

not occur to me that the blood was coming from my rectum. He kept this up every weekend thereafter. I was not able to tell the truth to my foster parents for fear I would be the one to get in trouble. It did not occur to me that he was doing something wrong.

After living with these foster parents for four and a half years, I was placed in another home. Here I was introduced to pot and sniffing glue, again by someone much older than I. He would tell me how much he loved me. I had to show him my love.

By then, my life was filled with confusion and total isolation. There is fear, shame, guilt, anger, rage and even blame directed at myself. Add to this that I was about to enter into the teen years. Somehow I thought I was perceived as a useless piece of a human. After all that I had been through, this is what I thought. Between the ages of twelve and nineteen I was to see more foster homes. At one there was an introduction to more humiliation. At some point I remember being tied to a tree and made to eat the grass around it. I can't remember what I had done to deserve this only what it made me feel like. I felt like an animal. I even thought that of myself, at least inside that somehow, everyone else saw it too.

It was during this time period that I tried to kill myself by hanging and then by suffocation. By this time in my life I was starving for attention and affection. I would do anything to get it. When I did not get what I had to come to understand as normal attention, I thought there must be something wrong with me. It did not matter what I did, for it was never good enough, at least in my own eyes and heart. I had friends, even though looking back now they were as quiet as me. I wonder now if they were being abused at home. They knew very little about me and I knew very little about them. I was always terrified if they knew my past they would run away. This was to go on for some time. Try to imagine not letting people too close and yet at the same time needing and wanting to be liked and yes, even Loved. Still I did not know how to ask for what was needed to fill a continuing void.

Out of all the foster homes I stayed in only one foster parent molested me (one too many wouldn't you say?). He would come into my room to tuck me in at night and rub his arm over my genital area until I was aroused. Then he would tell me how bad I was for getting aroused. My punishment then, was that I had to do the same to him. Sometimes I would be left at home alone to think about why I got aroused and would have to tell him when he got home. It was at the age of seventeen that I introduced myself to Alcohol. I thought I had arrived. Now I could laugh sing dance and yes, even CRY. My first drunk session was a blackout. I was to have many more. One thing you the reader need to know; I blame no one for my alcoholism. That was and still is my responsibility.

The last of my abuse (well somewhat the last) took place in a group home and school not very far from Columbia. The name of the home is unimportant. What happened there is very much the opposite. I was a senior. What to most is the happiest time of their lives was a living nightmare. A teacher took a liking to me. He would have me come over to his home after school with the pretence that I needed extra help with my schoolwork. What I found myself doing was giving him oral sex for cigarettes. The way it got found out was that someone else he was "helping" discovered what was going on and told the group home. I am not sure what he told them; what I am sure of is that I was taken out of the classroom with my peers for the last month and half. I studied and worked in a second

grade room after everyone else had left. I was not allowed to eat or sleep with other people for fear I might "do something" to them. I lived in the infirmary. It was decided that I would not be going to graduation with the rest of my class. I was told this was so that I wouldn't be embarrassed about "my affair" with the teacher.

Looking back, it was their own embarrassment they were trying to avoid. I finally got my diploma when someone risked their job to take me to the school. When we arrived at the school, my diploma was thrown at me. I was told that I should be ashamed that I had ruined a teacher's career. When I got back on campus a few days later I packed my things and left. As I was leaving I was told, "It's about time you left". These words stuck with me for a very long time.

Perhaps in these writings that is just what I have done. I am no longer willing to live with the shame, guilt, anger and blame. After all I was a child with the needs and wants of a child. Only others chose to use and abuse me for their own selfish pleasure. Enough. I am a Male who once was a victim who is now becoming a survivor. I am alive and growing stronger every day.

For me life at nineteen was no easier than it had been in the past. I was soon to be out from under the title of Ward of the State. After all that, is about all it was. My last foster home was in Gilbert, South Carolina. There I got my first paying job. Also this is where I meet my first partner. Before I go any further there is one more thing I must say about myself. I am a Gay Male. That in itself has a story behind it. I will say for the record that being gay is nothing to be ashamed of. It took me many years living in fear of what others would think or say if I was to say a thing like that public. Say what you want to. In my heart of hearts I know I am a Child of God. Now that this is said, back to the story.

When I met that partner I had no clue what it was to be in a relationship other than that which I experienced through childhood. I was to have many years living with this person with that mind set. Now, looking back I was still searching for a father figure, someone to take care of my every need. I did not understand or think I could take care of myself. No one had told me I could. We stayed together for almost ten years. During this time I became an every day drunk. For a very short period of time it helped me to be social in settings I had not ever been in. Like bars.

I thought I had found where I belonged. Soon though, I was to learn that to keep friends from the bars, I had to be willing to do what I thought every one wanted me to. One day my partner and I decided that we were no longer in love. We went our separate ways; yet I was to keep coming back to him over and over. There were many other reasons why this relationship did not last. One of the most important was that I was very immature.

Well, I finally got my first place. Boy did I cry that night. I felt so alone. Of course my first response was to go out and get drunk. This again worked for a short period of time. I allowed others to use my body many more times than I care to remember when I did not have the money to buy that next drink. You see, Drinking became my most important friend. It helped to numb the pain of the past. Well one day it stopped working. The alcohol became my Master.

During this time I was to work many different jobs, not sure what I wanted to do, or for that matter could do. By this time my self esteem, self worth, and self-confidence were almost as low as one can get. The first ray of hope that came my way was through meeting a friend; his name is Jay. He was to become someone I could go to and talk about things I had not dared share with anyone; nor did I think anyone else would care. He did and still does.

Then the day came when I was offered a job out of the state of South Carolina. Through much encouragement from Jay and a few other friends I took the job. It took me to Chicago IL. There the biggest change was to occur. After staying in a motel for a month I was told either to find a place or move back to South Carolina. Well I found a place. Only I found much more than that. On February 18 I went to my first AA meeting.

There for the first time I admitted I was an alcoholic and that I need help. For the next 11 months I was to do a lot of crying and trying. Crying for things lost from childhood and trying to understand the effects that they had on me. I came back to Columbia just knowing for sure that I would be able to find a Male group of Survivors, only to be told I had to be on a list. If enough others came forward then there could be a group. Well I knew there had to be a group somewhere. So I went on a search. It led me to Orlando.

There I found what I had needed and had been wanting. I discovered there four of the most courageous men I had ever met. You see, they were Survivors just like me. We were to share parts of our life we had not spoken of until then. To tell you it was easy from that point on would be a lie, for it was something I would have to learn to live with for the rest of my life. Now, however I no longer have to be ashamed of who and what I am. After all I am a caring, loving, hoping, trying kind of guy.

My name by the way is Elden Phillip Owens. I no longer choose to stand on the sidelines of life and watch it go by. Instead it is time for me to come completely out. Though I never knew Matthew Shepard I knew what it was like to live in fear, shame, guilt and blame. No more. Matthew, you will be missed by a brother you never met. That is a Gay brother. It took me until I was thirty-one years old to begin realizing that I was and still am somebody. There have been many people who have helped me in my life for the last three and a half years. Thanks to each and every one of you for believing in me when at times I could not.

I hope this will help some others to realize just how twisted a person can get from what is seemingly such a simple act. In writing these, there are still other things that are left out. Not because I wanted to, but only because the space was limited. Thanks again. I must say that at this very moment my