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Revenge
is
Sweet

REVENGE

Volume I

*Retaliating through the
written word against
Others who would speak
for us...*

New York Harm Reduction Educators, Inc.

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Artwork by Juan Nolasco



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An Introduction by Mary Egan
Writer's Group Facilitator

The one thing people have that no one can take away is their stories. When it happens that all is taken including one's name, and replaced with a number, or a label, or a status, then it is the stories people have that sustain them. From the days of Homer and beyond, the most feared fate was to die and to be buried without a name. We have all read of men kept in solitary confinement for years whose only salvation was to tell themselves stories, even if they were the same stories - told to the walls.

Like most at New York Harm Reduction, I started as a volunteer. Though the sites where I worked changed, and the seasons, and the faces of the people waiting for help changed, one thing did not: peoples' stories. When everything is lost: when there is no home, no bed, no food, I have heard people tell stories. In the hot afternoons on 110th Street in Harlem, or in the early winter darkness waiting in lines, I have heard stories, incredible stories. However, the tales that I heard - most of them heartbreakingly true - evaporated like smoke into the sky. I had to make others hear; especially those who think those with nothing are nothing.

Some of the stories are here. The majority are written by people who never wrote before, or never graduated from high school. Some of these stories are humorous. Other tales will tell of powder girls, and silver skies spread like a sheet of tin foil across the city. These are stories written about the daily crucifixions of being sick, and homeless; of vacant lots, and riding the A train all night until dawn; of the luminous beauty of that dawn; of falling in love, and of friendly bathrooms. Whatever the subject matter, though, you will find that these tales have been honed to a sharp, hypodermic edge of honesty.

NYHRE Mission Statement

New York Harm Reduction Educators, Inc. (NYHRE) is devoted to promoting the health, safety and well-being of marginalized, low-income persons who use drugs, their loved ones and their communities.

NYHRE recognizes the historical, structural, socio-economic and environmental inequalities that foster adverse outcomes among drug users, particularly those from communities of color.

Vigorously advocating for social justice, we strive to redress these disparities by providing vital resources, tools and support that enhance quality of life and facilitate the prevention of diseases disproportionately affecting persons who use drugs, including HIV and viral hepatitis.

To this end, we deliver integrated health and social services that promote physical, psychological, social and spiritual wellness. Utilizing a grass roots approach, we prioritize peer involvement in all aspects of our programming.

worn. The fact that something was stolen never stopped
 any thief in a shelter from brazenly displaying his looted
 goods the next day; this usually meant wearing someone
 else's clothing, a coat, a hat, the occasional guitar or saxo-
 phone. No amount of protests from the innocent injured
 shelter inhabitant could undo what had been done. His
 jacket was gone, as inexorably gone as the sun from the
 sky at dusk.
 In full view of the guards doing rounds, and with the full
 knowledge of the guards in their cushioned office chairs
 at the ends of the halls, men stole one from another.
 Some men stole inanimate objects; others specialized in
 stealing innocence. The guards knew, and the men knew
 that there was no way to sleep in any of the shelters
 unless you could take a pill or a drink to make you uncon-
 scious enough to get through those sounds. While the
 men lay on their urine stained, often blood stained foam
 rubber slabs on their rusted, bolted down iron cots -
 holdovers from the days when Camp LaGuardia had been
 a women's prison the sounds of the men in the bed next
 to you copulating, squealing, grunting, stinking, was dis-
 tracting. On hot summer nights, a thousand sweaty, dirty
 bodies made the smell of testosterone, without benefit of
 air conditioners or fans for the most part, all pervasive.
 In the bathrooms, all night long in the White House - the
 building where the drug problems resided, the men sat in
 their stalls - minus doors, shower curtains, mostly ripped
 and useless filled in for doors, dealing and doing drugs.

SEGUE WAYS
 Back in the day when I was young, dumb and naive to
 say the least, to say it politely, I was celebrating my
 date of birth and someone had a wicked devil of a gift
 for me. Clear Tape was the name and it came in a
 small, screaming, waxed paper bag. Large and furi-
 ous was its legend.
 I remember how I sat all crunched and crooked, easily
 mistaken for a remnant of an Addam's Family outing.
 Pop went the pin that pricked me ever so loudly, and
 up went that rush of warmth and a fury only second to
 a storm. Up came my lunch and who knows what else
 I had stored in my stomach. The very sight of me
 would've sent the clergy afoot and away, back, back
 ever so worried that a crucifix and holy water could
 possibly placate me. Oh did I hate that drug. But I fell
 in love. The fury that was still in me didn't yet get to
 kill me.
 It was the 7th of Never. How I remain in that day.
 You see, he's my buddy, my pal, my very, very, best
 friend, as they say. The wives are at work. It's our day
 off. What a beauty that day, the 7th of Never.
 We split three bags and a zanax or two. We laughed
 and we shared our deepest most fears. It's my God-
 son's - his son's - birthday, that 7th of Never. I can
 never forget Toys 'r Us at the mall, but who do we
 think we have fooled? Ah, it was me that I fooled and

of the men at La Guardia Camp have been there for years, so many years that they are forgotten men. They don't read, they don't talk or watch television; they don't shower or shave; they don't change clothes; they walk the grounds all day and the only thing they know is when food is served. They look like zombies.

Then there is another generation of younger men in their thirties - you have to be the senatorial age to go to Camp LaGuardia; in other words, the age of thirty is the required age for admission. These younger men belong to the generation that deals in drugs. On a daily basis they take the free Cheese Line Bus to the city, buy a smorgasbord of drugs for cheaper prices because they're buying in quantity, return that night on The Cheese Line and sell all the drugs for double, sometimes triple the price.

Then there are those who spent all day playing cards, dominoes and spades. They had a pool house at various times in the drug rehab. Then there were others who watched television all day, but if anyone suggested they take a shower they were ready to kill you. You had to sleep in your clothes, even in the summer. There were no air conditioners; an occasional fan, if you were lucky. You had twenty five men to a room. All night long you smelled them, especially those aforementioned inhabitants of The Camp who refused showers and didn't change their clothing. If you washed your only pair of socks in the sink, for example, and hung them to dry on the bars at the head of your bed, they'd be gone when you

PLATO'S CAVE I

Plato taught his students on a hill (thus the origin of the term Higher Education) thousands of years ago. Today most colleges are still on hills.

One day Plato was late for class and his student, Aristotle, said, "Let's ask him a question he cannot answer." Plato knew his crew was up to no good when they said, "Plato, you are a wise and learned man, answer us this: if we all went into the same cave at the same time and lit the same size candles at the same moment, how could I make mine shine brightest?"

Plato went into the Greek Thinker's pose: hand to his down-turned head. He answered. "One can go to the darkest corner of this cave where the walls are coldest, wettest, and the smelliest of rock. One can go where darkness is darkest, not light. Here the silver, glimmering glow of your flame will be that much brighter."

Plato said to the next student, Take your candle to a place of stone, the slimy boulders of this cave will reflect its glow more brightly."

The next student was told to take his candle to a well in the cave. Plato said, "Place your candle near the water; the glow will be many times bright."

To Aristotle, finally, Plato spoke. He said, "Blow out everyone's' candles, and yours, my friend, will shine brightest of all."

By NYHRE Participant

Being skipped in school and some of my peers being held back, I was the youngest in the crowd. I didn't go to parties that I was invited to. I guess I didn't measure up. I felt more comfortable with my friends from the project. Then R's family moved across town. I followed. I started staying out nights at a time. My mother threatened to call the police and put me in a home. I can thank God she never did.

I met my first child's mother around this time. I thought she was good looking. She liked R. For some reason he didn't like her that much. I started baby-sitting with her. We started going out. Faced with these responsibilities, I guess we felt like we were husband and wife. In November of 1974 her mother sent word through the woman I was baby-sitting for that my girlfriend's mother wanted to speak with me. I got along well with her mother, so I had no idea of how serious the matter was. LA was eight months pregnant. She said, "How you'll do this to me? What'm I going to tell my mother?" If it was earlier in the pregnancy, she would have expected LA to get an abortion.

At the time I felt I was ready to be a father. I didn't have a clue. My mother and sister told her mother they would help out. It took me one month to start making bad decisions. I dropped out of high school in the twelfth grade. My excuse was I have to get a job to help support S. I was so in a hurry to prove myself; I didn't think of the danger of leaving school.

By: NYHRE Participant

WHEN THE MUSIC STOPS PLAYING

Music in my day was first heard on a.m. radio. (Yes, try to imagine no f.m. stereo.) And we called the music we listened to "Sweet Soul Music." And we jammed to the D.J.'s sounds of men like Garry Bird, Hal Jackson, Jerry Bloodstone (who is Tempest Bloodstone's Father - the girl from the Cosby's show: Vanessa.) Yes, the sweet sayings from the D.J.'s mouths like, "If you suck my soul, I'll lick your funky emotions," and "If we all could live forever, I would only want to live forever minus one day. So I wouldn't know nice people like you passed away." I was too young to feel those words the way I feel them now. I couldn't see, touch, or share my understanding. I now live for every breath of life I breathe. The words that say it best are, "That's when the music stops playing." That's when we played our last 45's, L.P.'s, 8-track tapes, cassettes, CD's, and videos. We hummed our last tune, sang along with our last favorite artist. We mimicked our last pop star, relived our last pop star, relived our last James Brown step. We did our best piece two floor tom-toms on an imaginary drum set on loan from Buddie Miles, then borrowed a 6 string lead electric guitar from brother Hendrix as we performed to a jam-packed audience a solo of The Star Spangled Banner, or even brought the whole house to tears as only a LaBelle performer named Pattie could;

