

New Life after Dropping Out

Willie A. Coleman

Education achievement either opens the doors to opportunity or closes them. For many in our society, including me, the latter proved to be the case for several years. Lacking the very basic academic achievement (high school diploma) was for the most part the cause of my initial failures in life. Dropping out of high school allowed me to socialize with “like minded people”, which in turn led me to withdraw from all normalcies in life; even to the point where I rejected my church upbringing! Dropping out of high school exposed significant character flaws in my persona. Quitting had become habit forming and the doors to success were not opening.

However, after finding myself in a place with nowhere to turn and no one to turn to but God, I asked for help. I enlisted in the military, enrolled in a GED program, received my GED, enrolled in college and received a degree. I married a very wonderful and intelligent woman with whom God gave us two bright children to raise. From that last day of hopelessness, I have continued to pray and make education a focal point in my life. The doors to opportunity keep opening.

Therefore, when I hear the words “Education is the Key to Success”, I feel I am a living witness to its truthfulness and also understand its magnitude when coupled with prayer.



New Life after my Husband's Death

Emily Terry Cosby

Seven short/long years ago, in a matter of days, my existence changed from being a wife of 48 years to being a widow forever. The state of shock which followed was a cushion, allowing me to function through the next days. Gradually, however, the reality became part of me, bringing emptiness, uncertainty and dread.

Somewhere deep inside I believed that “all shall be well,” but could not access that assurance as I moved through those days. Waking every morning to the shock of Paul's absence and coming home day after day to an empty house drilled into me the loneliness which was my only reality. Every significant milestone during that first year—wedding anniversary, birthdays, holidays—brought home to me the realization that we would make no more memories together, a reality I had to accept and endure.

My belief that “all manner of things shall be well” gave me hope and was the rock to which I clung during my transition from desolation to resurrection. I realized that as God had been with me throughout all the days of my life, He would be my help now. This was made clear over and over through the caring of my family and friends. Worship became even more nourishing as it provided strength through the reading and preaching of God's word, and in receiving the Eucharist.

I later made a pilgrimage to Italy led by our bishop. On the first anniversary of Paul's death, I was in Assisi where I found healing within that group of supportive people.

The Easter Vigil was the last service that Paul and I attended together. It continues to be my favorite of the church year. Hearing the stories of God's action in our history enables me to move from the darkness of Lent through the saving acts of Jesus' suffering and death into the glorious light of Easter and resurrection.

The realization that heaven is becoming more and more populated with people I have loved deeply leads me to understand how heaven and our earthly life overlap. The kingdom of God is indeed at hand, and I believe we are living, though imperfectly, within it. When we are praying, worshiping and serving as God has called us to do, the kingdom is clearly present, and there are times when the veil between heaven and earth seems very thin. It is within the faith community that I am able to move toward experiencing these moments. I know of no other way to explain being able to continue my life after the devastation of losing my spouse than to credit God's saving grace.

New Life after Incest

Twilla Robinson-Booker

People often ask me, “How is it that you can smile and laugh while telling such accounts of your childhood?” They wonder if it is a coping reflex or some other psychological reaction to help me deal with the pain. They are surprised when I tell them that I am so very blessed to be alive to share and expose the truth as I experienced it. God knew He would be able to trust me with exposing the effects incest has had on my life and countless others. I laugh and say, “I have a big mouth and a booming voice for such a task as this!”

So often the victims of incest stay victims all their lives, never believing they can have complete honesty and disclosure of their past. I am here to tell them that they can, and that they will live fuller lives when they put this ugly reality to rest and walk in the newness of survivorship.

I have found such joy in taking the power away from the secret of incest, finding a voice I never knew I had.

-A peace in understanding it was never my fault.

-A new life in knowing I was not the only child to experience this kind of manipulation of her God-given Love.

People ask why I choose such themes as “Straight Talk about Your Sexual Health.” I want them to know that God invented a wonderful way for mankind to replenish the earth, and there is nothing ugly about it. It is only through the vain imagination of man that the truth of God's creation has been distorted. It is truly fulfilling to help my sisters and brothers understand and get past some of the darkest days in their lives. I am grateful for the word of God, my inspiration and light.

I leave you with one of my favorite Bible verses, John 8:32: *And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*



Stories of the Resurrection in our Everyday Lives

Easter Meditations 2011

An Easter Gift
from the
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Welcome to Easter Meditations 2011

After the poet George Santayana delivered his final lecture, the speech was said to have been “mesmerizing” – right up to the point when he stopped in the middle of a sentence. Later, he explained that he had noticed a forsythia branch just coming to bloom outside of the window. The people listening knew only that he suddenly looked out at them and said, “I shall not be able to finish... I have just discovered that I have an appointment with April.” He realized that he had better things to do. He had an appointment with life. This is the promise of Resurrection. It is the Easter theme, and it is the chosen theme for our meditations this year. Resurrection is the promise of springtime again for our lives. Not just in the next life but in this one as well. God is redeeming all of it for us. Like Santayana, we have an appointment with April and we must not miss it.

We hope the different experiences of Resurrection within life witnessed to in the following writings will inspire you and encourage your generous support of CVEM’s ministry. May this Easter season and these meditations remind us of the gift of the Resurrection we experience through the love of Jesus Christ not only in the next life, but in this one as well.

Faithfully,
The Rev. Donna Gafford, *CVEM Board President*

Our Gratitude to the 2011 Meditation Writers:

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Retired Priest in The Episcopal Church
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Motivational Speaker
Mike Venable
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New Life after Cancer

Mike Venable

“You have cancer” are three words that can stop a life dead in its tracks—if you let them. Those three words can create a big, fat Helvetica bold check mark in the negative column of a life.

I’m one of the lucky ones. I am fortunate to have realized that I have enough check marks in that other column to keep moving and not let cancer stop the trajectory of my life.

My Episcopal faith, delivered to me in man-sized doses by my fellow parishioners at St. Matthews-in-the-Pines in Seale, AL, has sustained me. Check.

My warrior wife, Jill, has ruthlessly carried out her brand of love and care for her sometime-sick husband, all the while keeping our business running and being the perfect mother for four sons. If I were to write all day, every day for the rest of my life, I would not be able to pen enough words to properly thank her for all she has done for me. Check.

Four great sons, both parents, a mother-in-law who is easy to love, extended family and an army of friends have loved me, encouraged me, fed me and prayed over me, leaving me bathed in light, seeing life from a new perspective. Check.

So, what is a life like after cancer? I have written much about my new normal. Everything is different. Everything.

Everything is cast in a new light. A dusty, matte finish spread over all everything that once was shiny. Everything.

So I have to look a little harder, touch a little longer, draw a bigger breath to get the still sweet smell of a rose fully into my olfactory system. The extra work reminds me that I am still alive, still my old self, still the object of the love of others and still in the loving embrace of my God.

In this Easter season I’ll be vigilant. I’ll notice the bees working the blooms of spring, the greening of new grass, pollen settling on my favorite fishing pond and the smell of honeysuckle.

I wouldn’t trade this for anything.

New Life after Brokenness of Body

The Rev. Bill McLemore

In August, 2008, I experienced unusual pains in my lower back. My doctor examined me and sent me to a gastroenterologist. Nine surgeries and seven months later, on March 17, 2009, I emerged from twelve hours in the operating room at Emory University Hospital. The doctor, who is one of the leading gastric surgeons in the country, took out my gall bladder and appendix and told my wife Lori, "I did that because no one is ever going in there again." I have very little memory of most of those months. My hospital bed became my home. My daily diet consisted of a nutritional fluid that I never tasted or chewed.

My new life after hospitalization was like waking from a dream. I emerged from a profound surrender to doctors, nurses, attendants, family, and friends—some of whom I will never know. My spiritual journey since then has been one of appreciation for the miracle of our human bodies and, at the same time, how vulnerable we are. An Ash Wednesday Psalm, recited at the beginning of Lent, seems to summarize my thoughts: *Make me hear of joy and gladness, that the body you have broken may rejoice.* (Psalm 51:9) My reflection goes like this: “Even with my broken body—which is mortal and a gift from our immortal God—I seek to “hear of joy and gladness” and “rejoice” forever.

This April 1st was the 45th anniversary of my ordination as a priest. During this time, I have called on many people who have experienced diseases, wounds, losses, and tragedies much worse than mine. My task, and that of all baptized Christians, is to affirm God's love and presence—especially in the brokenness we experience on this earth. Only then, will our broken bodies begin to hear of the "joy and gladness" of a cosmic surgeon, who in some wondrous way, binds up every wound in our fractured universe.



New Life after Homelessness

Victor Feliciano

My wife and I spent over three years living in my sister’s home beginning in 2003. It was a humbling experience arriving unemployed with a storage unit filled with our possessions.

Though we found various jobs, even with college degrees, the pay was not sufficient to afford rent and utilities for places we deemed safe and cost efficient. We were blessed with a patient sister who allowed us to stay as long as we needed. We never had a strained moment during our stay with her. Eventually, we became homeowners in 2007.

Unfortunately, many families do not have the opportunity to stay with a friend or relative until they are financially capable of living on their own. They face the daily struggles of wondering where they will sleep, what will they eat, and what are they going to wear.

As the director of a family sheltering program for the past four years, I have had the opportunity to watch families arrive with nothing but air to breathe and the clothes on their backs.

Looking back at all these previously homeless families, I think about those who are now stable and those who continue to hit barriers. The Holy Spirit reminds me of Jesus’ words in Matthew 31-34:

So do not worry saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

I have noticed that the families who place their trust in the Lord, live in His righteousness, and do not worry about their basic needs are still stable. This trust is the key to new life after homelessness.