As a person, I feel that now I have the resources to become the person I am meant to be. Slowly but surely I am becoming whole. The past is still there but I'm thinking about the future more. I am hoping to drive again. I am hoping to get more involved with Mercy Haven's programs. I would also like to find a part-time job. I am looking forward to the continuous changes taking place in my life.

Some of the challenges I have are the result of my mental illness; they call them psycho-mobile seizures. I haven't had any in several months since they gave me a shot. But I am afraid of them coming back. Since I have had them, my handwriting has changed drastically, and I am slower from the medicine. But I do have hope. My illness is common; it can be treated. A lot of people have it; I have to be responsible and take my meds and see the doctor at least once a month. Sometimes it's difficult because of all the medications. I yearn to have more energy and have a clearer mind. It is getting better; my environment is conducive to peace.

My hopes for Mercy Haven are that more and more people in the community become aware of what good is being done and partner with us. I pray for a renewal in all our spirits, a new energy. To realize how thankful we should be, even the staff, just for being able to work. I hope that all of Mercy Haven's staff has a blanket of peace so that they come together and continue to work well together.

There are no words I can say to thank Mercy Haven. There is no amount of money or anything monetary I could give – I am grateful every day. My life is stable now. I have peace in my life. I can laugh every day. My mind is being treated with great success. There is nothing I would not do for Mercy Haven.

Sister Pat, thank you so much for having this idea.

KL

Mercy and Forgiveness

In an Affirmation class, we were told to write an affirmation and we could personalize it to our lives. So the thought came to my mind - I realized that just as others need to be forgiven, I also need to be forgiven and how if we need to have mercy from others, we need to be forgiven as well. God be merciful to me and to each of us.

SF

"To extend mercy to others is to teach something about the nature of God."

Independence

Mercy Haven has given me an opportunity to be independent from the community residence in Bay Shore to an apartment on Manatuck Blvd in Bay Shore to now living in the community residence in West Babylon. I am currently packing my own medication and my primary counselor and I gathered the paperwork for an independent housing application. Sometimes I get scared, but I take a deep breath and count to twelve and then breathe out to calm myself down so I can be less afraid. If you don't speak, you will remain with fear or still be afraid.

I would like to congratulate Mercy Haven for thirty years of success.

AR

I am a very caring and giving person. I am very helpful and I always try. If you're stuck in life, ask for help.

WD

A childhood memory is of us having a good time playing around with the neighbors.

MP

"The purpose of life is to be about something greater than ourselves."

Time for Love

It's time for love, nuzzling my little babies with my face

A beautiful rose reflects the regality of a princess
The authenticity of the crown
Creates a warm wonderful smile on her face.

My babies, my babies
Love, the nectar of purity.

MEC



acrylic on canvas, Paul D.

Someday

She lived at the foot of the rainbow
In the “land of forever young”
Her dad said you’ll be a star someday
Her mother nodded to her yes

God I have never seen such beauty
In the land where I was born
What if the dream came true
What if the footlights were all for me?

She donned her dancing shoes and headed
For the boulevard of broken dreams

She took out her pen and she wrote down the script
Only kings and queens need apply.

If all you can do is dance
Then be the best dancer you can be
In the “land of forever free.”

KF

Work of Mercy: Freely Given with Love

When I was homeless, you gave me shelter. When I was hungry, you gave me food to eat. Naked, you clothed me and gave me Christmas presents. In short, you gave me back my dignity. I am now living alone in Bay Shore and hope to give back to Mercy Haven what was freely given to me. What more can I say at this time except thank you...

KF



PEACE - The Mercy Award, oil pastel on paper, Ed G.

Affirmative Action

For young children and maybe even for adults, gardening represents the potential for good in our world, amongst so much bad. It represents the hopes and dreams of people from all walks of life, all people. I hope this garden project was as fruitful and spiritual to others as it was to me. I finally found myself at peace around the gardens. My prayers of removing my nightmares of wars past and present were answered.

Thank you for allowing me to broaden my horizons to take upon the challenge regarding the Mercy Advocacy Program. I liked the opportunity to voice my opinion to Honorable Steve Israel's office regarding the plight of food stamp recipients under the proposed reductions in the Farm Bill. My opinion is a passionate one. I'm gravely concerned about the proposed SNAP cuts, for this concerns all lower class individuals who need food stamps to feed their families nutritious food. Starvation, homelessness and hunger are main concerns for all Americans. I've experienced hunger and homelessness first hand. I am grateful to God for providing Mercy Haven to me which assisted my homelessness as well as my need for nutritious food. Perhaps we all need to get more involved with passionate ideals and act on them, doing, participating; affirmative actions are what our God requires of us all. A do-er of the work will be happy and find contentment in his doing it.

TE



Tom, tending his garden in Mercy Haven's *Growing Together* Community Garden

Gratitude and Pride

There were so many obstacles in order to move into the apartment we now occupy and even when I lost my faith in coming out of the shelter, staff kept giving me the encouragement to keep having faith and don't lose hope because Mercy Haven will help to bring me out of homelessness. Since we are living in a more stable place, my son is happier and with the help of my fiancé, he has been on the honor roll for the past 3 school quarters.

MT

Thank You From a Child of God

I was reminiscing about my life before Mercy Haven. All of a sudden tears of joy overcame me. You have no idea where mental illness was taking me prior to getting the help I so desperately needed. You have given me a foundation to heal, stability to grow as a person and challenged me to be all that I can be. You have taken the time to nurture me by allowing me to be part of the Mercy Haven family. In my time here, I have healed and grown beyond my wildest dreams. You have given me my dignity and self-respect back by allowing me to share my journey with others. When days get tough as they sometimes do and you start to question whether you want to go to the next level, throw your hands up and say 'God let your will be done'.

I don't have an award to give you, or a check to put in your name, but I will say thank you for pursuing your vision and continuing to be an example of excellence. The award would say "Humanitarian All Year Long." The check would say "Unlimited Access." In other words, thanks for helping one of God's children who was suffering prior to meeting you.

DGJ

Blessed by Pain

In our expected inability to understand, we challenge Jesus. We will say ‘God, how could you have allowed this? God where are you? God why have you abandoned me?’ These are the questions I asked God when diagnosed with bipolar illness at age nineteen at the College of Mount Saint Vincent.



My Bright, Sunny Day, oil pastel and collage on paper, Augustine R.

In His humanity on the cross, Jesus still accepted God's plans. Nailed to a cross of wood, Jesus felt rejection. God understands pain. Suffering in God's world has a purpose. Imagine if it didn't. Where would all that pain go? When we live in the Divine Will, doing everything in our day with Jesus, He takes our precious suffering

and helps others come closer to Him. So in a sense, every time you suffer pain of any kind, God is blessing you. I'm really blessed, and so are you!

Thank you, you have blessed me with a new start, fellowship and love. I am able to feel and be a part of my community, make friends and be myself again, a better, stronger self.

BB

Grateful Parents

At the ages of 76 and 80, my husband and I thank God each and every day for Sister Pat and Mercy Haven. It was her vision to provide much needed housing for the mentally ill and the homeless. We know that when we are in Heaven, Barbara will have a safe place to live and that knowledge fills us with peace.

MB

Reflections...

I just wanted to thank you for the things you have done for me and my girls these past couple years. You have given me hope when I had none, shelter when I desperately needed it, guidance when I lost my way – Thank you –

ML

I just want to say I've been living here for 4 years and I love the staff. I am glad they are teaching me how to live with more than one person. We also go to outings like the Halloween party, Christmas party and St. Patrick's Day parade. I love to be home.

DM

I like Mercy Haven better than any other program. I am retired from the Entenmann's Corp. I lived at a community residence for a short stay. Now I am happy in Pleasant Gardens. My sister also lived with Mercy Haven. I'm happy here with my new friends and kind staff.

JB

I am with Pleasant Gardens 12 years now. I hope for the pleasant things. I want people to understand everything about me: how I feel - the good as well as the difficult.

LS

I am here almost nine years. My hope is to get a job part-time. I love working for Mercy Haven and doing all the mailings. Will you call me again soon?

TP

I never would have become as independent as I am, nor kept my job for 12 years without your help. I just wanted to thank you so much.

CM

Paying it Forward

I used to live on the street. Now, I'm always looking to help someone who's hurting, who's hungry, who's in pain. I reach out, try to give something to eat, to wear, a couple of dollars. I used to preach: you should do this or do that to them. Now, I just sit back and listen... I can feel their pain.

Anonymous

Respect

Respect is a word that could and should be used for Mercy Haven and MAP. The respect is that they will hear you out and give you a word to say on your behalf. I know from my experience with our attorney that he holds a great sense of integrity for his clients. His respect toward you is like no other. He is unassuming, a mentor and a spiritual, gifted man. Just by his looks and manner he shows you he is compassionate. He deals in justice for you and the people. The justice of the MAP program is supreme, and I can say that because all the cases I had with MAP, I have won. Please remember this – without a MAP, you'll be lost!!

LR

The Color of Love

The clouds have dissipated and the sky is a beautiful shade of aquamarine, portraying love, hope, faith and goodness. Angels speak the truth of beauty. The angel sees the beauty of the Lord. The rain made a rainbow of courage and fortitude. The love that permeates, brings out faith and leaves an aura of infinite blessings.

MC

Respect for the Mentally Ill

Through my work with Mercy Haven I have been made aware of the hardship people with mental illness face in a world of discrimination. My work also allowed me to gain respect for people with mental illness and gave me a level of understanding and empathy that I may not have had, had I not been in this field of work.

MG

From the Mouths of Tweens

My experience at Pleasant Gardens was amazing. The people were extremely nice and they love kids and trying new foods. Also, the wonderful people there love to see new faces.

Jakob - Youth Volunteer

My visit to Pleasant Gardens was amazing! The rooms were nice and there was a lot to do for the people. I loved everything about cooking for the people there. While I visited, I met a lot of very sweet people. My favorite part was the people. The staff and people who lived there, I absolutely adored!

Kaitlyn - Youth Volunteer



“By the Grace of God, I am What I am.”

2Cor18:10

I'm not always thankful to be alive
Every day I work and strive.

But when I stop and look at nature
The awesome grand land
I am overtaken with gratitude because
I know I am part of His master plan.

So why am I struggling to become the person He planned me to be?
I look at the trees, the clouds, and the sea.

I'm a little different, I have to take medicine every day
Just to function in society and be OK.

When people hear I'm bi-polar, I see the change in their face.
So I try hard not to give that info out so I can stay in my happy place.

The trees are strong and some are there for years, just standing tall.
I get strength from them, it helps me not to fall.

When I look at the sky, I feel so free.

It reminds me of what a vast universe we live in
And this is all a gift that to me was given.

It reminds me that we are here only for so much time.
Life is so precious; it can be taken at the drop of a dime.

I don't always live like that at all,
Like any day, I could hear the master's call.

I am so blessed to be living, I've had many close calls.
I've been stretched in every single way and always came out of my falls.

When I see the ocean, I feel an energy, freedom and strength
It's promising, huge. Who can measure its length?

KL

Breakthrough Mentor Reflection

This mentoring program has become a very humbling experience for me. I learned that not everyone has a support system of friends and family to help them work out their problems. This program helped me to see that what works for me may not necessarily work for others. I needed to learn to listen and allow my partner the opportunity to explore, share, and to be just there as a friend. I am so proud to be a part of this group and to see the tremendous growth they have made.

AM



Graduate Reflections

Breakthrough has opened my eyes and really helped me to focus on what's important. I have gained a feeling of self-worth and self-esteem. ~ Edward B.

Breakthrough has given me the courage to go on and believe in myself all over again. ~ Kelly D.

Breakthrough was a chance to meet people and learn. I felt good to talk about my past and let go of those feelings that I have been hiding in myself... I am now more motivated to accomplish things I was not able to do before. ~ Jeff K.

Breakthrough is a blessing breaking down the walls that are around us hindering us. The program makes me realize that I can do whatever I set my mind to do... ~ Denise A.

Breakthrough connected me to people I probably wouldn't have socialized with normally. I love my group. I learned new things pertaining to budgeting, time management, traversing the red tape and blockages of various gov't. agencies, and being myself. My Mentor is awesome and I'm glad to have met her as well. ~ Joanna A.

Time With Our Children



We also had the opportunity to meet with a few of our children. In these brief few hours they expressed some of their own life experiences in living in shelters and having parent(s) who struggle each day to make ends meet. I wanted to focus on some of their hopes and dreams as a source of encouragement to them. The discussion was easy, honest and fun. If only we could keep their simplicity and openness we can only imagine what our world could become.

We certainly did not have enough time to capture their eager and growing minds. Like the adults who participated we used the written word, discussion, art and dance to find ways to meet one another. I so look forward to more time like this with them.

Sister Pat



The children focused their time on questions like:

What would you do if you were president?

If you had a million dollars what would you spend it on?

If your pets could talk what would they say to you?

What's the greatest thing about being you?

What words describe you?

What do you want to be when you are older?



Beyond Me...

I am blessed to be a resident of Mercy Haven. Thirty-two years ago, my first husband died the day before our son Patrick was born. At four weeks old, Patrick rolled over. I thought he was a genius, turns out it was a grand mal seizure. Patrick continued to have seizures for years, sometimes more than one hundred a day.



At the age of two, Patrick coded. When I got to the trauma room in the hospital, they were placing paddles on Patrick's chest. That was the first time I heard God speak to me. I had been a pretty whiney, put upon twenty-eight year old, but it was as if I had been hit in the head with a baseball bat. God said, "You think you're in pain, this is real pain," and Patrick's heart started with the first shock. That day, my priorities became crystal clear. I've never had a problem with self-pity again.

Patrick remained ill, the doctors said it was terminal. There were three million or so possibilities and his had not been identified yet. I moved around the country from hospital to hospital trying to get a diagnosis and finally got one – primary carnitine deficiency. Patrick showed immediate improvement once he began the appropriate medication. He moved from terminally ill to chronically ill overnight. Six months after his diagnosis, Patrick told me to start dating and find him a dad – and I did.

I met my second husband on a blind date and we married eight months later. With my Masters in Geophysics and my husband's Masters in Engineering, we decided to start our own company. Patrick continued to have health and education issues, but we coped. At age twenty, Patrick was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome.

Seven years after marrying, my husband was diagnosed with cancer. After years of surgeries and three rounds of chemotherapy, he was lost nine years ago.

For thirty years I worked, juggled bills, then I hit a wall. It was a big wall. Patrick was in a psychiatric ward, and our landlord turned off our heat and electric. It was dark, cold and winter. I lived without heat or power for four months. Patrick couldn't return home with no power, so the hospital was looking for alternative housing for him. I had essentially failed to provide my son with a home.

All I could think about was killing myself. All day, all night, plans formed. I got a new rep payee for my son's social security check, I packed all our belongings and put them in storage. I returned the dog to North Shore Animal Shelter. I amassed a significant quantity of sleeping pills. It was all in place and one sentence stopped me: "If you kill yourself, Patrick will blame himself." So I went to Stonybrook Hospital.

When I was released, I was homeless. I carried my clothes with me and rode the bus to social services each day for placement in a shelter for the night.

Mercy Haven selected me as a client. Those are big words. Mercy Haven was going to give me a chance to get my life back, one piece at a time. The process was in a word - kind. Mercy Haven employees talked about my needs, how they might be able to help me. The whole process was steeped in a kind of Christ-like benevolence. It was always about how Mercy Haven could best help me to be better. It was life changing.

I'm a few years away from being able to work, so this fall I will begin school again for another degree. After my experience with Mercy Haven, I'm going to study social work. I hope one day to be a therapist. I believe I can achieve my goal because I have the gift of beautiful, safe, affordable housing, the support of the Mercy Haven community, advice from my housing specialist and the quiet strength of my faith.

Thank you Mercy Haven for changing lives and giving us the chance to live with dignity. I am deeply grateful.

MT

Marguerite lived with us for three years and died peacefully in January 2015. She influenced many of the residents to get involved and to be responsible for their individual lives. Rest in Peace, dear Marguerite.

Afterword

Our staff person, Margo Bosché, has a long history of working with our residents and facilitating book and poetry classes as well as their art classes. She worked with residents throughout the creation of this publication. She was asked to reflect on the experience and offers us the following words.

After the last writing session, S. Pat said, “Next week will be art with Margo.”

“Art?” said someone.

“Yes.” said Margo.

“Really, art?”

“Yes.”

“I can’t.”

Unhappy looks all around, then:

“I tried and I’m just no good.”

“No one will be judged.”

“I can’t draw.”

“You don’t need to know how to draw, you can just work with shapes.”

“I can only draw stick figures.”

“Stick figures are fine.”

They were not convinced –

On the day of the art session, there was a welcome and an introduction. A table was set up with the different materials they could choose from: oil pastel sticks, markers, clay, water, acrylic paint, canvas panels, brushes, palettes, knives, palette paper, water colors, construction paper in several colors, scissors and precut shapes of construction paper. A brief description was given of each art supply. Per S. Pat’s suggestion, I asked that anyone selecting the cut shapes should move the pieces around and not glue them on the paper until you are pleased with the placement.



Most people knew right away what they were going to work with and collected their supplies. Some individual assistance was given.

One woman remained seated and said she did not know what to do. I suggested working with the construction paper shapes. She hesitated and then said “ok.” After working awhile, she became excited. She had worked on collages but always glued the pieces down right away, one by one. She enjoyed thinking and moving the pieces around before using glue.

Another woman picked oil pastel sticks and purple paper. She studied the paper awhile, drew a few lines and threw down the pastel. She was frustrated.

I had collected a large selection of magazine and calendar photos over the years: landscapes, flowers, animals, gardens, seascapes and photos S. Pat had taken. I asked if she might find looking at photographs helpful. She said yes. She spent a long time looking at the photos. (Had I overwhelmed her?) Then she worked with pastel and white paper without referring to a photo. Later she smiled.

And they were off...



There was heightened concentration by all. Complete silence as they worked independently. As an artist, I recognized these precious moments called “flow”, when you are completely engrossed in an activity and lose track of time.

As art was completed, conversation slowly began. Half of our scheduled time was over. Someone asked if they could do another one. (Be still, my beating heart.) Remaining calm (on the outside) I said, “Yes, there are plenty of supplies.” Another person said, “We can?”

A man was drawing animals from photographs.

He pointed and asked an outsider, “What is this?”

The outsider said “a monkey.”

The man said, “It’s a buffalo!”

I overheard and made my standard comment, “Everyone’s an art critic.”

In fact he did draw a buffalo and a seagull and a deer.

Once again there was the magical silence of concentrating on creativity but now with a relaxed feeling in the air.

When everyone had completed their second work, I said, “S. Pat asked that you title your art.” Heads went down and everyone looked at their own work. Titles appeared almost immediately. A connection had been made. They had indeed created art “through their eyes.”

The woman who could not get started with a project titled her works “Maze 1” and “Maze 2.”

The man who drew the buffalo, seagull and a deer titled his art “Three Monkeys in a Barrel.”

One by one I held up each work and showed the group. The remarks were specific, positive and encouraging. No one simply said, “Oh, what a nice picture.”

I believe creativity of any kind is hope and possibility.

Gratitude

Gratitude explodes in my heart
Thank you Mercy Haven for giving me a new start.
It feels so good to sleep at night
Without having any fright.
I am certain I am in the right place
People say they can see it on my face.

KL



I Am What I Am, paper collage, Kelly L.



Faith, Hope, Love, acrylic on canvas, Tom K.