

# FUEL YOUR BODY, FEED YOUR MIND

RECIPE & LIFESTYLE BOOK MADE  
FOR YOUTH, BY YOUTH



YOUTH EDUCATING AND ADVOCATING  
ABOUT HOMELESSNESS

## *To the ones like us*

*For the youth who grew up without family, without teachings. We understand. Let us be your guide.*

*-Brandon, Julia, Troy, Catt, Julian, Lou and Emily*

*This book will teach you some of our favorite easy, affordable meals, peppered and garnished with personal essays and support from our youth team!*

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# PERSONAL STORY OF HOPE

by Brandon

## EDITOR'S NOTE

This isn't my book, and it isn't my place to share. But as the editor of this book, I want to vent a few thoughts with fellow readers.

Above all else, this book was born out of passion for education, awareness, and community support. For me, this passion was born out of my lived experience. When I was 14, I first experienced homelessness. I was expected to parent myself from an abruptly lonely place. I was expected to have all the answers.

At the same time, I was still in school, where I was expected to assimilate to 'normal' students. As a result, I felt like I needed to wear a mask everywhere I went. No one I knew at school were experiencing homelessness, and on top of that, I was harboring an opiate addiction. I felt solely responsible for my safety, my development, and survival. I told myself I couldn't admit to anyone what I was going through, I couldn't admit when I didn't have the answers – it wasn't safe. It would feel too alienating. But in that line of thinking, I alienated myself from support I desperately needed.

That sense of loneliness still sits with me today. I still feel like I have to fake it. I must have the answer to everything and pretend to if I don't. I have to be hypervigilant; I can't trust anyone. And even if I believe I'm trusting people, it's not real trust if I feel that everyone I 'trust' has ulterior motives – that's my trauma brain. By believing these things, I've inadvertently created a wasteland of loneliness. I didn't instill within myself from a young age that its okay to ask for help, because at many moments of my life, it wasn't. It wasn't safe. I taught myself that no one understands what I'm going through, because in high school, that may have been true. But I also never tried. I never tested that assumption.

Please, reader, imagine me as your older sister. I'm urging you, reader, to find hope and solidarity in these pages.

For the last four years, I've worked in the homelessness sector. It's from this job that I've learned that the younger me was wrong. So, so wrong. Every time I do a talk at a school, I'm amazed by how many students come see me after or write letters, telling me they are experiencing homelessness just like I did. More than you could imagine. So many, I'm now certain there must have been at least 3 or 4 others like me in my classes when I was in high school. Which means I wasn't alone. I just told myself that. I told myself reaching out wasn't safe, so I never tried.

That being said, whether you realize you can reach out or not, it's still easier said than done. That's why we will do the reaching out for you. That's where this book comes in. We are your symbols of solidarity, your proof of not being alone. All of the book's authors are still youth with experiences of homelessness, addiction, mental health challenges, you name it, we've been there. We understand what you're going through, even if our experiences aren't mirror images of each other.

When I was 16, I got my first apartment. The problem was, I didn't know how to be an adult yet. I didn't know how to cook anything. And I didn't have anyone to compare experiences with, so lessons and hope had to come internally. I received food from the food bank, for example, but had no idea what to do with the random cans of food. Now I know that's a far too common experienced, as I've since learned that all the youth I work with had similar experiences.

That's why we started this program. It started as an in-person cooking group and life skills program, but the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all of our lives, including professionally. Because of the global pandemic, we made the decision to write this book instead, to reach you in your homes, on the street, wherever you are – to spread the message that **we see you and you are not alone**.

As youth who grew up without parents and 'normal' lives, we need to be there for each other. The Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness has many youth involved with their projects spreading these messages. We exist. We are out there. We are not alone, and neither are you.

Stay safe, my little sibling. I believe in your strength to get through this, whatever 'this' means to you.

With love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emily Jackson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Emily Jackson

# LOSS

With loss it can be hard to stay in reality, just ask me. It can feel unreal – its hard, too painful, to believe what you lost happened. In that process, you can become lost yourself. I have been in that frame of mind more times than I can count. Walking down the street after just losing someone and not being ready to accept that. Forgetting where I am. When I lived on the streets, I would constantly forget where I was going. Its hard to feel a sense of direction when you don't have a home, no north star to plan from.

I, like most people, experience most of my losses through relationships. Loss of family, friends and pets, too. No matter how many times you have gone through loss, it will push you to new depths each time, places you never thought you would end up.

Loss is the hardest thing we have ever gone through. It is not just the loss itself, it's that it can cause you to feel lost yourself, to become lost in it. I know this feeling because not too long ago, I lost my transitional housing to a fire. It's from that experience that I know loss can turn you into someone you don't know. Losing everything can be hard, trying to move on can be hard, but losing yourself is the hardest consequence.

I remember the first time I felt lost after losing everything. I was in pain for years and I knew I had to change. One of the only things I had left was work. Not just employment, but work on myself, too. I decided to stay focused on work, but I'll tell ya, it was not easy at first. If you're finding it hard to adjust to looking to the future after experiencing lost, you are not alone. Keep reading. Maybe by the end of these chapters you will find your courage to move on, the same way I did. My journey to staying focused on something 'good' (work), was hard because the loss would feel overwhelming. It would take up all the space in my head, in the room. The pain was enough to make me want to stop trying and give up.

It's a common story you hear a lot. Someone loses a family member. They turn to drugs or alcohol, or both. But not everyone. For some it's video games, for others its music guaranteed to keep you feeling sad and teary, others might pick adrenaline, the rush of something you're not supposed to do. In either or all cases, these addictions take form because we need to mask the pain.

Another common story is when someone loses custody of their child, they just drink and don't want to care anymore, because caring means accepting what lead to that moment. And that is a reality one might not want to live in. But hey – this response comes from the fear. It comes from the loss. If you stay in this 'whatever' mindset, your reality will always stay the same.

You'll always lay somewhere in that space between acceptance and denial, the place where you avoid the truth but meanwhile evidence of your worst fears is stacking up like a can of pringles. If you accept where you are, and accept the loss, only then can you plan your new destination, and map your next move. Only then can you focus on reaching your desire – in this particular case, demonstrating all you need to do to get your baby back. I believe in you!

What I'm trying to say is that pain, and the state of being pain creates, is a downward spiral. It's what I like to call 'becoming lost in the loss'. It might feel good to feel really bad for a while, we all deserve moments of self-pity and breathing in the sadness. But eventually, we have to pick ourselves up from the ground, and say 'I am worth way more than this reality.'

Relationships are interesting too, in the sense that the loss of a relationship can sometimes feel easier to swallow if it's all the 'other person's fault. It wasn't me, it was all ' \_\_\_\_\_ ' (insert name here). Often we become so lost in anger from the end of a relationship that we forget to admit we contributed in part to losing it. This is not true in every relationship, sometimes there is a one-sided Meany-pants who is responsible for all the pain you are feeling. But for the most part, it takes two to tango, just like it takes two to be in a relationship. The relationships we lost, I know now more than ever, that admitting where you personally went wrong can change the anger. That uncontrollable urge to yell at small things. I'm not saying move all the blame from the other person to you. No one has to be the ender-of-all-happiness. It's just that you both likely played a part in how things turned out. Try to review your relationship in your head as if you were a judge in a courtroom, a completely unbiased individual. What do you see? This anger you are feeling towards the 'other person', is not healthy for them, and especially not for you. Actually, forget them completely. This anger is hurting *you*. And at the end of the day, you are the only one that matters in this life. This anger is caused by the fact that you cannot accept the reality of your loss. To accept reality is to accept the truth.

Other forms of loss, like a death, can either be much less or much more simple, depending on how you look at it. When my parrot Jellybean died it was a hard thing. The day before my partner sent me a video of him in pain, looking up as a sad song started playing. At the time, I had been working a lot, so I hadn't been able to see him much. I would get home late from work, and most of the time go right to sleep.

One day, I got back from work early and had a chance to see him. He was so happy to see me, but I was tired, so I picked him up. I kissed him and told him I loved him. I put him down to go to sleep and had no idea that was the last time I would hold him alive.

While lying down, I heard my partner scream and say that Jellybean had collapsed. I was in such shock, and as he closed his eyes for the last time, I told him I love him. He was gone. A bird who loved me more than anyone else, human or pet, ever had, who had helped me heal, was gone forever. To be honest, I was so lost in the pain, the grief and adjoining guilt that I made up my own story of why he died. I told myself he died because he missed me too much, because I kept working late, and I punished myself with that thought daily. Jellybean died of a broken heart, and it was all my fault. I was lost in the loss, so to speak, and not accepting the reality that he was old and it was his time. He lived a long, happy life and even had a positive life with my partner before ever meeting me. But I felt like I had enough grief for the both of us, so I felt like Jellybean was mine in spirit, because I cared more than anyone else, I wanted Jellybean to be my pain and mine alone. I felt like no one else understood our relationship and in his death, I wanted to feel like I was the only special one in his life. I loved him the most before he died, and the last thing he ever felt was my love for him. I became lost losing a life that was a big part of mine. In that pain, I lost track of reality. Becoming lost in the loss will only result in losing more and more. It will lead to becoming trapped in the maze of your mind.



This led to me:

- Losing connection to the reality of the situation
- Not being ready for acceptance
- Feeling like I have to mask the pain with a newfound addiction to deal with the grief.

With this type of loss, it's hard to accept reality, and come to terms with that fact that your life has changed. The fear of the reality being real will make you hide in places like alcoholism and addiction. You may even forget who you are or who you want to be. That can be why masking the pain feels like a good escape.

## FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF

**DENIAL, NUMBNESS and SHOCK:** Numbness is a normal reaction to loss and should never be confused with not caring

**BARGAINING:** Struggling to find meaning, telling your story, may include persistent thoughts about what could have been done to prevent the loss

**SADNESS:** In this stage, we begin to realize and feel the extent of the death or loss.

**ANGER:** This stage is common, and happens when we feel helpless and powerless. It can stem from a feeling of abandonment because of a death or loss.

**ACCEPTANCE:** Exploring options, making new plans. We can begin to come to terms with the feelings we experienced when the death or loss happened.

### **Editors Note:**

*I want to remind readers that grief can happen due to a loss of any kind, be it a friendship, a home, healthy state. Grief is not limited to the death of someone close to you. There are many things grief relates to.*

*Remember readers, grief is different for everyone. Not everyone will experience it in a linear process, like this chart shows. I lost my mother as a youth, and sometimes I felt denial, anger, depression and bargaining within the course of one day, and the next day I might have a moment of acceptance. It's your experience, you own it. It was important for us to include this graphic so that in case you're feeling symptoms of these stages, you have a word and reason for it. Information is power. If you are feeling symptoms of any of these stages, know that you're not alone.*

*If you are feeling grief, it may help to:*

- *Acknowledge and accept both positive and negative feelings.*
- *Confide in a trusted person about the loss.*
- *Express feelings openly or write journal entries about what you're feeling.*
- *Find bereavement groups where there are other people who've had similar losses.*
- *Remember that crying is always okay and can provide a release.*
- *Seek professional help if feelings are overwhelming (if you don't know where to receive support, please see the 'Resources' section at the back of this book!*

## **POEM**

### **For Jellybean**

*Can't describe the feeling*

*What is its purpose and meaning*

*Can't handle it so I lash out in anger*

*Cause all the people closest to me end up becoming a stranger*

*I'm winning the war*

*But losing the battle*

*I know that in my heart*

*But these feelings can rattle*

# EASY STIR-FRY

Basic stir-fry! You can dress it up and make it restaurant quality or make it simple for a cheap and easy dish



Easy



15 minutes



Lunch/Dinner



1-2 Servings

**Approximate cost:** \$5.00

This ingredient list is only an example of how many different veggies you can include for a \$5 meal! You can swap the chicken for any meat (beef, pork, etc.) just make sure to cook until there is no pink visible. We chose chicken because they sell 4 for \$12 at Save-On Foods

Example of veggies you can use: onion, spinach, bean sprouts, alfalfa sprouts, water chestnuts, corn, baby corn, green beans, peas, snap peas, snow peas, eggplant, black beans...

<u>Amount</u>	<u>Ingredient</u>
1	<b>Chicken breast</b>
1	<b>Bell pepper (red, green, yellow or orange)</b>
3	<b>Cremini Mushrooms (brown or white)</b>
1	<b>Celery stick</b>
1	<b>Carrot stick</b>
4	<b>Broccoli florets (pieces of broccoli)</b>
2	<b>Baby Bok choy</b>
1	<b>Teriyaki, Stir-Fry, or Black Bean sauce</b> (you can use as much as you want!)
1 pack	<b>Mr. Noodles (original or oriental flavor)</b>
<u>Extras</u>	
2 cloves	<b>Garlic</b> (minced in a garlic crusher)
1	<b>Fingernail-sized piece of Ginger</b> , minced.
1 handful	<b>Cashews</b> (roasted, salted or unsalted)
1	<b>Lime</b>

## DIRECTIONS

1. Cut your chicken breast (or whatever meat you decide to use) into thin slices. Cut your veggies however Big/small you like!
2. If you're using garlic or ginger, 'mince' it. (mince means cutting it into a pulp – you can use a cheese grater or garlic crusher, or a knife)
3. Heat up a pan on the stove over medium heat (halfway up the dial) and pour a bit of oil (canola oil, olive oil, sunflower oil, etc.) on the pan.
4. If you really like seasoning, sprinkle salt and pepper on your chicken slices. Then add your chicken to the pan and cook until there is no pink left. (If you are unsure if it's cooked, cut a slice open to make sure the pink is gone). Once cooked, take it off the pan and set aside.
5. Rinse out your pan and put it back on the stove. Add more oil to the pan and add your ginger and garlic (if you are using it). Stir for 30 seconds, then add your veggies.
6. After stirring your veggies for a couple minutes, add your chosen sauce.
7. Continue to cook for 3 minutes, then add your chicken again to warm it back up.
8. While the chicken is warming up, make your Mr. Noodle packet. Once it's cooked, add it to the pan with the chicken and veggies.
9. Serve on a plate or bowl, and if you're using cashews, sprinkle them on now! If you want additional sauce, this is the time to pour it on!

# MAKE YOUR OWN STIR-FRY SAUCE

*It may take a few minutes longer, but it's much cheaper than buying a bottle of sauce!*



Easy



5 minutes



Lunch/Dinner



1-2 Servings

## INGREDIENTS

<u>Amount</u>	<u>Ingredient</u>
2	<b>Clove of garlic</b>
1	<b>Thumb-sized piece of ginger</b>
1 tb	<b>Peanut oil, sesame oil, or if you don't have it, any cooking oil!</b>
1 tsp	<b>Fish sauce</b>
1 tb	<b>Soy sauce</b>
1 tsp	<b>Sriracha or hot sauce</b>
1	<b>Lime</b>

## DIRECTIONS

1. Mince your garlic and ginger. You can do this with a garlic crusher, or if you don't have one, by cutting it into tiny pieces with a knife or brushing it along a cheese grater!
2. Instead of cooking your chicken/pork/beef in canola or olive oil, use peanut or sesame oil if you have it!
3. Once your chicken/pork/beef has cooked enough that it is no longer pink, pour in each of the ingredients, starting with the garlic, then ginger, fish sauce, soy sauce, sriracha. If it's too spicy, feel free to add some white or brown sugar (only about a teaspoon!)
4. Once the ingredients have simmered for a few minutes, you are good to go!

NOTE: if you are a vegetarian, use veggies or tofu in the places where the recipe mentions chicken/pork/beef. If you are a vegan, swap out the fish sauce and add some sugar and a touch of vinegar!

This recipe was brought to you by Emily 😊



## ACCEPTING YOUR REALITY

Ever had a story people don't believe? Have you ever been told you are lying about an elemental truth in your life? Yeah, me too. I became so lost that it became hard for me to sort out my reality. What made matters worse is that when I did feel ready to reach out, I often felt shut down because my story was difficult and seemed made up to most people. I even lost people who were there for me because they didn't believe me. Only the people who were there for those dark times, the people as unhealthy as me, really believed me. This is difficult, because later in life these were people I couldn't associate with anymore, because they were the people I used drugs with, the people I did illegal things with, and the people I generally didn't want to surround myself with being clean.

In order to protect myself, I built a heartless complex to deal with my pain. It worked so well, I started to block out people I care about feeling pain. I figured, I never had anybody to help me through mine, so why should I care about anyone else's hardships? I see a lot of people going down this path, making the choice to act mean and cruel in a harsh unforgiving world. Everyone goes through loss, pain and trauma that changes you. It is easy to become angrier and less understanding. To judge more when you see someone struggling with their own life, or worse, to feel good seeing others hurt worse than you.

I didn't have many friends. I was mad with my reality and felt like being heartless was the only way I could get through not having anyone. Friends come and go, relationships that might be real still might not last and that's a lifelong lesson I've had to come to terms with.

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*My best friend's mother always told me: People are either in your life for a reason, and season, or a lifetime, and that's okay. Sometimes I'll be in a relationship thinking it's for life, but years after we break up, I'll look back on it and see it was just a season. Other people, I'll realize it was a reason; to teach me a lesson.*

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Regardless, I still had to work for a future. I have to get a better chance to love again. The people around you can influence you to be a certain way, some for better, some for worse. Some people use love to escape their reality. Others use success to better their reality to have a better life. It's all about how you play the game of life. I got a scent of this reality, where people become better to reach success and have a happier life with healthier connections, and realized that the heartless person I felt like I needed to be was not me.

I admitted I was wrong and felt different, like my truth made my reality seem less made up. I understood myself and who I was better. In a world full of people who saw the world the way I did, letting go of what made me heartless helped me feel less angry. Being mad at yourself for not admitting you're wrong is not easy to do. This is a huge part in accepting your reality to change the way you view yourself and become who you need to be. This has been a huge part in my growing up in a world full of people I believe have yet to do this. Reaching out to change is key to being grounded as you went through becoming lost in that loss and came out the other side. Admitting you're wrong is the most important part of accepting your reality. Nobody is perfect, we make mistakes, but whether

you learn from those mistakes is the true challenge. Learning from mistakes is a part of growing. This has been a huge part in my life and has made me who I am now.

Maturing mentally is a part of growth that comes from what we learned. It's often good to forgive yourself (after acceptance of course) to release any anger you have about the past. That way, you can be less negative about the things you can no longer control. Stay focused on what you can control. Doing this will help you through loss that life is going to provide.

Certain people will be there for you, and have the same views and goals as you to keep you positive. They are the key to a bright future. They will help you reach it! That's why it's important to grow with positive people that influence you in the best way possible. That type of friend is the best investment. Cause that has the biggest impact on your mindset. Nothing lasts forever and to you must grow constantly as things change. The fear of both loss and change will hold you back.

## GETTING OVER THE FEAR

You have to accept the scary situation you are in, whether you lose someone or something. The fear of the unknown can drive you to do things you will regret. It's like you are lost in the wind and are waiting to blow away and can't accept it's already gone. You feel unsure, scared and in disbelief about what just happened. That fear will hold you back and all the pain you feel will make you a stronger and better person. If you can accept the reality of the situation and move forward to a better self, you can plan a new destination. Some people become worse; it's easy to do, it's harder to become better, that's why good people are hard to find. Not everyone is born with the strength and understanding. Let's all try to stay grounded in reality of life. We all need to get over the fear so we don't lose track of who we are. We need to learn from life to keep unlocking things in life you have not thought possible! Just don't let the fear of not getting there hold you back, use the negative to be wise and the positive to be happy. Grow and change cause that is all a part of life.

## POEM

*Rearranging my heart strings  
I'm going through hard things  
Who you were in the past now isn't you who are in the present,  
I never pretended,  
I put no one above you, you think everyone is beneath me,  
Why don't you believe me, It's so damn confusing,  
I don't know what I'm doing,  
My face is so sad now I think I need a face lift, and I aint talking about Botox,  
Going down new roads and keep hitting the roadblocks,  
This road is so dangerous cause I know that this aint us  
Why do they just hate us  
and hide it with fake love I don't need to fake I love  
I'm addicted to realness, Nobody can cure this  
Cause there's no prescriptions and nobody listens  
They act like they listen but something is missin'  
Where did all of our minds go  
We pay for the hydro  
To charge our devices That keep us connected  
So overprotective  
Comes off as controlling, All this pain that I'm holding  
I just need to let go why cant I just let go  
Never knew something so special could turn out so broken  
from words never spoken , Conversations in private at a new destination  
I just haven't arrived yet, It's so hard to describe it*



# MIX AND MATCH EGG BITES

Super easy and fun!



Easy



15-minute bake time



Breakfast/Lunch/Dinner



12 Servings

Approximate cost: \$6

## INGREDIENTS

<u>Amount</u>	<u>Ingredient</u>
5	<b>Eggs</b>
2 tb	<b>Milk</b>
½ cup	<b>Grated cheddar cheese</b>
½ cup	<b>Deli ham cut into small pieces</b>
½ cup	<b>Red bell pepper</b>
¼ cup	<b>Red onion</b>
¼ cup	<b>Green onion, sliced</b>
½ tb	<b>Olive oil</b>

### NOTE:

You can mix and match ingredients! For example:

Broccoli & chicken

Tomato & mozzarella

Green pepper & bacon

Mozzarella & Cheddar

Spinach & Green onion

Etcetera!

## DIRECTIONS

1. Wipe cooking oil on muffin pan with cooking spray
  - a. PRO TIP: The dollar store has great muffin/cupcake pans for \$1!
2. Preheat oven to 350 F.
3. Heat the olive oil (or any cooking oil) in a pan. Add ham, red pepper and red onion. Keep on medium heat until they start to get tender.
4. Whisk milk, eggs, green onion and cheese
5. Stir the pan mixture into the whisked egg mixture.
6. Pour into the greased muffin pan.
7. Bake for 15-20 minutes!
  - a. PRO TIP: You will know when its ready by the colour! When its golden brown, take them out!

This recipe was brought to you by Emily 😊

# CARROT BACON

*Vegans started it, now everyone loves it! A cheaper way to get bacon-y flavor*



Easy



15-minute bake time



Breakfast/Lunch/Dinner



12 Servings

Approximate cost: \$3

## INGREDIENTS

<u>Amount</u>	<u>Ingredient</u>
<b>2</b>	<b>Carrot</b>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	<b>Maple syrup</b>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	<b>Soy sauce</b>
<b>½ tsp</b>	<b>Garlic powder</b>
<b>½ tsp</b>	<b>Onion powder</b>
<b>1 tsp</b>	<b>Paprika</b>
<b>½ tsp</b>	<b>Black pepper</b>

### PRO TIP:

Our team knows the annoyance of collecting so many bottles of spices that only get used once a year – what a waste of money!

Instead, we now go to a local grocery store or bulk food store, where they have a bulk spice aisle, so you can measure your perfect amount!

Additionally, the small spice bags are thicker and heavier than the larger bulk bags, so our team has been known to use the big bags when weighing out the spices so it keeps the cost down!

## DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350F.
2. Cut the carrots into thin, wide pieces, like a piece of bacon and set aside.
3. Pour all the spices and sauces into a small microwavable bowl, and heat for 1 minute. Stop the microwave after 30 seconds and give it a stir.
  - a. If you don't have a microwave, you can use the stovetop!
4. Line the carrots on a greased baking pan (greased means you have wiped the bottom of the pan with a cooking oil).
5. Pour the sauce mixture overtop of the carrots.
6. Let bake for 30 minutes. Once the carrots have been in the oven for 15 minutes, flip them and put them back in.
7. Take the carrots out once they are lightly golden and getting a little crispy.
8. Voila!

This recipe was brought to you by Julia 😊

## GROW AND CHANGE

Learn from your internal cheerleader. Give them an identity. Maybe your cheerleader is the classic movie stereotype, with pom poms and a fun half-time dance. Maybe your cheerleader is an astute academic peering at you with round tortoiseshell glasses from over a book called, 'You Can Do This: Life Tips from the Cheerleader in You and More'. Either way, listen to your cheerleader. Learn from their optimism. We all have optimistic, hopeful areas in our mind, it's up to us whether we drown their voice out or turn the volume up. Deep down, we all have the answers. We already know what we need to do and how to get there. We just need to learn to get that validation from ourselves, our inner cheerleader, and not an external relationship, like a parent who doesn't always give you what you need, a problematic romantic partner, or a flaky friend. You can unblock things in your life you have not thought possible, just don't let the fear of not getting there hold you back.

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*Use the negative become wise, and the positive to stay happy*

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Grow and change because all these experiences are a part of life.

It's not easy growing up in a world like today. I know because the way I grew up was a hard path.

I want to share with you my story now. I know from personal experience that when you meet someone with similar experiences as you, but who has made it out of 'rock bottom', they share a little seed of hope with you.

**I also want to urge you to start crafting your story, for two reasons:**

- 1. Once you start writing down things you know about yourself, you can look to them as comfort when you feel lost. For example, when I feel like who I don't know who I am, I look to a sheet of paper I wrote several months ago when I was feeling levelheaded. It has ten qualities about me. It helps me feel grounded, like I can hang on to those facts. I have PTSD, so reading facts about me brings me back down to reality and gives me a grasp on the person I am today.**
- 2. Writing is extremely healing. Writing about what you've gone through is different than talking about it. We as humans often speak really fast without registering what we are saying. However, when you write, you have to go slower, so you place more careful attention on the specific words you are choosing and why. The act of writing this down on paper helps you receive lessons you didn't know you already carried. It helps you analyze and redefine your past experiences, to overcome the trauma and pain that might still linger. I share my story constantly, and it brings me great peace when I know I'm growing every time I reframe it, and the listener might be gaining hope from it.**

## BRANDON'S STORY

**Warning:** The following story is based on the co-author, Brandon Dennis' life experience. Some areas of his lived experience are triggering and includes a history of child abuse. Please read with caution, and if you are feeling triggered, please see our list of resources in the back of this book.

My mother was the best mother she could be for me. She had a problem with drinking. She dated an abusive man for most of the time I was in her custody. The closest thing I ever had to a father was my older brother. He would say things to me like, "One day you'll work for me as a getaway driver". He tried to normalize within me a lifestyle I knew very little about growing up. I didn't ever really feel that I had a family growing up. I can remember my mom and me in the bathtub, her huddled over me crying saying it will be okay, as her boyfriend at the time was at the other side of the door with a chainsaw. He had chased us around revving the engine, coming close to killing us numerous times. We ended up in the bathroom as a last resort. I think he ran out of gas because he couldn't restart the chainsaw. In anger, he kicked the door in and continued to try and rev the chainsaw. It almost started every time. My mom covered me with her own body as I lied down in the bathtub. They both had a lot to drink that day. Reliving that moment and thinking if he had been able to start that chainsaw again has haunted me every time I think of it.

He was not good to me and my mother. We would end up sleeping in abandoned trailers. It was up north in the freezing cold as well. I was not okay with living like this, so I ran away a lot. Foster care never felt like home, though.

I can remember the exact day my mother stopped feeling like my mother. She had left to go hitchhike into town to drink. I was in my room. I couldn't believe she would be okay leaving me there with her abusive boyfriend. I tried to keep my mind off the ominous sense of evil nearby. He began to yell, "you should have left with her. You're not welcome here you don't live here!". Trying to ignore his stupid, drunk anger because my mother didn't stay with him that day was *not* easy. I was doing my homework. I got tired of the yelling, so I told him to be quiet. I heard him leave his room, stomp to the kitchen and grab a knife. He chased me around the house nearly slicing and stabbing me. I was almost 11 years old at the time. I left the house by myself; I had no choice. He had already tried to kill me and my mom once before. I walked down the dirt road, to the main highway. I knew it was about an hour or so walk to a friend's place.

The walk was hard. I realized that my mother cared more about drinking than my safety. That she chose to still be with him after that chainsaw incident. As I walked, I felt like all I had was me, no family. I knew I had a lonely path ahead.

See, a huge thing about being indigenous is this is how a lot of us are brought up. From broken homes, a family's generational trauma from residential schools. We face racism and judgement for being damaged and angry that we have had very little choice about life since childhood. The pain I felt walking down that road as the sun set made me feel a constant heat, almost like a reminder I was not dreaming. *This is real*. Thinking to myself, 'if I want a good life I have to make my own'. I had to face the fear of not having control over everything. Let go of my ties and rebuild a better place. That dark hopeless place I had left was no longer an option. I was at this moment in my life where I realized fear

is the only thing keeping me from a better life. The fear of not having a home or a family. The fear that I may not make it alone. Facing my fear of not having anything walking down that hot road...It made me feel that fear of change is why my mom held on to her boyfriend, why I still tried to live there with her. That I had to change to make it out of this situation alive.

I spent a large majority of my life on the streets. No family, only me to rely on. It made me a strong person on the outside, but with deep seeded trauma and trust issues. You can't trust most the people you meet in this lifestyle. Not many of them had the drive like me. No matter how hard life is I always keep going. More than anything, I know what its like to have nothing and nobody. That's why I work hard to make sure I have a good life ahead of me. So I don't live in the fear of not having that.

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*It's easy to become a product of your environment and lose track of who you are, and who you want to become.*

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I came from a lifestyle so many judge and misunderstand. To grow up around friends who steal, have addictions and their own reasons to be in that position. It's easy to become a product of your environment and lose track of who you are, and who you want to become.

As a young indigenous child, I always heard, 'Wow, what a good-looking boy you are for an indigenous kid. You'll be a handsome man someday". As I grew older, those words turned into judgement and racism, or maybe they always were, and as a child, your impressionable brain doesn't register.

I experienced a lot of couch surfing and had a problem with drinking through my hard times. I would end up being taken advantage of by older women while drunk. This happened to me a lot throughout my high school years. I can remember walking to school after waking up at a shelter. It was summer break, and the school was still open for a few weeks for the students to use the library and computers for any schoolwork. I had my backpack and a few things I felt I needed to make it on the streets. I was one of three students still trying to finish work in that library. I had my headphones on finishing a paper on the computer. The librarian came up and saw I had a lot in my bag. She asked why, and I simply replied that I was homeless. She told me she couldn't believe it. That not many in my situation would even try to finish school. I can remember this because I was listening to sad music. I felt lost, used, like I didn't like having a body. My sexual trauma I had experienced was still new to me. Most the women who took advantage of me were older. Some of them even wanted a relationship afterwards. I felt so much pain. I am sure that's why the librarian felt the need to talk to me. I remember thinking I was going to give up soon. Thinking of my mom drinking, leaving me with a babysitter who raped me, on top of all the other sexual trauma I had. That day was another day I decided you cannot trust anyone.

See I spent a whole majority of my life becoming who I thought I needed to be, based on what I had gone through. Creating this mean, careless, and heartless person that I needed to be to not get hurt anymore. I became the type of person I hated the most. Putting up this false guard to stay safe from all the people I kept meeting in this street lifestyle. But seeing this took a long time to realize. Thinking it was okay to become the people I had trauma because of. Because of my anger and frustration, I had very little control over my emotions the second I realized I was wrong to let myself become a product

of my environment. Not only was I hurting, but I was also hurting the ones I loved by not caring and overall being a terrible person.

Telling yourself the hard life you have is 'normal' is a form of coping. Through my life I grew up fast, seeing things at a young age. I can see how my life has affected my way to process things like family and friendship. I had to look at, and ask myself, 'How am I actively trying to get out of the lifestyle and self-destructive ways like not wanting a body and not caring who used me?' I didn't always have a good answer. I felt like I had very little control to change things. Using drugs and drinking to numb my pain. I have always tried to do better in spite of my situation. To learn from mistakes and not let them drive me to be more destructive. I grew up with no home most of my life. No choice but to watch others struggle in a lifestyle I didn't choose. That heartless, careless person I became was second nature. But then, I met someone so amazing, so down to earth, they helped me realize I could love, change, and have a better life. I finally accepted the reality that if I want a better life that heartless, cold mean person I was to survive had no place in my future.

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*Telling yourself the hard life you have is 'normal' is a form of coping. But its not normal, and you deserve the best life possible.*

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See, when we live in a cold harsh world, we lose track on what it truly means to be human. To care for one another, to try and make the world we know a more enjoyable place to live. Life will be hard. It will push you to your limits and change you. It's always important to remember that. No one is perfect, we all make mistakes and we all go through hard times. Some of us have had it way harder. Its easy to judge, hate and criticize one another for being human. Accept the reality you are only human. Accept that you will make mistakes, you will hurt the ones you love and feel pain and loss from time to time. But promise to always strive to right the wrongs. And remember not to become lost in the loss because you could lose yourself in that process and end up hurting the ones you love and yourself more. Overcome the fear of change to let go of the heartless person you have become. From the pain you feel that makes you angry. To release the burden you have held on to for as long as you can remember. To get back to that caring loving person you will need to be to heal not only yourself, but the ones you hurt along the way to the realization of great truth.

# 3 INGREDIENT PANCAKE

NO DAIRY, NO FLOUR!



Easy



10-minute bake time



Breakfast



6-7 Small Pancakes

Approximate cost: \$2

## INGREDIENTS

<u>Amount</u>	<u>Ingredient</u>
½ cup	<b>Rolled oats</b>
1	<b>Medium banana</b>
3 ½ tbsp	<b>Milk (can be cows, oat, cashew, etc.)</b>
Pinch of	<b>Salt</b>

### EXTRAS

**Cinnamon  
and chocolate  
chips!**

## DIRECTIONS

1. Combine all the ingredients with a hand blender or stand alone blender.
2. Grease a pan VERY well with cooking oil, then turn onto medium heat.
3. Pour spoonfuls of batter onto the pan.
4. If the pancakes are cooked enough that you can stick a spatula underneath without it falling apart, flip and cook for an additional minute!
5. You're done!

This recipe was brought to you by Troy 😊

# PERFECT PANCAKE TOPPER

*Yum, nuff said*



Easy



20-minute bake time



Breakfast/Dessert



6 Servings

Approximate cost: \$2

## INGREDIENTS

<u>Amount</u>	<u>Ingredient</u>
<b>3</b>	<b>Apples</b>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	<b>Cinnamon</b>
<b>½ tsp</b>	<b>Sugar</b>

## DIRECTIONS

9. Preheat the oven to 350F.
10. Cut the apples into thin slices, as thin as you can cut them!
11. Place them in a baking pan (a deeper pan is preferred, but either way is okay)
12. Shake the cinnamon and sugar over the apples.
13. Bake for about 20 minutes (check on them apples every ten minutes until they are starting to get golden)

You are done! So easy!

This recipe was brought to you by Troy 😊





# CHANGE

What is change? Why is it so hard to believe people can change?

The one thing about change most don't understand is it is constant. Nothing stays the same over time. I have had a hard life for as long as I can remember. I have an immense amount of trauma. It affects the way I think when I have a partner so used to being used. Understanding what its like to have someone take advantage of you can make you appreciate what its like to have someone love you.

I can remember waiting at the bus stop with the most amazing partner I ever had at the time. Having bad PTSD and probably a troubled look on my face. She grabbed my hand looked up at me, reached up kissed me and said, 'We will have a house someday'. I had been sleeping outside a lot that summer. She was bussing home, and I had to go to sleep outside again. The love me and her had changed me in way I still don't fully understand. I am still changing, change is constant it can make you feel lost as you lose old versions of yourself. To find a new you that shows you have been changing. I know I was a different person when I met her, I had nothing.

She was the person who pushed me to work hard and change my life. Just by loving me. The power of love can change people. Just like hate can. I grew up hating that I didn't really have family. My own family acted like they did a lot for me. While I was living with a partner that was my family she even said, 'They are full of shit you made it alone for as long as I can remember'. The best partners I had have always appreciated that about me. Learning having a future for not just me, but my partner was a huge part of the change that love can do. Growing up alone, realizing the struggles of life at a young age showed me that not having family can make you hate how hard you must work through things alone. From realizing people thought we were homeless because of how much my mom drank downtown. Giving change to me as I played with my toys I had. A random stranger looking at me playing in an area known for the winos drinking. Me, too young to realize this wasn't healthy for me up until that moment.

I was in grade 3. I was hungry but my mom was drunk. Not knowing how to understand that someone felt bad for me enough to give all the change they had. I went to the dollar store to get snacks. I can remember my older brother when me and my mom had no where to go. We stayed there at his and his father's place. He did things like show me pornographic magazines and say that is what life is about – objectifying women. He would make me wear baggy clothes, chains and would say to me I would work for him someday. He would normalize this player, baller and gangster lifestyle in me. If I dressed like a 'G' he would pay for my dates with girls at school. He always had a fat wad of hundreds, never small bills. He influenced me to become a person I know I didn't agree with now. Telling me one day, I would be his getaway driver. I can see how he made me think the best clothing and most beautiful women was the biggest priority.

The people you look up to influence you. The people around you do, too. I know this because my partners have changed me more than anyone else has (other than myself). Being toxic is a problem for most people. To be driven by negative thoughts and hate to spend so much time thinking about what is wrong with everyone can make you forget that doing that is what's wrong with you. You become your thoughts, actions and mindset.

Sleeping outside waking up to go to school or work was a huge part of my life. Telling myself I have to work for a future while most would just give up and embrace having nothing their whole life. Watching my family struggle and try to cope with the pain in their addictions made me see how that wasn't an option. I can remember living in Vancouver thinking having multiple partners was normal, having thousand-dollar hoodies was normal and being involved in a lifestyle with my older brother made me think was normal. I struggled on and off with addiction. My lifestyle at that point made me a very toxic, negative person. My partners seen me as a good-looking male with money, Bape clothes and a heavy addiction to lean and other drugs. I was feared by people who saw me doing what I thought was normal. It wasn't until I had one of my partners in my arms. She was scared, she was dying. Wearing one of my hoodies had gotten her mistaken for me. She looked so scared I couldn't believe what was happening. I felt the warmth of the blood as she bled. I told her she would be okay, that I loved her, that she would make it. After she was gone, I couldn't stay in Vancouver anymore. I went back to Victoria; my addiction became worse and I told myself everyday it was my fault she died the way she did.

I became so lost by this loss that I was okay with the thought of dying. I still tried to work through this pain. Reaching out to get housing staying at group homes. Finding comfort in a new person that reminded me of who I lost. Going back down the only lifestyle I knew. My partners and friends were concerned I was going to die. I can remember feeling like I lost a piece of me. For years this loss effective me from foster homes to group homes to my youth apartment, where I met someone who made me want to change, I had gotten court ordered to go to treatment in Vancouver. I did a three-month program to help me get sober, my new found friend helped me want to see through this treatment. She had been told I was dangerous, evil, ruthless, and not a good person. I wanted to show her I wasn't. Love is one of the few emotions in mt life that has always made my change in ways I never would have. While hate had my close friends telling my best friends not to fall for me you don't know who he is. What he does he will hurt you Seeing how love and hate have affected my life has made me see that love is the one thing that always drives out hate.

Negative people are full of hate and always talk bad about everyone and use everything. While happy loving people are full of kindness, acceptance and understanding. Not hate and judgement to filly change sometimes it means cutting out people who are toxic never positive. I became healthy in treatment I was no longer small from my addiction. I had an idea that I can love again I started cutting out. People from my old lifestyle. Realizing being a toxic male with more than one partners as a part of the reason people said not to date me. I stopped and fell for the one of the only people I ever considered family. That seven-year long relationship was a life changing experience. To know that pride and experience the joy of supporting your partner to the point that you changed them. To know what it is like to be with someone people saying you saved. Hearing you guys are a partner couple charged me, it showed me I had come far. To realize change is constantly happening to see that love creates change for the better and hate destroys progress to change has made me want to write this book about my story. To help people realize that when you can love yourself and your partner to the point you are both changing for the better is a powerful life changing experience. Chose love over hate and change.

## WHO YOU ARE VS. WHO YOU ARE BECOMING

Not having anyone most of my life made me raise myself, learning a lot like had to offer me alone had made my heartless person second nature. I didn't realize how who you are right now isn't who you could become. Until I met the most amazing person in my life. About seven years before that day, I had lost my mind to a point. I was being called crazy. Some idolized me for this, others just avoided me for their own safety. Not realizing I was losing grip on my reality to the point I was hospitalized. Being talked to by someone who barely knew me. Telling me I need help to change before I end up dead.

I decided to get help after I recovered. The hardest part about getting help to change is it takes time. I realized that the day I admitted I was wrong, I was bitter, mean and angry. Being toxic made me into a person I wasn't proud of. I remember this cause I was told that day it's a long process the change it can take years. I had to face my trauma myself and admit the errors in my actions. For me to think it was okay to be the way I was to spite my drive to make it still not over losing what felt like a huge part of the old me in Vancouver. I knew I had to change from that loss. Seeing the person I was couldn't be the person I need to become.

Often the people closest to you influence you to be a certain way, act a certain way and shape you into someone you are to be part of their life. My part with sexual trauma and being a violent person made me feel broken and numb. Its been nine years since I was told it takes ten years to change. Two years ago, I fell in love and changed not only myself but the person I chose to love. That first year was a lot of changing. In ways my past made me think I never would. A huge part of changing is facing who you were to except that. You need to change and see that you don't want to be the person who showed you that you need to change for the better. Seeing my family care about me, but still being toxic was not a good fit for me. So I couldn't really reach out to them. I can still remember telling my auntie I had three jobs. I had found someone who showed me they can change and help me realize after so long. That people can change, and I have a new outlook on life. She looked at me and said it's not a competition, is it. A very toxic thing to say after I just said something from my heart that made me happy. My family reminding me why I believed no one can change after explaining I have new hope people can once again realizing people who don't change will bring you down not help you up.

Negative people never really have anything glad to say. They focus on all the bad choosing to talk about problems and things they can't control. Making them stuck in the very mindset that makes them not capable of changing. Seeing this in my family through out my whole life made it a real situation I had to face not being able to have a relationship with my family. Only made me life harder and I didn't have family support. Every time I would hear you have family to support you at least after reaching out. I would strike a nerve. I would feel like I thought family made other people blind to how real and hard life could be. Me having to go through that firsthand dealing with my friends taking to me like they knew my pain. While they had no idea just how real having nothing and nobody can make you go crazy. The reality of being negative over things you cannot control. Is common in a negative mindset. That keep you in a negative mindset. To break the cycle of this is not easy, you will find comfort in your that when you are lost in loss. I stopped reaching out to my family, friends, exes, and full-on street family I made to change. I would often run back to my stepfamily in hard times even though my ex who killed my cat lived there. They would support me. Help me through my struggle but never felt right causing the most abusive thing ever to happen to me. In a relationship around in that place I was told

by my last partner who is one of the only people I ever seen change while I fell for them. That you go running to the past when you don't see a future. She was right because I don't need to run back to people who haven't put as much effort as I have to change. I am not proud of who I was to make it on my own. The person I was to survive is not the person I need to be to change for the better. To let go of your past to see a bright future is no easy task. Trauma haunts you, stays with you sometimes for no reason at all I smell blood. It triggers me and makes me feel like my past is more real than my present. It makes me feel like I will never get over my past. Having negative people in my life doesn't help I have had people in my life a long time who have seen me change over the course of the past almost ten year who see that I am changing. I had had negative people who known me for less than a year act like they know me. Say I will never change those people will not help you become who you need to be. That negative mindset they have will always be there to clash with the positive mindset you need to change.

# CHICKEN PARMESAN

*Super cost effective, too!*



Easy



25-minute bake time



Dinner



2-3 Servings

Approximate cost: \$10

## INGREDIENTS

<u>Amount</u>	<u>Ingredient</u>
<b>2</b>	<b>Chicken breast</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Can of pizza sauce</b>
<b>½ cup</b>	<b>Parmesan cheese</b>

## DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350F.
2. Grate parmesan cheese
3. Place chicken in baking pan and put in the oven.
4. Wait 20 minutes or until cooked.
5. Pour can of pizza sauce on top of chicken
6. Toss parmesan cheese over the sauce
7. Place back in the oven for 5 minutes, or until cheese is melted and golden.

This recipe was brought to you by Catt and Lou 😊

## LETTING GO

Getting court ordered to treatment was a huge eye opener for me. I had to deal with being in a place I had put behind me to change for the better. Knowing I had someone to go back to help me see. I had a chance to try and move past. The pain I had felt since I lost my partner. Having to go to AA and NA meetings everyday. Was a huge part of the treatment program. The few days that stood out were the days I had to go alone catch the sky train. Bump into people I haven't seen in a long time along the way. Seeing people I said I wouldn't talk to approaching me as if they missed me. Saying how have you been. Me saying I am in treatment trying to change. The awkwardness of it all. Them laughing saying yeah right. No way you will be back out here. People like us don't change for nothing. This type of stuff made me feel like I made the right choice trying to change from that mindset. Not only through facing the fact I had been using alcohol and drugs to cope with my past. I seen I had to face it. To let go of what made me need to numb away my pain with substances. I chose to go to an NA meeting near where I lost my partner. To say a few things to her and tell her I had to move on. To be happy I knew holding on was hurting me. I missed her because I knew if I had not put my hoodie on her before going to the small corner store up the street from the area she was killed. I probably would have been dead myself. Year after year of me telling myself it should have been me not her being so negative and drinking being self destructive. I can remember telling her that the lifestyle she thought was amazing I was in cost me her. That it made me want to change after years of pain and grief. She found comfort in that lifestyle like I did when we dated. She was always there through anything and everything she was my ride or die. I missed her for such a long time telling myself she was gone It was all my fault. Finally telling her how I felt made me feel sad and happy.

I felt a great pain in myself not only hit me but fade away. Having flashbacks often holding her almost like reliving it to the point I broke down crying having complete strangers come ask me if I was okay. After letting my pain out I still had to make on NA meeting not from that area so I rubbed tears off my eyes stood up and said I am fine and walked to the NA meeting. That was a very pivotal moment in my life. I know my life would get better if I stayed down the path I was going. You had to let go of who you were to see value in when you are now. To see the potential in who you can become.

## LETTING GO OF CONTROL BEFORE LOSING CONTROL

A huge part of being toxic is believing you can control all things in your life. This idea is not only wrong it can be very unhealthy way to look at thing. In fact, the most memorable moments I have about charging are times I had to let go. Letting go of something I can't control by letting go of the mindset. That makes you feel the need to control the outcome. The fear of not controlling things, will hold you back and keep you in the past. More than help you reach the outcome you actually want. Letting go of control is key before you los control. The idea you can control everything is not real. You can let go of that idea now or be control when you realize you can not control everything two points in my life I can say letting ho helped me change. One was the day I told the person I had my first home with to let me go. That I would take me along time to change. She had to not hold on to me. It was one of the saddest nights I ever had. We still lived together so the night was very sad for both of us. I was letting go of any

control I had on her belief I could change soon. I knew I had to let her go to change. The second time was letting go of the pain I had from my past life in Vancouver.

It was hard for me she was one of the only partners I had who had no family at all. We met on the streets in Van. I remember her just standing out by the way she stood there. The similar upbringing made our bond one I didn't know could be so strong. We found comfort in a style of life that is so misunderstood. I always put so much value on having someone take care of you. Raise you and provide for you that I always thought it was the best things to do for my partners watching her become happy from my love made me feel like a better person. Letting go of all control can be key to changing your mindset. Sure thinking I am the best and always right helps me believe so while the truth is you maybe wrong and on your way to becoming the best. I know telling myself I am this or that to help me believe it. I also know at the time I get called something that makes me happy. Without accepting it keeps me humble. I expected these things not getting that made me unhappy. So when I let go of the idea that everyone had to see me how I wanted.

I not only was happy I felt different. I realized you cant expect to be called something unless you earned it. Letting go of my ego to understand more about the world, less focus on myself to learn more about the meaning of not just my own life but life itself. Letting go of the fear I cant control everything help me realize. That there is more to life than myself my own beliefs view points and opinions. Making me more open minded to understand that rather than ignore. My first belief in god was normalized in me. By my mother and most of my family friends and activists. My first foster home made me go to church every Sunday. As I grew up, I watched the world as I knew it slowly die. I always had this belief in facts over fiction. I know global warming was a real thing. I didn't know if god was real. I never believed in Santa or Easter Bunny. I outgrew the tooth fairy belief. By the time I had my first youth apartment I didn't believe in god. The world I knew was too real and cold dark and unforgiving. For me to believe in such a thing. At that point I had known I had myself more than anyone to thank for how far I'd come. Fresh out of treatment feeling like a new me.

I had learned a lot about why I needed to by hearing her say before treatment she was scared of me. I had found someone who I could relate to on a level I was ashamed to admit. All those years alone no family, just myself to make it. It made me appreciate when I would feel love. Before long, I was three years clean in college something not everyone could believe given my past. Outgrowing my belief in God was a huge part of my younger years. It was clear to me outgrowing by belief that my old lifestyle was normal was next battle.

I was going to be aged out of the foster care system by the end of the year. I had no idea I would fall in love and want to change my life for anytime soon. I knew I had to stay clean and avoid my old pattern of self destructive behaviour. But its easier said than done. I grew close with someone who would become the very first person I would ever consider family after letting go of my past life in Vancouver. After days of always messaging each other visiting and constantly being connected. I was falling for my best friend. Having aged out of the youth apartment in my first apartment ever. Trying to keep on the new path. Not being able to control how long that took was my only thing holding me back. Hearing from professionals over and over it can take a long time to get over such a hard life and such deep seeded trauma. Made me fear I couldn't control when I would change so I let that hear go.



# EGG AND BLACK BEAN BURITTOS

Have random ingredients around your house? Here's a good use for them.



Easy



20-minute bake time



Breakfast/Dessert



6 Servings

Approximate cost: \$3

## INGREDIENTS

<u>Amount</u>	<u>Ingredient</u>
1	<b>can of black beans</b>
2	<b>Eggs</b>
1	<b>10-inch tortilla</b>
1	<b>Can of diced tomatoes</b>

## DIRECTIONS

1. Crack eggs over medium heat and scramble in the pan
2. Once scrambled, place black beans in a colander or just rinse in the can.
3. Add black beans to the pan.
4. You can either place in the tortilla now, or:
  - a. Heat the tortilla in the microwave for ten seconds first.
  - b. Place tortilla on a pan over medium heat to 'toast' it a little
5. To dress it up, add salsa or sriracha! Done!

This recipe was brought to you by Brandon 😊

## LIVING WITHOUT FEAR

Fear is a powerful emotion that can keep you stuck from change. The fear of change that you cannot control will hold you back and stuck in the past. To push past fear of change is a huge part of life. Within my life it was a huge part of changing from being scared when running away after my cat was killed to being scared after being chased out of my home with a knife. I learned fear of change was not real by letting go of my past. To change my future through not being scared of losing my life. Giving up on my family to grow and learn things in a way I didn't think would shape my the way it has. By facing the idea I had to put up with toxic family because they are my relatives. I chose to be different in a world where most have a strong belief in family and religion. I still go this day get hated for my views and non belief. I chose to be myself in a world of these who are scared to be the way I am. Growing up on the streets showed me aside of the world. Most have the privilege to avoid seeing how the world could really be affected me. Not only did I become a protected? My environment. I also lost track of myself, forgot that I had to avoid negative people like my family. I found comfort in my old lifestyle so it seemed normal. See telling yourself something is normal when its not is not a good way to deal with anything. I know this because I have realized how my life growing up wasn't normal. A lot of the abuse and lifestyle I was used to was not normal, it had helped shaped me into a very heartless person. Letting go of the idea my life had been normal so far helped me want a better life. I let go of the fear that my life wasn't normal. Facing the reality that I was not a good person head on to change in ways my family never could. To live without fear of change and to let go of the past is a key to real change. You will find comfort in the things you thought were normal, it takes time to grow out of that. By facing your fear of change you will find everything you could have ever wanted is on the other side of fear.

## REBUILDING AFTER SELF DESTRUCTION

To fully understand why it was hard for me to live what most call a normal life. For me having no one to support me as family. Until around my early twenties. Making an amazing bond with a partner after the darker time in my life. Years of being on my own after my home was no longer home to me after my cat was gone. Self destructive behavior usually stems from seeing no value in your own life. My biggest battle was with addiction that I used to numb the pain I felt from couch surfing and doing anything I had to for my own survival.

My addiction started going out of control to the point everyone would say I was throwing my life away. The blackouts. Got to a point where I would come to either in Vancouver or Victoria. These times are still hard for me to remember from waking up in bastion square with a duffle bag I had no idea how I got to walking up in Vancouver with nothing. I could say that lean was something that changes me. Some have seen me blacked out from drinking before. I have heard things I don't remember or recall.

My friends tell me they seen me do violent things. My addiction sent me down a darker path than I could ever thought I would have lived through. To have no choice but to stay stuck in an environment where you can't keep going without numbing the pain of the past you can't accept. By the time I was in this dark place not caring about myself, I had not talked to any family at all from my home town in 4 years. I had people telling me I had a future while I was doing things I no longer think are who I am. My drive to keep going comes from my wanting to change after I was court ordered to treatment. Had lost lots of friends by then seeing my become terrible person, I had no family members to tell me I needed help finding out from couch surfing from most the people I went to school with were always too scared to approach me and talk, also let me know I was not a good person. The people who idolized me for this and normalized this behaviour. Were those in the same place as me. Its harsh but a real part of change cutting out those who will try to tell you your old life was normal.

Thinking back on those days, barely sleeping, addicted and sleeping outside I had severe trust issues. From childhood trauma. That made me not trust anyone around my cup or only my partners could make my drink. By that time, I had been raped a lot, not knowing what had happened to me as a kid. Having my brother normalize that having a girl was key to being the man I had this idea of unhealthy relationships. As much as I loved her then, she normalized the destructive nature. I knew since I was a kid by mom man drinking downtown doing drugs. I wasn't tell she was gone I seen that. Being able to pass out and walk up next to my partner. Let me know I had a good partner in most cases in my hard life. Realizing not only my family friends also my partners can normalize unhealthy habits. I had more reason to believe my heartless nature I had in my to make it was normal. After being court ordered to treatment I knew I had a lot of changing to do. The hardest most crushed part of changing is moving on letting go of toxic people who will bring you down. That's one of the main reasons I don't speak to my own family.

As much as I tried to avoid my unhealthy family. I still had the unhealthy was of living normalized in me. With trust issues something I developed at a young age, I knew I couldn't trust my family I can remember the first time I had almost died I was sick with a flu was a seasonal things for me growing up. I wasn't capable of holding down and good. My brother tells me he has something that may help. Tells me mom he can help me she agreed with him he comes back in with two pills, and ginger ale. He

gives me them and I take them. The thing was it was Penicillin, something I was allergic to. The thing about dying I have learned from my times having faced? It. Even the first time, I was hallucinating seeing things that weren't real with both my brother and mother sad crying checking on me for hours. Before falling a sleep I can remember feeling my heartbeat. Thinking it might stop any minute, sick and swelling up. Telling my mom my picka is helping me heal. Vividly thinking I was actually cuddling a fictional cartoon. This feeling I had experienced more than once and every time after you feel like you cant believe how real the hallucinations could be as you fight to keep awake. The fact I woke up the next morning was amazing.

I remember my mother getting mad at me for not knowing I was allergic to penicillin. Both my older brother and mother saying I was lucky I didn't die. I had no idea I was allergic to that but after that day I knew I was and knew deep down my family didn't care about me. Not only my family but growing up in foster care with other kids and the off foster mom who would hit on me. That and my past of coach surfing and being taken advantage of made me barely trust anyone after ,y cat was taken from me. I had felt different about trusting anyone. Having sexual trauma from being raped by a babysitter. I made me feel like I didn't care about my body. The hardest part about growing up was realizing slowly I didn't see a future in my hometown. Having had my brother normalize this tough guy toxic male in me. After years of my dad saying he will get his residential settlement he was finally coming. My other told me father who I barely knew I wasn't coming with him. I told her let me talk to him. I said I will come with you father. MY oms face dropped and I had changed my future. I didn't care about that home that much. I didn't see a bright future there safest part about that was I was right. The last day at my hometown was sad because I seen one of the first girls ever cared about enough to be a good friend to her. It was the seven eleven in my hometown having been the place my childhood rapist had taken me to buy me things to keep me quiet. I was happy to see her one last time to say goodbye. I remember her saying you're leaving me said and me replying I am sorry but you know you are special to me. Seeing her smile alone made me happy having cried for half there/. Seeing someone I truly care about there made me feel better. This normalizing my self destructive nature completely okay having left my mother and all my friends I was slowly becoming okay with not caring if I lived or died, I hated my family.

I packed a few bags my addiction started as my step family drinks like most of my family. I chose not to so I can avoid the urge to drink away my pain. Going to school drinking becoming worse having no problem with black eyes swollen face. No shame, no care. I wasn't until my cat died I knew it was time to move on again this was normal to see. Packing one backpack saying I can make a better life somewhere else. The only thing I didn't know I was slowly becoming way more self destructive. The downtown lifestyle I faced normalized it more with losing close friends to addiction before naloxone was disseminated more broadly.

As much as not seeing a future was normalized so was wanting nice things. So was cutting out toxic people. By eliminating all toxic people losing a partner to it. I had to want to have a better life to get one. I realized if I had a self discipline to work for a future. I would be able to do better than the old me if I stayed clean.

# HAWAIIAN BAKED BEANS

*Time to use all the foodbank cans!*



Easy



20-minute bake time



Breakfast/Dessert



6 Servings

Approximate cost: \$3

## INGREDIENTS

<u>Amount</u>	<u>Ingredient</u>
1	<b>can of black beans</b>
1	<b>Can of ham</b>
1	<b>Can of pineapple</b>
1	<b>Spices</b>
½ tsp	<b>Brown sugar</b>

## DIRECTIONS

Combine all ingredients in a pan over medium heat for 5 minutes.

Done!

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# BELIEF

Belief in you. Belief in life. Believe in positivity.

The hardest part about self destructive nature is usually its normalized. By people you chose to be around you. Making you feel comfortable in that mindset. Its easy to find belief in religion in times with no hope. Or to turn to substances to escape the reality of life. My life has been extremely hard and the reality of becoming okay with not caring is a huge problem. Many people face it in a world like today. I know this because I wasn't just my drive to want to do better than the ones who normalized my old lifestyle. I had to believe in myself I ad to realize it would take a long time to get my life together. Not believing in religion or anything of that nature. Gave me a broad and mere realist outlook on a lot of the realities that I faced growing up. I can remember getting trouble for walking across the bridge which had to the trailer park. TO the left after the bridge and at the end of the street was an A&W I had sold a few Yogio cards and want to eat. Being in elementary and having to feed myself wasn't new to me. Nor was walking alone. I came back have my closest friend a burger and turned around to get taken to the office. Being in trouble for this to me was funny. I told him to call my mom I wasn't right her because I walk now alone every day. This point in my life was not that far away from my first foster home. They tried to normalize the belief in God in me. I would have to go to Church. Every Sunday. I remember being told to pay and build my relationship with God. At first, I was not okay with that at all, after being there long enough though I can remember praying in church and considering that there could be a god. I lived with them long enough to have them normalize belief in God. Influence someone enough to try and believe in a way of life, and they will. A short-lived part of my life that I had no problem leaving when my mom had come back from treatment. I was okay with going back. Once they were gone, I had slowly started to have that normalized belief go away.

For me, not understanding this world was a huge part of my life as an indigenous person. Having religion forced on me in foster care didn't make me believe in god. From a young age, I can remember choosing not to believe in fiction cause I wanted to stay in tune with reality. Finding out at a young age that if I didn't get good grades I didn't get a good Christmas for the rare times I had one as a kid. Hold my belief in fictional things not really a way to feel self love like make do with a relationship with god I chose not to believe in such a thing the world is the way it is. Not because of god but because of the people on earth all my life growing up with media like music and move glamorize violence and sexism. One of the only time I felt like I was changing I had no TV in my life no cell phone. It helped me cut off all in my lifetime. I have owned two flip phones and one smart phone. This helped me not become attached to friends or anyone. Never been one to have snapchat or post everything I do in one day. Helped me grow as an individual person to reason to act a certain way to get accepted in a group. That's part of the reason why its hard to make me believe in god. I cant be easily influenced by people around me to forget I have to work for a future. My belief in who I am and who I can become has been the reason why I work hard and never let failure keep me down. Yeah I get misunderstood for not believing in God for not caring about my family. For struggling to feel normal after such a hard life my journey to step my old pattern of self destructive nature is difficult. The one time I was fully sober. Going to college and trying to change as a person. I had a hard time having just let go of the longest relationship I had ever had. Knowing years of change was ahead. I found myself in pain on my bed in the living room. That day was hard for me having to attend the Missing Sister's March. Having lost family through the highway of tears. The pain I felt had me shaking my heart reaching something that might come to me in the form of while fungus the gathered around me shaking from pain confused as

to what was happening to me. The white figures pull something out of me. In that moment, the pain was gone I felt different the next day. As someone who never believed in god I can't explain how in the most sober I have ever been about five years clean, How what happened to me did my belief in myself and if I could work through all the miserable, lonely and hard days. I feel for who I have been to one day be someone I can be proud of. Led to me experiencing something beyond me. Something that changed me in a way I never thought I would reach.

This part of my journey to this day still makes me wonder if there is life after death or if there is a god. Whatever happened that night did take the pain away and helped me change. If you are unhappy with your life who you are the best things you can do is admit to yourself, you can do better. Believe in yourself that you can work towards a brighter future. Note seeing hope if life because it can lead you to places. That some don't return from your belief in who you are and who you can become will give you the drive and mindset to change your life. And remember, there is *always* hope.

## INTERVIEW WITH A PRO GARDENER

*On a sunny day in March 2021, Julia Greco, a youth passionate about growing her own produce and in that, changing the world, was interviewed by Emily Jackson. We discussed her reason for gardening, tips for beginners (like me!) and about the need for the conversation to be about climate justice.*

Emily Jackson: I'm so excited to sit down with you, Julia! As you know, I'm a newbie when it comes to gardening. I haven't done a lot of gardening in my time but am so interested. What is your favorite thing to grow?

Julia Greco: Definitely kale. Its so easy to grow, which makes it easier to share! It responds to care and nutrients quickly, so you know how its feeling.

That being said, you can't just stick it in the ground, snap your fingers, and say, 'grow!' It's not a magic trick, its all about providing it the care and nutrients it needs.

EJ: Well, when you say care, I imagine water and soil and sun. When you say 'nutrients', that's when I get confused. Should I be using fertilizer? If so, what kind?

JG: Chemical fertilizers are bad for the environment, plus it costs more. I prefer to use something natural. Personally, I opt for compost instead of commercial fertilizer. Even compost tea is great!

EJ: What is compost tea?

JG: Its when you put your compost in non-chlorinated water and let it 'steep'.

## RESOURCES

If you are feeling triggered from the information in this book, let's pause together. For now, stop reading the chapter that triggered you. Take a step back. These stories are meant to be enlightening and inspire hope. Our intention is not to cause stress, trigger you, or remind you of traumatic experiences.

If you are feeling triggered, take a break from this book. Stop. Take a deep breath. Inhale. Exhale. Listen to your body. How are you feeling in this moment?

Take a minute to examine each part of your body. Are your shoulders raised? Are your muscles tense? Are you squinting or clenching your jaw? Address each of these parts of your body, releasing the tension.

Remind yourself that in this moment, you are safe. You are okay.

If you have someone you call during tough times, reach out to your supports. It might not feel like it right now, but it's always better to talk about how you are feeling.

If you are still feeling triggered, here are a list of resources that are available for support:

### **Youth Chat**

Open from 12 PM to 1 AM in BC and the Yukon Territory.

Visit [www.youthinbc.com](http://www.youthinbc.com) to join a one-on-one chatroom. A crisis responder that will connect you with support, information and resources.

### **Kids Help Phone**

Text CONNECT to 686868

Depression. Self-care. Anxiety. Relationships. Thoughts of suicide. Sometimes, we may want help with something on our mind, but we're not sure how to get started. And if we're dealing with an issue we find hard to talk about, like a crisis, it can be tough to say it out loud.

With Crisis Text Line you can chat with a trained, volunteer crisis responder for support any time, about anything, via text message. Our texting service is free and available across Canada 24/7. You **don't need a data plan, Internet connection or an app to use it.**

You'll be connected to a volunteer crisis responder who can talk to you about any issue — big or small. You can end the conversation at any time by texting the word STOP. (This means that we won't send you any more messages unless you text again).

### **Vancouver Island Crisis Line**

1-888-494-3888

Vancouver Island Crisis Line is for people in emotional crisis, including suicide and mental health issues. In addition to their 24-hour crisis line, they also offer a crisis chat in the evenings through the chat icon on their site.



**Youth Space**

778-783-0177

Youth space is a Victoria based online resource for youth (under the age of 25) that provides live one on one chat, forums, e-counselling and an extensive online resource database.

The text support number works in much the same way as their online chat does and the hours are also the same (6pm-12am, every night).

**Canada Suicide Prevention Line**

Call 833-456-4566, open 24/7.