



SINGAPORE  
PRISON SERVICE

CAPTAINS OF LIVES  
REHAB • RENEW • RESTART

# Waiting for You



**HOPE . INSPIRATION**

**A COMPILATION OF STORIES**





# Preface

“Waiting For You” comprises 22 narratives written from the perspectives of the drug abusers’ families. These narratives provide family members the opportunity to freely voice their grievances and difficulties. Readers can experience their struggles through the lens of the affected family members and journey with them as they go head on with these obstacles.


Embark on a roller coaster of emotions as the 22 families describe their predicament in vivid detail, pouring out their bottled frustrations. Readers will witness the destructive nature of drugs on the family, from financial difficulties to fatigue and helplessness of the family members when the drug abuser relapses yet again. The lure of drugs is alien to the family members, to the extent that they would willingly try drugs to understand their drug-abusing loved ones better.

It is not all doom and gloom for drug abusers. Even as the tormenting fire of the dragon that they once chased breathes upon them, there is still hope. Some families do give up after extensive struggles, but the families in these narratives chose to cling on to the hope that a brighter future awaits, no matter how far they have gone – be it to the edge of the Earth, or the depths of the sea.

This compilation seeks to bring out the saliency and gravity of the family’s struggles brought about by drug-use and its resulting behaviours. The stories seek to inspire and instill hope in the inmates, and to motivate them to stay on the path of recovery.

*Brought to you by the DRC's Family Engagement Workgroup  
Singapore Prison Service*

*Note: Names and locales have been changed to protect the identities of family members*





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# Can You Hear My Heartaches?



"If he could hear my heartaches, he would know that his mother wants nothing more than for him to be forever free from the shackles of drugs"

If my heartaches had a voice, what do you think they would say? At the age of 68, I have been through settling my husband's gambling debts, a divorce, raising my 2 sons singlehandedly, cleaning up my son's debts incurred from drug addiction and watching my sons' relationship with each other destroyed. This sums up the story of my life; a life that revolved around three men. I never had the time nor the opportunity to look after myself. Today, I continue to work to pay off outstanding debts on behalf of my son. For them, I remain frugal to make ends meet. For them, I cannot afford to purchase a flat to call my own. For them, I distanced myself from my siblings to avoid unwanted conversations about my family. If my heartaches had a voice, what do you think you would hear?

My marriage was a difficult one. My ex-husband was a gambler who did not care for this family. Throughout our marriage, I had to continuously help him pay off his gambling debts. I eventually filed for a divorce as I felt that the marriage was going nowhere, and I feared that my two sons would role-model after their father. I slogged through two jobs then as I had two other mouths to feed. Every day, I left home before the sun was up and

only returned when the sky was dark. Much as I wanted to be with my boys, I had to make money to put food on the table.

If life took a 90-degree sharp turn after my divorce, the bend became more arduous to navigate when I discovered that my younger son James was on drugs. James was in his twenties when I noticed something amiss. He lost weight rapidly and languished at home for long periods without work. He would deny it whenever I raised my suspicions, but my heart sank the day he was arrested for drug consumption. Where did the son who once excelled in both school and work disappear to?

The path that James chose did not just affect his life. It brought unexpected destruction to our family in so many ways. I had prayed so hard for my sons not to follow in their father's footsteps, but it seems my prayer was not answered. James's drug addiction resulted in colossal debts and once again, I was back to settling debts. As if this was not enough for a mother to bear, I also had to witness the breakdown of my sons' relationship with each other. James's brother could not tolerate his behaviours and was constantly furious with



me for fending for and defending James. It was heart-wrenching to be sandwiched between my sons and nothing I did appeased anyone. At times, when I close my eyes, I wish that this would not be my life when I reopen my eyes.

I must persist for James's sake. But has James ever spared a thought for his suffering mother? Once, our church pastor informed me that James was contemplating suicide. With a heavy heart, I rushed to James who remained completely indifferent to my concern. I felt an acute pain in my heart and all I could think of was why my son would consider ending his life despite his mother's struggle to support him in every way possible. How powerful are drugs that they can create so much damage and change a person so drastically? When James was sober, he was the perfect son. He was kind, caring and considerate towards almost everyone. I was touched when he helped with the household chores and bought me food. He taught me how to converse in English too. He extended help to others and would often ask if he could donate groceries to friends who were in need. This was James without drugs; endearing and likeable.

You would probably not like James on drugs. He was demanding and unreasonable. He would disappear without a trace for days on end. When he was home again, he instructed me to buy him food with stronger flavors or he would refuse to eat. These were signs that he was back on drugs. I could never understand why; I had thought that he was enjoying his work and performing well as he was promoted. What drove him to return to this detestable habit again? Would someone explain this to me?

In James's current sentence, I am showing support by visiting him and bringing him everything he had requested. During these visits, I take care not to mention anything that might cause him stress. I wish I could talk to my son about my woes and worries but he comes first, and I should not burden him so that he can focus on his rehabilitation. I have assured him that he does not have to support me financially as I am still fit enough to work. I will persevere and do my best to help with his outstanding debts. I have no one to talk to, so I will say here that I once had to delay my dental treatment at the expense of my health as I could not afford it.

There was also a time when I did not have an income for five consecutive months, and I had to tighten my purse strings just to survive. I could never share these with my son for fear that he would be stressed. If I had to choose all over again, I would still choose to sacrifice myself.



If there was a button to end all these heartaches, I would press it with all my strength and refuse to let go. "I will change.", were once words of hope and music to my ears. Dismally, these hopes have been crushed time and again. I am numb and I need more than words to convince me now. If James could hear my heartaches, he would know that his mother's love is eternal. He would know that his mother would support him until her very last breath. He would know that she wants nothing more than for him to be forever free from the shackles of drugs.



# He Ain't Heavy: He's My Brother

**"I WILL NOT WASH MY HANDS OFF YOU AS WE ARE CONNECTED BY BLOOD. I ONLY ASK THAT YOU TRY TO REBUILD YOUR LIFE."**

I cannot remember the last time we were all together as a family. Before Mother passed, you had someone to watch over you and help you make the right decisions. She loved you so much and only hoped to see the day you become a changed man. After her demise, I had to step up to care for you since I am the only family you have left. But I am married with my own family and you are turning 49. Don't you think it is time you started taking some responsibility for yourself as a mature adult?

I am plagued with worries for you. I worry about the people you hang out with. I wonder how you allowed yourself to be influenced by them time and again. Despite my constant reminders for you to surround yourself with the right crowd, I guess you found it hard as you considered your friends to be safe and familiar. You know that your nephews and I are always here for you; we have told you to come to us anytime. Unfortunately, it sometimes feels as if I am talking to a wall whenever I try to start conversations with you. Perhaps it is awkward for you but please understand that we want to accompany you on your recovery journey.

Brother, this is your ninth time in prison. You have said you would change at least nine times in your life. Your words have never translated into actions and your promises never materialized. I know it is hard and it hurts me to see you lead a life trapped in this vicious cycle. I feel hopeful when I see how others have turned their lives around after multiple incarcerations and I wish the same for you.

It is heart-breaking to know that your children and relatives have deemed you incapable of change. I cannot blame them for thinking this way, but I refuse to accept that you cannot change. I know you can live a life of hope without dope. Please tell me what else needs to happen to make you realize that it is high time to turn your life around? I stopped visiting you in prison not because I stopped caring. I have not given up on you. I just need you to understand that we lose our loved ones along the way when we make them feel unimportant, or when we do not reciprocate their care and concern. While I am doing my best to help you, it is important that you help yourself too. I will not stop loving and caring for you but this will not be enough until you give me your hand to hold.

I am trying to recall what you were like before you became addicted to drugs. Honestly, it has been so long and I do not know if I can experience you as your former self ever again. I will not wash my hands off you as we are connected by blood. I only ask that you try to rebuild your life. You are capable in so many ways and it is time for you to reflect on what is really preventing you from change.



# Help Me Help You

My dear son, you were such a good kid in school, and you always helped with household chores. Till today, I still wonder what happened after secondary school that led you down this path. I have seen you go into prison multiple times but the one that hurts the most was when we were having breakfast at home, and the police barged in to arrest you. You hugged me and said, "Mummy, I'm sorry". Seeing them arrest you really broke me.

In the past, you would always get into trouble because of your friends. Haven't you noticed that they were taking advantage of you because you are easy-going? What have your friends done for you that I have not? What do you think your friends can do for you that I cannot? When you are in prison, they are not there for you. Friends come and go. But your family is always here waiting and looking forward to your release. Do you think it is fair that you always prioritize your friends before us?

I just want to say that I appreciate all the times you have looked out for me when you were out. You accompanied me on my medical checkups and grocery shopping. It may not sound like a big deal to others but for me, it is precious time spent with my son. Sadly, you went back to prison, and I feel all alone once again. I never imagined that I would have no one to depend on at this age.

Please help me understand what makes it so hard to quit drugs. Is there something I need to know about your drug addiction to be able to help you better? As a mother, I will never give up on you. But my dear son, I am weary of living this way, are you not? I have nothing left to give, as much as I would like to. You seem to have taken for granted that I am always here to clean up after your mess. How would you feel if you woke up in prison one day and were told that I have left this world? I watched a documentary and cried when an inmate shared that he learnt of his mother's death when he saw her picture in the obituary. Is that when you will finally wake up and realize it is too late?

You have always had the freedom to choose what you wanted to do with your life. Instead of choosing to live purposefully, you chose this path. I was pleasantly surprised to hear that this time you have chosen to take up courses to improve your work skills. I hope you understand how making this choice was yours and how you can make good decisions. I am also excited by the prospect of us working together, as you sounded enthusiastic about my online business. When you are out, there will be many people willing to support you. The question is: Are you ready to give up your old habits and let people help you get better? Are you willing to forge a better future for yourself? Can you trust the learning process and not be easily discouraged? Although people may see incarceration as a negative experience, I see it as an opportunity for you to learn from your mistakes and make changes.

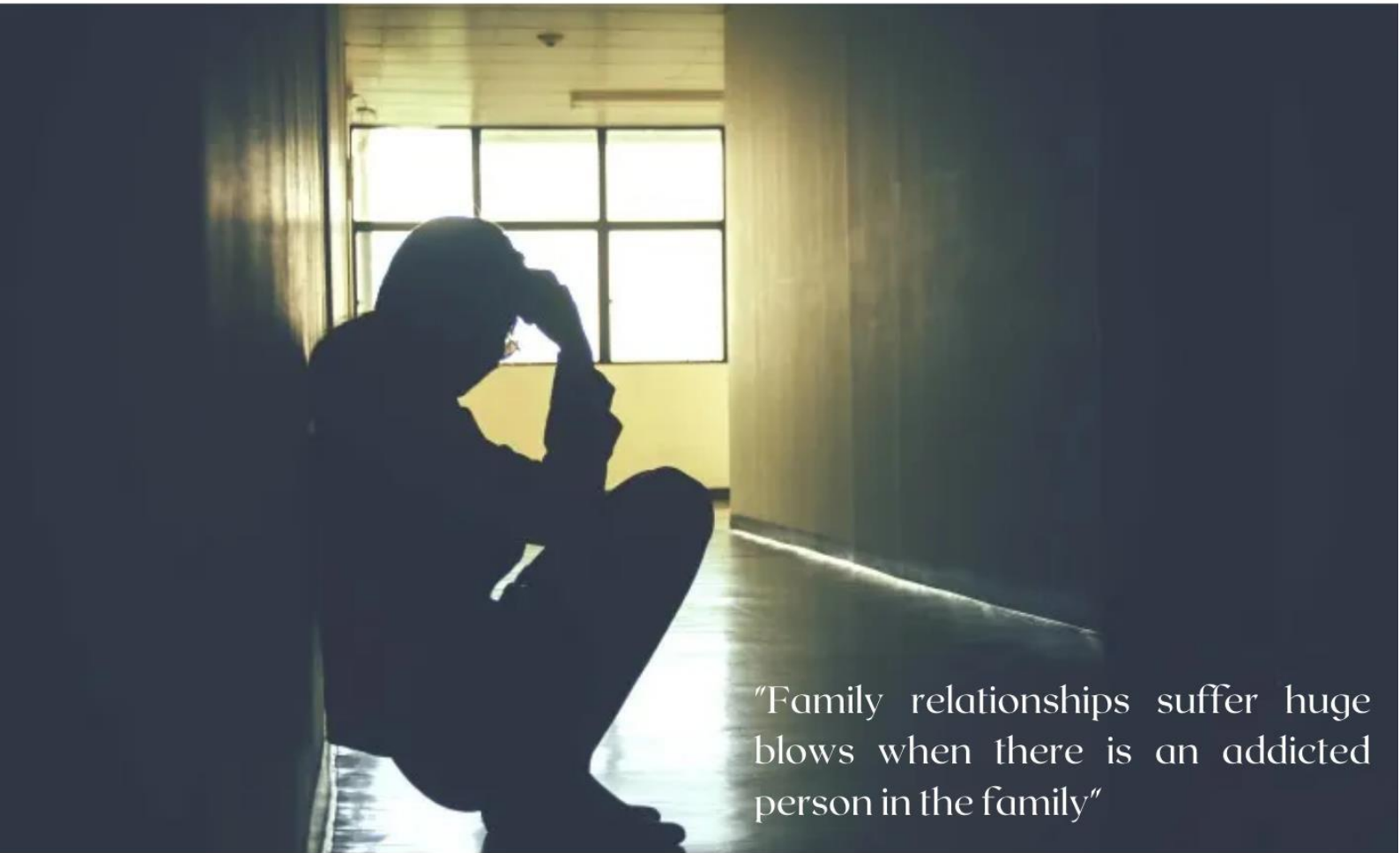
Our family will always pray for you and support you. I do not care what anyone says about you. You are my son, and I know you can live a better life. We cannot change the past, but we can work on the future. I believe you can be responsible for others and yourself. I hope one day you would be responsible enough to have your own family. I hope to see some changes in your actions rather than just hearing your empty promises. I just want you to change for yourself. That way I will die happy knowing you did something for yourself. You will always be Mama's baby, and I miss you so much.

**"We may have our differences, but nothing's more important than family."**

**-Coco**



# Caught in the Middle



"Family relationships suffer huge blows when there is an addicted person in the family"

I sensed something different about my brother when he was released two weeks ago. He has been in and out of prisons for almost 50 years. In fact, he had spent more time in prisons than outside, given his fast relapses. This time round, I had the feeling he would really change. Maybe age has made him wiser. Maybe my endless nagging has finally paid off. I have always told him "If you choose to lead your life like that then it is up to you"; "If you want to die faster then please take more drugs"; "This time if you go in you will die inside". It is not that I enjoy cursing him, I just want him to be aware of the consequences. Afterall, he is already 67 years old, with heart issues and two strokes.

My brother is now living with me after his release. Looking at him sitting on the wheelchair, I cannot help but feel a mixture of emotions – sad, angry, frustrated, happy and relieved. I wonder how different his life would have been without drugs. He could have become a captain. He was lucky and had the opportunity to travel to a few

countries during his work as a sailor. We would have celebrated our birthdays together as we shared the same birth dates. How exceptional is it for siblings to share the same birth dates? The rare opportunity to celebrate our birthdays together in 2014 was the happiest memory I had with him.

During his absence, a lot has changed within our family. Our mother and sister had passed away. It was my mother's biggest wish to have him beside her when she took her last breath. Sadly, he was not around. Imagine the heartbreak and yearning she had to take with her. The relationships between him and our other siblings became distant too. Even though he played his role as a brother by buying things for us, his repeated incarcerations angered and disappointed the family. My sister chased him out of the house when he lost his temper under the influence of drugs. He would destroy things around the house and all he seemed to care about was using drugs.



I cannot help but think how different my life could have turned out if my brother were never involved in drugs. For one, I would not have had to witness my mother's prolonged suffering; a mother who lived a life fraught with disappointments and worries for him. She instructed me to look after my brother, for she was afraid that her death would mean that my brother would forever be alone. How could I defy a loving mother's wishes? I visited my brother monthly in prison. It was exhausting as I work night shifts. I resented the long journey to prison in exchange for short visits. However, I pressed on as I wanted to bring him his favorite magazines and show him that I am here for him. I also wanted to know how he was doing.

Family relationships suffer huge blows when there is an addicted person in the family. Overtime, negative feelings build up and bitterness creeps in. This happened in my family too. I noticed how awkward it was for my siblings in my brother's presence. They avoided speaking to him. Despite my explanations that we are all connected by blood and that we are humans who make mistakes, my siblings would counter argue that our brother was incapable of change. They had also accused me of siding with him excessively. I wish this distance between my brother and siblings can be bridged; if only he showed them that he can change.

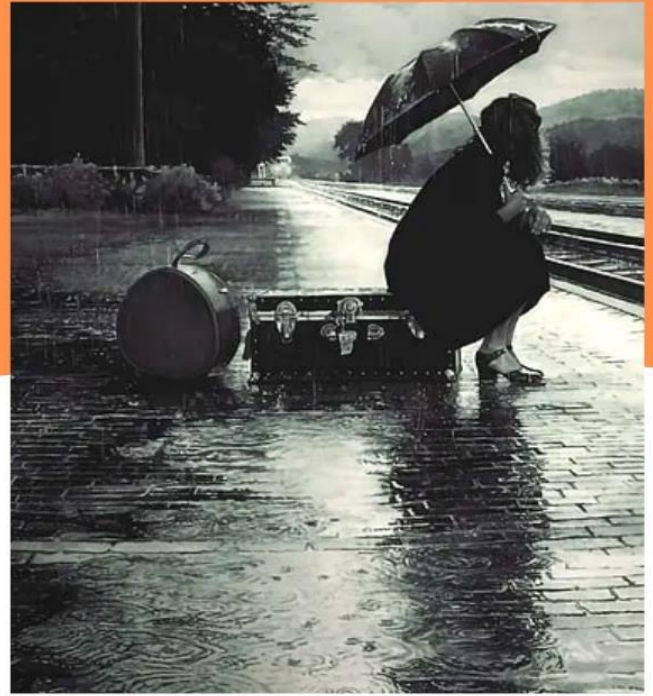
I am also sandwiched between my son and my brother. My son once reported him to CNB when he caught his uncle using drugs. Although I knew that my son did it with good intentions, I could not help but feel upset that he did not give his uncle another chance. When I invited my brother to move into my home, my son decided to move out. It is emotionally draining to be constantly caught in the middle, yet I cannot choose one over the other as I care deeply for both. I am leaving my inheritance to my brother because I am worried that he would have no means to care for himself if something were to happen to me. I cannot imagine how my son would react if he found out, but I hope he understands my position. I am tired of trying to appease everyone and being the sole supporter for my brother.

Looking at my brother now gives me a huge sense of peace as I know that for now, he is safe from drugs. Simple things such as seeing him enjoy his

television programmes, eating the food I prepare and being here to listen to my rants are sufficient to bring me immense happiness. I wish that these simple joys are enough for my brother too. He has nothing else to worry about as I will continue to do my best to support him. Ma, as you look down from above, please know that I have fulfilled your wishes by being here for your beloved son, my dear brother.



# A Mother's Unanswered Questions



I am 84 years old and I have been living with uncertainties since 1991 when Fazi was in his 20s. My heart has ached for 29 years as I carry around a bag of unanswered questions concerning Fazi's chronic drug problems. To this day, I cannot comprehend why Fazi had to "eat" drugs over and over again. What problems did he face that repeatedly drove him down this path? I reminisced the period before Fazi became addicted to drugs. He was a good son. Although a little quiet, he had a pleasant and polite demeanour about him. He was an independent child who even helped take care of his sisters when I was at work. He rarely asked me for money; and would never help himself to anything that did not belong to him. I have never had to discipline or punish him as he was extremely well-behaved.

So why did he change? Was it peer influence? Even so, how could I blame his friends? He has a thinking brain with an ability to make choices and decisions. No one force-fed him with drugs. And if he was indeed influenced, what made him listen to his friends and disregard his mother's advice? Do people who use drugs not really know who has their best interests at heart? Or do they not care?

My most dreadful and painful memory was of Fazi's 4th incarceration. I felt as though someone had ripped my heart out and shredded it into pieces. It was during the period when all my other children started leaving my home to build their own families. Fazi was hauled back to prison. Although I did not show it, I was lonely, afraid and crumbling inside. I wondered why Fazi did not think of how much his mother needed him. Was I not important at all? Did he not consider my feelings, even for a little bit? I cannot begin to count the number of times I have cried oceans of tears when I learnt of Fazi's relapse. Fazi said he did not like to see me cry, so why did he continuously act in ways that brought tears and sorrows to me?

I called the police to arrest him on one occasion. It was not because I wanted to see him back in prison. Rather, I knew he would lose control of his drug use if he remained out there. It was unsafe for him. As a mother, I only know of two choices. Either I watch my son spiral further into his drug use and die from it, or I get him arrested so that he would at least be safe from drugs. The second option felt right. Yet, when he was arrested, I was burdened with more questions swirling in my head. "Why? Why did he do it again?" "What was so delicious about drugs?" I was desperately seeking answers so I asked the CNB officer if he could let me try some drugs. All the officer said was, "Don't be crazy, Aunty!"



“Fazi said he did not like to see me cry, so why did he continuously act in ways that brought tears and sorrow to me?”

I went around seeking clarity on my son’s drug problems. The religious leader at the Halfway House told me to support Fazi and pray for him. That was exactly what I have been doing every single day for the last 3 decades. I have prayed all the way to the Holy City of Mecca. I have stood by him, encouraged and supported him in every way possible. What more am I supposed to do? This is my only son. I am not willing to see his downfall. Will I give up on him? Definitely not. But why does it feel like he has given up on me? I tried to find comfort by talking to my friends who reminded me to be patient. It has been so long. Have I not exercised enough patience? Another question crossed my mind. Was Fazi facing marital issues that led him to his relapse? Why did he let his wife go? She was such a good woman. Was there another secret he was keeping from me? I do not know.

I have asked Fazi these questions hoping that his answers would help me understand him and his situation better. Every time I asked, he either laughed it off or kept silent. Occasionally, I would feel a flicker of hope when he promised to change. Other than that, I am still in the dark. I do not think he would answer my questions. Perhaps he is looking for answers himself. All I know is that this is a test from the Almighty and I place my faith in His plans. I pray not just for Fazi but for all prisoners and their families. I hope all prisoners realize the struggles their families go through in their absence. And I pray we will find the answers to all our questions; the kind of questions I have asked and am still asking.





# A Wife's Wish: 50/50

"I realised that he had to learn to be responsible for his actions too. And now I want him to take this task on, 50/50... I believe he can."

Ismail is my husband. I cannot quite remember if this is the 3rd or 4th time that he has gone to prison. All I remember is that it hurt more each time it happened. Honestly, we were a close-knit family; we talked, laughed and had engaging conversations. Unfortunately, Ismail succumbed to drugs when I failed to give him the attention he needed. I realized that Ismail's behaviors started to change when I became busy with my home-based business, managing the household and tending to our two teenage boys. I felt blamed for his relapse as he repeatedly pointed out to me that I did not give him enough attention. But I wonder if it was entirely my fault.

He told me that he started taking drugs due to curiosity and peer influence. Overtime, I witnessed him becoming dependent on drugs. When he was using, he seemed to forget about the family that has been supporting him, the good times we spent enjoying our weekend meals together and the beautiful conversations we had. All he had in his mind were his friends and drugs. Really, who should we blame here? I hope there would come a time where we no longer need to accord blame or find faults with each other. Time and effort could be channelled to understanding each other; prevention is easier than cure.

It hurt me badly when he started to lie after he went back to drugs. I always believed that the last incarceration was the final one. I chose to believe him time and again because I had faith that he would not go back to his old friends and old ways. His words always felt comforting to me. However, I felt defeated whenever I found out the truth. I felt even more devastated when I saw him experiencing withdrawals. Ismail was a nice and kind man when he was sober but would become easily angered and irritable when he was on drugs. There were times when I felt like giving up, but I am still here today because I believe that with the proper care and attention, he can and will change. He just needs to fight the negative peer influence and strengthen his resilience.

I raised our sons to deeply love and respect their father no matter where he was. I also raised them to understand that they needed to take responsibility for their actions, as portrayed by their father's incarcerations. My sons understood and accepted my advice. Like me, they also believed their father can change with proper love, care and attention.

I used to think that it was all my fault that my husband behaved the way he did, but not anymore. I realised that he had to learn to be responsible for his actions too. And now I want him to take this task on, 50/50. I want him to be equally responsible for raising our children and providing financial and stable accommodation for the family in the future. I believe he can. I know that many have left their marriages because they could no longer deal with their spouse's addiction problems. Drug use affects the whole family unit. But I stay because my marriage is sacred to me as written in my religion and upbringing. No matter what, I will uphold it. My prayers have kept me going. My faith and support from my family have kept me strong. It is my opinion that with support, persons with addiction can change. And for that very reason, I will never give up on my husband. I will place full faith in our journey of 50/50.

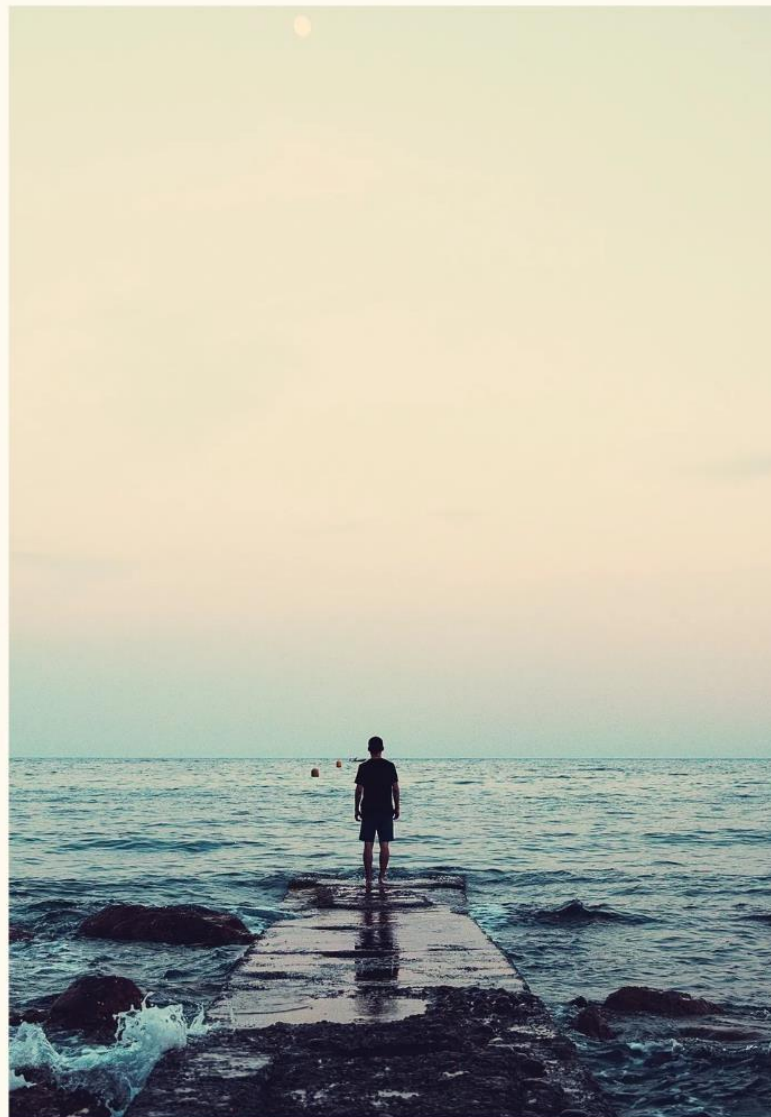


# I HAVE A LIFE TOO

"In my moments of anger, I may have uttered unpleasant words that I did not mean and I know they came from a place of hurt, frustration and helplessness."

Alias is my brother and I love him with all my heart. I will always be here to support and cheer him on. At times, I think he forgets that I have a life too. And frankly, I am quite afraid to say it to him as I do not want him to think that he is imposing on me whenever he wants to approach me for help.

Alias has been in and out of prisons since he was a teenager. He was incarcerated for a myriad of offences ranging from drug consumption to trafficking and a whole lot more. Our family only found out about his drug use when he was arrested. We were shocked at that time as Alias appeared to be fine. He had a stable job and seemed normal when he was at home. Alias told us he tried using drugs for fun because he was curious. Ironically, he has had to pay a high price for his curiosity and fun and till this day, he continues to pay. Our family did not blame his friends as we believed that Alias was old enough to discern between right and wrong. Looking back, I feel that Alias was a good person who was incapable of making good decisions. As a family, we have scolded and advised him to quit his bad habits but we could not supervise him around the clock as we have our own lives to lead too.





I often asked Alias why our family had to do all the work of advising and visiting him whenever he was incarcerated. I wanted to know why his friends were his first priority instead of his family when he was released. It felt unfair. Alias would only respond with “yes, ok ok, I will change” but it has never happened. I have been playing the role of a broken recorder. It has become my job to talk to him, see to his needs and remind him of the things he needed to do. For example, I had to be mindful of what day it was so that I could remind Alias to attend UT. Whenever I talked to him, I had to measure my words carefully so that I do not hurt his feelings. I had to sound encouraging, understanding and empathetic so as to not trigger any ill feelings or misunderstandings. On top of this, I am the main caregiver to our elderly parents. I have a lot to juggle and I have to admit that I feel so tired, but I know this is my responsibility to shoulder despite my struggles.



Alias knows that I care about him even though I used to demand answers from him. Mostly, I told him to reflect on his behaviours. I would have come across as harsh and there were

times I scolded him in the presence of prison officers during those visits. What troubled me most was seeing my mother’s emotional pain and distress when we visited Alias. Her sobs evoked my fury, so much so that I would raise my voice in the fervent hope that Alias would understand our pain, and consequently consider change more seriously. In my moments of anger, I may have uttered unpleasant words that I did not mean and I know they came from a place of hurt, frustration and helplessness. I have been taking care of everyone’s feelings without realizing that I feel equally broken. Once, I told Alias that I wanted to get incarcerated just to understand why he kept going back in. He might have understood my fatigue at that point because his facial expression suggested that he knew I had my own life to live.

Before I focus on myself, I want to ensure that Alias’s life improves first. My dream is to see him find work that he enjoys and become independent enough to take care of himself before he progresses to start his own family. Above all, I wish that he would forever stay drug and crime free. I know how powerful a family’s support can be to inmates. I have called the families of Alias’s prison mates to request that they pay their respective inmates a visit. Sadly, most have refused with reasons such as “busy, no time, don’t want.” Oftentimes, they decline because they are struggling with their own lives. Some have lost hope, while others no longer have the energy to keep up. At the same time, if families do not support them, then who will? For me, I will always be here for my brother because of my love for him. I am fine placing his welfare above mine but I long for the day he would get his act together so that I can start living my life.



# Not Asking For Much



I was about four years old when I came home from school and saw a male stranger in my home. I did not know who he was until my mother introduced him as my father. She explained that he had just been released from prison after serving a sentence for drug consumption. I can only remember that I felt elated to have finally met my father. The rest of the information my mother shared about him was not important to me; all I knew was that I have a father. My family is now complete. Unfortunately, my happiness was rather short-lived, as my father was imprisoned again for the same offence in the following year.

During the year that Dad was home with us, he found a job as a delivery driver and earned a decent income. I liked that he always shared with the family how his day at work went. When he lamented on his work stress, my mother would console and encourage him so that he would not give up on himself so easily. Once, I heard him tell my mother that he felt mistreated by his supervisor. My mother stepped up as the protective wife and promptly contacted his supervisor to speak to him on my father's

behalf. I thought that my mother's care and concern for Dad was enough to keep him away from drugs. I saw how she was always there for him and us and I truly believed that her efforts would always yield the best outcomes for our family. To be fair, my father did his part too. He handed over his entire monthly salary to Mom who decided how much allowance to give him. I guess it was Dad's way of showing his appreciation for all the sacrifices my mother had made over the years. I also thought that my father was doing his best to be a responsible husband and father so that he could regain our trust. All in all, I felt really happy to witness the positive change in my father and the close bond between my parents. Their loving relationship made me feel safe and peaceful at home. This was all I ever wanted as a child.

**"How is it that children like us are expected to feel normal when our fathers come and go as they please?"**



At times, Dad told us stories about his life in prison. He said he hated it because he had to give up his freedom and he did not like being away from us. Whenever Dad told us these stories, I had so many questions running through my mind. I wanted so much to ask him, "if you hated it so much, why did you keep going back?" I could not get the words out as I was afraid that Dad would be stressed with my question. I also wanted to ask if we were important to him. If we were, then why were we not on his mind when he decided to go back to using drugs? I was just a child who felt that I had no right to question my father, neither did I want to pressurize him to change.

The good times lasted only for a year. Before I knew it, Dad was back in prison. I saw the pain that my mother was put through again. She could not stop crying when Dad was arrested for the umpteenth time. Soon enough, she was back to being the sole-breadwinner of the family. She was alone again, fending for us and herself. Once again, she lost support from the man she called her husband of 19 years. Throughout these 19 years of their marriage, I wonder how many years my father had actually been physically present for her.

I am a teenager now and I have more questions for my father. "How many more chances does he expect from my mother before she feels that enough is enough?" "Do all the spouses of addicted persons stay in the marriage forever?" "How can a father miss so many of his children's birthday celebrations?" "How is it that children like us are expected to feel normal when our fathers come and go as they please?" "Why can't we have a stable loving family?" "When is my father ever going to end his relationship with drugs and his drug-using peers?"

Dad is in his 50s now. What will become of us as a family if my father continues to live this way? At this moment, I am not so sure. All I know is that I cherish the year that Dad was home with us. Everyone was happy and contented then. We may not have had everything at that time, but we had a normal, simple and complete family. You may not know it, but that was more than enough for children like us.






# A Mother's Poem to Her Son: Mak Will Not Give Up on You

We are not sure why and how it all started  
Prisons was where you spent all of 15 years, this much we knew  
We kept trying to speak with you  
But you made it so hard when you just would not listen  
**We will keep trying because Mak will not give up on you.**



Age is catching up and I am getting older  
I feel I cannot hold on for much longer  
All your father's hard work has taken a toll on his health  
We need you to come home to take over  
**Mak believes in you and will not give up on you.**



I miss the times when we watched television together  
Seeing and feeling your presence just made me ponder  
What can I do to make these moments last?  
Oftentimes, I just do not have a clue.  
My heart aches when I think of all your broken promises,  
With the sea of tears you have shed, you filled me with assurance  
**Because of my perseverance, Mak will still not give up on you.**

Festive periods are the worst,  
I cannot find my son to hug and kiss  
From my lips I utter, "Dear God, the only One who can save him is You",  
But I believe my son will return to restore the bliss,  
**So always know this, Mak will not give up on you.**

I gave you money for your necessities  
Even as I suspected you were still abusing  
Some may consider me a mother who was enabling  
But I consoled myself because your promises always felt so empowering  
**And I believe your promises will eventually come true; Mak will not give up on you.**

I will not be here forever  
Before I close my eyes, I hope to see you change for the better  
As long as I am alive, I wish to have us spend more time together  
At times you will hear that others have lost faith in you  
For in their minds, they are asking "what's new?" when they talk about you  
**But the truth remains that Mak will not give up on you.**





# Please Let Our Together Be Forever



I knew my fiancé two years ago when he was still staying with his sister and brother-in-law. I knew he had been incarcerated about five times previously for drug offences. Yet, I chose to be with him despite knowing his history as an ex-addict. In fact, it became a personal goal and motivation for me to support him through his recovery journey. At that time, I did not realize the extent of challenges that I would be facing. I just thought that love was enough to change and move him, but I was sorely mistaken.

Zac relapsed on drugs when he was placed on home supervision after his three-month stint at the Selarang Halfway House. He was initially adjusting well in the community. I would make the effort to send and fetch him to and from the halfway house for his urine tests and our daily meetups. It was my way of showing support for him. However, things started to change after 3 months. Zac did

not want me to accompany him to his UT reporting center and refused to show me his UT card. Initially, I did not feel anything was amiss, but I started to become suspicious when Zac's attitude towards me changed. His behaviors were starkly different from how he used to be.

"Zac probably guessed that my words were just empty threats because I have never left despite his numerous relapses and imprisonments. I wish he would not take my presence for granted"



Zac started off in this relationship as a romantic, loving and caring partner who often checked on my well-being. He was also extremely attentive and affectionate towards my young son. Zac was aware that his tattoos frightened my child, and he would take special care to cover them up in the presence of my son. As his extensive tattoos attracted unwanted attention from strangers, Zac understood my discomfort when people stared at us in public and would make the effort to cover up when we went out on dates. Strangely, his considerate behaviours were short-lived. Gone was the Zac I knew. He morphed into a different character who became highly suspicious, irritable and impatient towards me. He would call to scold me for no reason and would at times send texts that made no sense. That was when I saw the red flags; Zac had relapsed. I felt a whirlwind of emotions ranging from sadness to disappointment but the thought of him lying to me about being drug-free broke me. I could not understand what triggered the relapse. Could it be peer influence or work stress?

Zac's relapse caused added pressure to me as I was overwhelmed with managing my own life as a single mother and providing for my son. I felt worse when our plans to settle down was delayed as Zac was incarcerated again. Zac's sister and brother-in-law refused to be involved this time. His sister stopped replying to his letters and told me not to update her about Zac. All that Zac had left was me and his mother. Zac's mother, although concerned about him, could not help much as she was elderly and partially immobile.

During a prison visit, Zac admitted to me that he had lied about his drug use. In fact, he was actively using drugs while we were together. Zac even took it secretly during our

dinner date, which was a day before he was arrested. While I thought that temporarily losing Zac to incarceration was bad enough, I did not realise that there was more to come. Zac's drug peers started harassing me via our joint social media accounts and kept asking me when Zac would be released. Despite having to put up with their insistence and negative words, I was determined to protect Zac from them and eventually blocked them on social media. I also felt blessed that I did not cross paths with them in the streets thus far. I was mentally prepared to seek help from the authorities if they continued to harass me. I could not deny that I was facing immense stress during those periods. The stress was compounded by my worry for Zac and the fear of what the future would bring.

Although I kept telling Zac that I would leave him if he went back to drugs after his release, deep inside, I knew I would never give up on him. At times, I wonder if my never-say-die attitude is the reason for Zac's relapse. Zac probably guessed that my words were just empty threats because I have never left despite his numerous relapses and imprisonments. I wish he would not take my presence for granted. Nevertheless, I love Zac and I know he can change with my help and support. I also want to help Zac realize that he must give up his negative peers if he desires positive change. I kept reminding Zac about his elderly mother and the possibility of her passing on when he is not around. I even told Zac that life is so fragile and even I could pass on in his absence. Zac would respond to my reminders with silent sobs and promises that he would change. I look forward to Zac's success in his recovery and pray that his past becomes a distant memory for us. I cannot wait for us to settle down, build a family and let this together last forever.





## I Am Sorry Son

I miss you so much. You mean the whole world to me. There are so many things that I want to share with you, but sadly you are once again not by my side.

Son, I feel so guilty towards you; I want to apologize to you for so many things. I am sorry for not being there for you during your growing up years, for leaving you under the care of your paternal grandmother as your father had custody of you after our divorce. I am sorry that you were exposed to drugs at the tender age of 11 because your father made you buy drugs for him. I am sorry for not being present as I was in and out of prisons because of my own addiction problems. I am sorry for not ensuring that you attended school, which caused you a lot of hardships later in life. Spending so much time apart has negatively impacted our relationship. I struggled to bond with you and to understand you when you came to live with me in your 20s. But trust me, I love you so much, my tears cannot stop flowing whenever I think about you. You are always on my mind, and I worry about how you are coping in prison. I feel so down even when I am eating as I will be wondering if you are eating well too.

I was shocked when I first found out you were arrested for your drug use. Seeing you go down the same path tore my heart apart. Watching you transform into a different person when you were on drugs was painful. It hurts me to watch how the gentle, soft spoken you turned aggressive and messed up the entire house. I recall the nights I was worried sick when you did not return home. I stayed awake praying for your safe return. I had made the decision to report you to the police when you were on drugs. Although I struggled with that decision, I would rather have you misunderstand me than to lose you to drugs. I could never bear it if something untoward were to happen to you.

I have been there, and I know it in my heart that this path you have taken will be a difficult one for you. You will find yourself fighting tough battles throughout your life, but it will all be worth it if you succeed. I admit that I previously used drugs to cope with stress, until I realized much too late that it was only a temporary relief. Back then, it was the only way I knew how to feel better and forget my worries.



I am unsure about your reasons for using drugs, but I want to tell you that I have learnt through multiple incarcerations that drug use is not the answer, and certainly not the cure for your problems. I have gained some knowledge from my prison programmes, even though I was initially resistant. I have learnt to keep myself engaged at work and at home. I have also found a sense of purpose in volunteering as it brings me joy to be able to help others who are going through similar struggles. I try to stay positive by reminding myself that it is not the stress that gets to us but the way we respond to our stressors. There are good and bad days and I have learnt to embrace them all. I have survived many hardships and I strongly believe that you can too.

Please know that I will always be here to hold your hand and walk with you on your journey towards recovery. This journey has come with plenty of obstacles, and it has cost us so much. We have lost a lot of precious time creating fond memories together. I really miss spending time with you; we cooked together and made each other laugh. These memories and words like “thank you”, “I love you mum” have kept me going all these years. These memories are priceless. Regrettably, we always had to cut these beautiful moments short when you made U-turns back to prison within a short time after your release.

It is a fact that I am aging, and my health will deteriorate. I remember discharging myself from hospital once just to go down to bail you out. Everyone tried to persuade me not to go but I know how much my presence meant to you. You hugged me and cried when you were bailed out. I knew you were disappointed with yourself for letting me down, but I have never held it against you because I understand how difficult it is for you.

Please let me know how mama can support you. I will continue to pray for you, and I want you to pray too. All I want is for you to be a good person and lead a simple life. Sometimes life is easier than we think. I will always be here for you. I am looking forward to the day that I can welcome you home to create more beautiful memories together.

“Although I struggled with that decision [to report you to the police when you were on drugs], I would rather have you misunderstand me than to lose you to drugs”



# Journal of My Life

I was reflecting on my life. Over the past 70 years, I have been through various ups and downs. I realized that I could not share my “downs” with others, and especially not my family since we are all bogged down with our own problems. I will attempt to share some of my experiences here.

I have an elder brother whom we call Tony for short. As a child, I did not spend much time with my family, neither did I play with Tony and my 3 younger brothers. I am the only girl and my brothers hung out with their friends most of the time. My parents were busy working to make ends meet and had little time for us. We were not a close-knit family, but we got by. Little did I know that things were about to get more challenging. My father passed away shortly, and my mother became a widow at the young age of thirty. As the sole breadwinner, she worked long hours as a fishmonger. We were left to our own devices most of the time. During this period, I noticed that Tony started playing truant frequently and he eventually dropped out of primary school. He then started working and made occasional financial contributions to the household.

Things spiraled out of control when Tony began to socialize with the wrong company in his early twenties. He was mostly absent from our lives and was hardly concerned about what was happening at home. Tony could go for several days without returning home. When he did, he came back disheveled with poor hygiene. He looked grossly different from his previous clean and tidy self. We were shocked when we discovered that he was on drugs and pleaded with him to stop. Sadly, our pleas fell on deaf ears and that marked the beginning of his prison life over the last 40 years. In the blink of an eye, he is already 72 and yet, he still has not changed.

I was already married when my brother was arrested for drug consumption. Despite having to work and care for my young children, I would take leave to accompany my mother on regular visits to prison. I could not bear for her to travel the distance by herself, and I also wanted to provide her with emotional support. Imagine how heart-wrenching it is to visit your loved one in prison. We felt so helpless and could only advise him to change. I kept wondering what else the family could have done to support him. Gradually, I realized the onus to change fell mainly on my brother. Ultimately, it was his choice as to how he wanted to lead his life. However, I wanted him to know that although it was his personal choice, he was not the only one who had to face the consequences. As a family, we have been vastly affected with a high price to pay for his bad choices.

“Sooner or later, everyone sits down to a banquet of consequences.”

-Robert Louis Stevenson



DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Throughout these years, I had suffered several losses. My mother and two younger brothers are no longer around. Losing loved ones was painful, but at least I could be by their side during their final moments. I wonder how it had been like for Tony as he was in prison when they passed on. Despite the short amount of time he had spent with them, it was apparent that he cared for them. If not, why would he work so hard as a cleaner to help our youngest brother clear his gambling debts? If not, why would he agree to be escorted in handcuffs to their funerals to be ridiculed by others? He cried at their funerals too. What did his tears mean? Was he crying because he felt guilty for not being able to spend time with them, or for not fulfilling his responsibilities as a son and elder brother? Did he feel bad for failing to deliver his promises to change? But why was his care and concern for this family not enough to warrant a change in him?

I only have Tony and my third brother left. These two seem to come across like enemies when they argue. I am always caught in the middle of their storms. My third brother dislikes and disrespects Tony for his selfishness; he cannot fathom why Tony would repeatedly choose drugs over everything else. If only Tony could show some determination towards change. If only my third brother could communicate better. If only we could be more intact as a family. Drug addiction has such an immense power to tear families apart.

Looking back, I have made uncountable trips to different prisons to visit Tony. I persisted even after Mom had passed on. I have told Tony how mentally and physically challenging it has been for me. I expected words of gratitude, but what I received from him instead was disheartening. Tony told me to give up on him and to stop visiting. If only it was that easy. Where has all the time gone? I have been visiting him since I was a young adult. I am an elderly person now. I depend on a walking stick to move around. The short walk to the bus stop takes me 20 minutes. My whole journey to and from Changi prison takes me 3 hours. You must be thinking why I would waste 3 hours each time to see him for 20 minutes? I suppose this is the sacrifice I am willing to make to keep our blood ties. I dare not tell my children about my struggles because of their utter disdain for my brother. For as long as I am alive, I will continue to care for Tony despite how exhausting this has been for me.

Penning down my thoughts made me realize that my brother's addiction has impacted a major part of my life, even though he has been absent most of the time. I am not sure how he would live out the final phase of his life, but I hope he can do a little better this time. I only know it feels great to be able to pour out all my pent-up thoughts and emotions that have been eating me inside.

WELL-BEING SCORE

On a scale 1-10, how happy do you feel today?

😊 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 😊

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# My Absent Father



Do not forget for a moment that children need their fathers too; isn't that why God made you fathers?

“GIVE ME THE MONEY NOW” was a frequent demand spewed by my father towards my mother. I watched in horror as he screamed; his face contorted in rage and desperation. As a child, I did not understand his obsession with money but it all made sense when I was about 11 years old. My siblings and I witnessed his bizarre behaviours at home one day. He looked delirious and uttered so many words but none of those made any sense to us. In the midst of his tirade, he fell asleep and drooled incessantly. We thought he was ill from something he consumed. Only when he was arrested and sent to prison did we realize that he had been addicted to drugs. It was a moment of clarity for me. Throughout the years, he had been demanding money for his drugs. When my mother did not give in, he stomped around the flat and overturned it in search of money.

During this period, we noticed his angry outbursts that often turned into rage. His temper tantrums reached a point where he became physically abusive towards me. I recall with hurt that he hit me with his belt when I returned home late from our aunt's place once. On another occasion, he had assumed that I had made a negative remark about him. He made a beeline towards me and punched me in my stomach. The pain was excruciating and it made me hate him. I became more afraid of

him as I was growing up because I could never anticipate when he would unleash his anger on me. It happened again when I was 15. I was home a little late from my part-time job and there he was, with bloodshot eyes glaring at me with a belt in his hand ready to beat me up. My mother swiftly stepped in to stop him. Although the physical pain of his abuse has left me, the emotional pain continues to live in my memory.

Overtime, my siblings and I tiptoed around him as we were afraid to incur his wrath. Deep inside, we all longed for his love and support but he was barely around. During the brief periods that he was, he did not conduct himself as a father. He missed all our milestones; from the time we sat for our PSLE to our O Levels, he was locked up in prison. On my wedding day, he was serving another prison sentence. It should have been my father's duty to give me away but my mother had to take his place.

We love our father but disliked his errant ways. We supported him in every way possible but each time, he left us disappointed. He seemed to love his friends and drugs more than us. It was obvious to us that he never rejected his friends. When they offered him drugs, he went along with them only to repeat his cycle of addiction soon after. My father used to argue

that drug use was his own business. He did not consider how it had affected each and every member of our family. He failed to realize that the money he had spent on drugs could have afforded us better housing or a more normal childhood.

Trapped inside me is a little girl longing to be loved and doted on by her father, but I know in my heart that this can only be possible when my father finally breaks free from the chain of drugs. I know now that a drug addiction can turn the most loving person into a selfish and self-centred one. To all the fathers hooked on substances, I speak on behalf of all your children. Whenever you find yourself in a situation where you are likely to succumb to drug use, please take a minute to think if the temporary pleasure you get is worth the permanent pain you install into your children's hearts.

Do not forget for a moment that children need their fathers too; isn't that why God made you fathers? If there is one lesson my siblings and I have learnt, it is to steer clear of drugs. We will ensure that we educate our own children and our future generations not to exchange their lives for drugs. I read a poem written by a chronic drug user before she died from an overdose.

If I were granted a wish, I would wish for my loving father to return to us drug-free. I know we cannot undo the past but we can certainly create a happier future together. We love our father deeply. If he cannot do much for us as we have grown up, we hope he can come back to take care of our mother. She has suffered silently and has been playing the roles of a mother and father for so long. It is time my father wakes up from his own nightmare to resume his responsibility of a father, husband and grandfather.

*I am a drug. I destroy homes and I tear families apart,  
I take your children, and that's just the start.  
I'm more expensive than diamonds, more precious than gold.  
The sorrow and pain I bring is a sight to behold.*



# Silent Screams

I have never missed a visit since my son's incarceration. I constantly worry about how he is coping inside although I know he is familiar with life in prison by now. Many have told me to give up on my son. I refuse to heed such an advice because I feel it in my bones that my son will turn around one day. He has to, when he starts to feel touched by the deep care and concern from his mother.

When my son served his first prison sentence, I looked forward to his release with hope and excitement. But with each imprisonment, the anticipation wanes. My son has been hauled back to prison multiple times and my feelings towards his release have changed. My worry increases twofold whenever my son is due for release now. When he returns to live with me, he would do absolutely nothing to help out at home. He could go for long periods without seeking a job. He believed that jobs would come looking for him and he hated it when people tried to correct him. He always expressed his annoyance by staying out late and would mostly return home close to dawn. As his mother, I could not figure out what he was thinking or doing. He has not given me any assurance that he would change. My son does not seem to care that I am anxious when he spends long hours outside. He leaves his phone at home so that I cannot contact him. Why does my son do this to me?

As a mother, I cannot believe that I feel afraid of my own son. When he was younger, I excused his bad behaviours thinking that he was going through a rebellious phase that would soon pass. Over the years, it has been rather impossible for me to justify his unpleasant behaviours. My son has no idea how frightening he can be at times. There were instances where I noticed him talking and smiling to himself. I lived in fear when I

was told that my son heard voices that instructed him to hurt me. What or who has he become? What have these drugs done to him? I was cautious and scared whenever I advised him to quit drugs. I know how much this topic angered him but I cannot turn a blind eye to how he had chosen to live his life. Yet I am afraid, for I do not know how he would react when I tell him what I think and feel. I walk on eggshells and do my best to suppress my anguish. I can only scream silently.

I am in my 60s and I no longer have the same level of energy. There were moments when I wished I were no longer around so that I do not have to witness how my son will continue to destroy his life. I had enough of suffering the pain, anger, anguish, disappointment and helplessness that I have kept suppressed for so long. I feel so alone with no outlet for my bottled emotions. Very often, I could only retreat into the darkness of my room to cry. I feel afraid because no one else will care for my son when I am gone for good. I wish the best for my son, like all mothers do. I do not ask for much. The best gift my son can give me is to allow me into his life wholeheartedly, where I can understand him, support him and guide him towards a life of sobriety. I know this will not be easy for either of us, but it is what gives me the hope, courage and strength to live on.

**"I walk on eggshells and do my best to suppress my anguish. I can only scream silently."**



# Only You Can Make Us Whole Again

Drugs robbed me of my perfect family. I have a loving and supportive wife and my adult children are filial towards us. Laughter reverberated around the house as we frequently engaged in hearty conversations, especially during mealtimes and festivities. I loved celebrating my birthday with my son Jack as our birthdays are a few days apart. Life was blissful until the day my world came crashing down when I found out that my son was indulging in drugs.

Jack was known to all as a sensible boy when he was in primary school. He would return home straight after school and completed his homework independently. He gave us very little to worry about. As a family, we spent lots of time together going out for meals, catching up on the latest movies and chatting about anything under the sun. These happy moments continued even when Jack went to secondary school. He was at the age where teenage angst and rebellion was expected but Jack remained well-behaved and soft-spoken. So, imagine the huge shock and disbelief we experienced when the school called to inform us that our beloved son was on drugs. We were stumped and confused with a million questions racing through our minds. It is impossible to describe how we felt at that time. All I remember is that we both struggled to grapple with the news that our little boy was using drugs. At times, we tried to pin the blame on external influence but deep down, we knew he made a choice and would therefore have to suffer the consequences.

Jack's admission to the Community Rehabilitation Centre (CRC) left us devastated. I stopped celebrating my birthday that year as it no longer felt meaningful in Jack's absence. My birthday became a day of yearning and heartache. It was surreal that I could now only see my son for a limited time when we visited him. We never missed a visit even when one of us was unwell as we wanted him to know he meant the world to us. Regrettably, Jack's stint



at the CRC was only the beginning of his addiction problems. Following his discharge, we continued to be supportive and trusting towards him. Although we had scant understanding of addiction, we still did everything in our capacity to ensure that Jack was well and safe. At times, we noticed that Jack spent a copious amount of time in the toilet, but he would claim that he was having stomachaches. We did not pursue with questions as we trusted him. My wife and I decided to suppress our suspicions although there were nagging thoughts at the back of our minds. This was probably one of those times we wished we were wrong. Alas, this was not the case when Jack was arrested once again and sent to the Drug Rehabilitation Centre (DRC).

Drug addiction, as we have experienced through Jack, takes a toll on the family's mental and emotional well-being. We also came across a quote which said that "Addiction is a family disease. One person may use, but the whole family suffers". We love Jack deeply and dote on him the most as he is our youngest child, yet we cannot help but feel disappointed. We had great expectations of him and saw him as someone who could excel in life. Having our hopes shatter this way is downright painful and tormenting. These days, we dread family gatherings as relatives have been asking for Jack. It kills me that I have had to cook up excuse after excuse and lie after lie. At times, we wished we could just disappear into a hole



so that we did not have to lie. My wife and I had jointly decided to keep Jack's imprisonment a secret for two reasons: we did not want others to think of Jack as the black sheep of the family and frankly, we need to uphold our family's reputation. I shudder to think about what would happen if our secret were to be exposed one day.

We are looking forward to Jack's homecoming. We hope Jack would learn from his mistakes and revert to who he was before he dabbled in drugs. We know Jack is a great person who had made bad decisions. We miss our once perfect family and only Jack's return can make us whole again.

**"Drug addiction, as we have experienced through Jack, takes a toll on the family's mental and emotional well-being."**





# I Want My Brother Back

"I admit there were times I felt like giving up, but I cannot bear to turn my back on my brother... I cannot wait to have my brother back so that we can enjoy a simple life together"

My older brother, Hilmi has been in and out of the Drug Rehabilitation Centre (DRC) since he was 28 years old. He is 71 now. I have been wishing and waiting for 43 years to have my brother back.

My memory takes me back to the time I was in National Service. One day, my parents revealed to me that both my brothers were arrested and admitted to the DRC. My parents were distraught and kept asking themselves what they had done so wrong to deserve this. Back then, drug use was rampant in our neighborhood and my brothers could have been influenced by other drug-users. Nevertheless, the news shocked us to the core as my parents had showered us with love and care throughout our lives. So, really, what went wrong?

Hilmi was a different person before he started a relationship with drugs. To me, he was a caring brother and a filial son. He worked hard and contributed financially to the household. I respected him and was appreciative of his considerate gestures. For instance, Hilmi would give me and my parents allowances when he received his paychecks. But this did not last. Hilmi started to become distant and defiant. For one, he kept our parents waiting

up for him whenever he returned home late. At times, he did not come home for days on end. This was the beginning of many nightmares that resulted from Hilmi's drug use. Inevitably, relationships at home soured. My sister was furious with Hilmi as she was unable to tolerate that our parents had to suffer the torment from his drug use. I was equally frustrated when Hilmi only contacted me for two main reasons; either he needed me to bail him out or he wanted money for drugs.

If this was not disturbing enough, there were more of Hilmi's antics to come. We once witnessed Hilmi in an intoxicated state whereupon he had a heated argument with our brother. The verbal altercation escalated to the point of violence when one of them grabbed hold of a knife to threaten the other. It was a highly nerve-wrecking situation as we were all afraid that someone might get seriously injured. We would have called the police if it were not for our neighbor who stepped in to resolve the matter. How did our family relationships deteriorate to this state?

The longest time that Hilmi had stayed out of DRC was one year. It was a magical year for me; my brother was employed for the first time in a long while and he was supporting himself



financially. Tragically, he relapsed back to drug use a year later and of course went back into his second home-the DRC. It has been 4 decades of endless prison visits, with my parents and I talking incessantly to Hilmi about changing his ways. Besides encouraging him to practice his faith, we have done our best to show him in various ways that we will support him wholeheartedly. Undoubtedly, our words have had little impact on Hilmi. It seemed that his bond with our family weakened when his relationship with drugs strengthened. I realize now that our family should not be the one doing all the work to help Hilmi change. He must be responsible for his own recovery. We will hold his hand throughout his change journey to show him that he will not have to walk this path alone.

That said, I know that support does not only mean that we visit Hilmi during his imprisonment. Hilmi needs a place to call home when he is released, which was why I continued to pay for his rental flat in his absence. Even though I could afford to, I did not think it was fair towards my own family. Afterall, I have a wife and children to support financially too. My late sister had also bequeathed some money to Hilmi, which I later used to offset his rental payments. Hilmi was eligible for financial assistance, and this was a huge relief to me as he would have sufficient funds to restart his life upon his release.

Hilmi was finally released and is residing at a Halfway House. I recall an incident where Hilmi was hospitalized. The doctor asked why he was wearing an electronic tag to which Hilmi replied, "I am a bad person." I advised Hilmi to view himself more positively as I believe that a negative view of oneself may limit one's ability to change for the better.

I admit there were times I felt like giving up, but I cannot bear to turn my back on my brother. This has been an arduous journey for Hilmi and our family. I am thankful to be blessed with my wife and children's support. Besides getting by with positive thinking, I live

by this motivational quote, "I have not failed. I have just found 10,000 ways that will not work." So much time has passed waiting for Hilmi to change. I only hope we have enough time to make up for the loss. I cannot wait to have my brother back so that we can enjoy a simple life together; more time to practice our faith and brotherly conversations to share our joys and worries. I know Hilmi's journey has been difficult, but I hope I will live long enough to see the change in him. The following summarizes my feelings for the past 43 years.



In the hot stall kitchen,  
My mobile rings,  
Same familiar news, Hilmi is back at Changi.  
Stare at the ceiling,  
Wondering why,  
It has happened again

Have I failed,  
It is not an exam,  
His vicious cycle keeps repeating.  
My brother, he is older, unfortunately.

I only have hope,  
But it is not enough,  
He must change himself.

Oh Allah (All Mighty),  
Please answer my prayer,  
Return back my brother,  
Before you take either one of us.

Abah (dad) and Emak (mum) if you can hear me,  
I feel helpless,  
I feel lonely,  
I feel useless,  
I feel unappreciated  
I feel lost,  
What would you both have done if you were still around?

Give up? Can I?  
Not bother anymore, should I?  
At the end of the day, he is a person whom God has faithed as My Brother.



# My First Priority

“As if this was not painful enough, you once threatened to take my niece away from me if I did not give you money for your drugs. How could you?”

You were in the centre of all the decisions I have had to make in the last 10 years. My decision to cease work, my decision for marriage and my decision on accommodation; you were prioritised when I made those decisions. I have no regrets making those decisions that revolved around you but sometimes, just sometimes, I wonder if you would have done the same for me if you were in my shoes. Sometimes, the greatest sacrifice that we can make is when we sacrifice our own happiness for the sake of someone else.

We have been inseparable from as far back as I can remember. Since young, I wanted to be there for you as a substitute to our absent parents. Although I am only 4 years older than you, I wanted to do my best for you. I did not want you to feel different just because we were raised by our grandmother instead of our parents. I was not aware that the time I spent with my friends when I was a teenager made you feel neglected, and consequently steered you towards a drug-afflicted lifestyle. You blamed me for my absence then. In turn, I felt guilty and shouldered the blame for how you turned out.

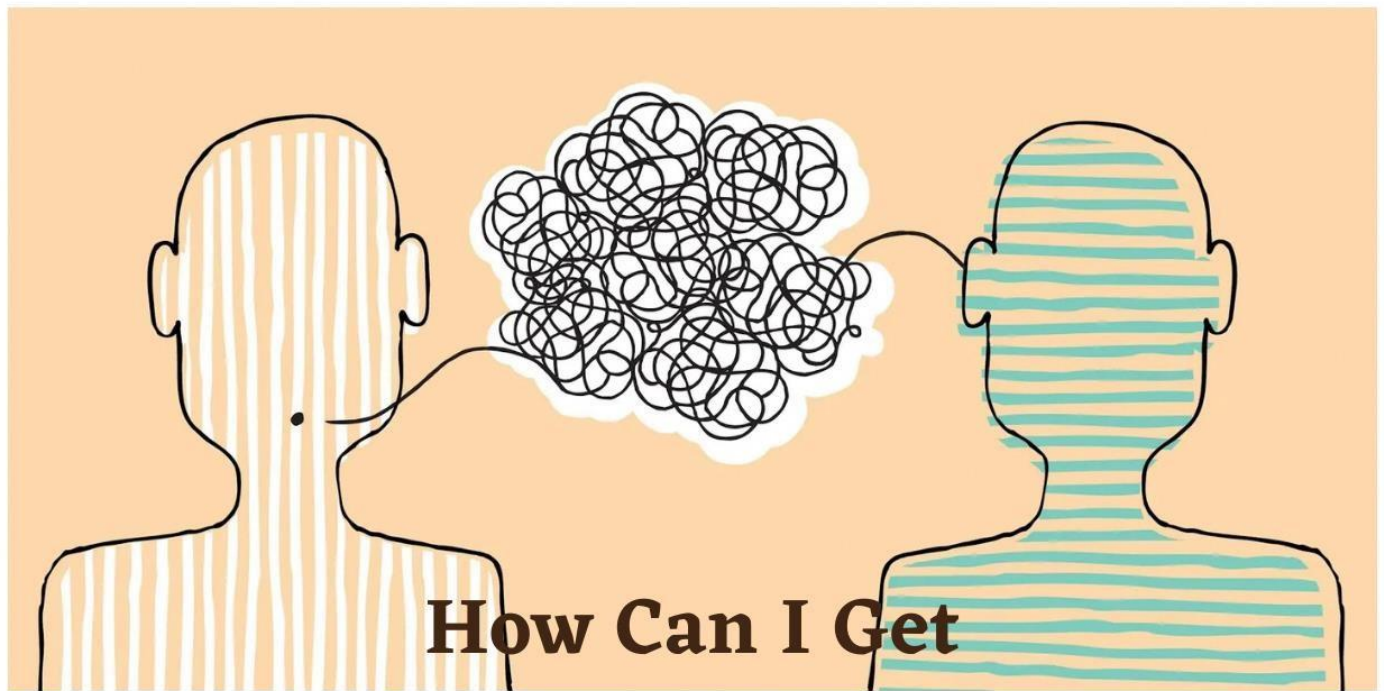
When I turned 21, I ceased work to help you care for your daughter – my niece. I was shocked when you first revealed to me that your girlfriend was pregnant, and abortion was not an option. I asked myself how you would take care of a child when you had difficulty managing your own life. I decided to keep this from Grandma for two reasons; I did not want her to bear the backlash from our relatives, neither did I want them to make nasty comments about you. She found out anyway. It was then that I decided to take on the caregiver role for your daughter because Mother declined to do it. Our mother’s refusal to take care of your child coupled with my fear of wagging tongues made me quit my job to care for my niece.

I could not control my tears as I recall the hardships that followed. The mental drain and emotional fatigue were real. I played the roles of a guardian, an aunt, a mother and a father to my niece all at once. I had to learn to provide appropriate care to an infant as I was new to this. Dependent on a monthly financial aid of \$300 to support my niece, I struggled to make ends meet. After deducting the high costs of diapers and milk powder, I had barely enough for daily living. Looking back, I shudder to think about how I managed to survive that gruelling period. It was not an easy feat although I tried to put on a brave front. This was worsened by the arrangements I had to make to visit you, your girlfriend and our father in different parts of the prison. As if this was not painful enough, you once threatened to take my niece away from me if I did not give you money for your drugs. How could you? Was it you or your drug speaking to me at that point?



I want you to know how I have lived for the past 10 years. It seems that my life has revolved around yours for a long time. I have called off my marriage 3 years ago so that I can prioritise yours. I wanted to focus on my niece and you. I had sacrificed my comfort zone to move in with mother so that you and father would be eligible for the home detention programme. I made this sacrifice despite my poor relationship with mother. I chose to be there for you and your daughter because you are both important to me. I cannot deny that life has been tough, and I am afraid to continue this journey. I am thankful to have the support of our grandmother. Her words of encouragement and affirmation gave me the courage to forge ahead. But I cannot predict how long this will last, especially when I feel this weary. For now, I will hang on as tightly as I can. We grew up without our parents, so we should understand the pain. Let us ensure that your daughter does not have to go through a similar path. Inconvenient as it may be, I persist in taking her to visit you regularly to bridge the distance between you two. I ask that you do everything within your power to break your cycle of addiction and imprisonment, so that your daughter can be reunited with you. Please let your actions speak louder than your words this time round. I have lived my twenties prioritising you, and it would mean the world to me if you can take back some of your responsibilities.





## How Can I Get Through To You?

It is my wish as a mother for my children to be brought up well, receive a good education, find a compatible life partner, settle down and hopefully, raise upright children. My son did not turn out that way. At least, not yet. Somehow, he got into bad company during his secondary school days and dropped out of school when he was in secondary 2.

My son was 18 when he started exhibiting wayward behaviors. One day, I noticed that he looked out of sorts, with bloodshot eyes, muscle twitches and slurred speech. I would not have suspected he was on drugs had it not been for my nephew, a policeman, who informed me that he had seen my son with undesirable company. That day marked the beginning of all my nightmares to come; my son had become a drug addict. Like most parents, we would begin searching for answers as to what had gone wrong or what we had done wrong. We may not always find answers, and we will not be able to escape the deep aching pains in our hearts. Let me attempt to describe the first time I discovered the treacherous truth that my son was on drugs. Imagine a person you love deeply twisting a knife into your heart. Now imagine this same person continually twisting and turning the knife in your heart while you bleed; that was exactly how I felt each time he relapsed. I have lived through this for the past 11 years.

At 29 years old, my son has already served three prison sentences. I constantly ask myself what his life would have been like if he had never dabbled in drugs. If we could turn back the clock, what would he be doing today? Would he have obtained a degree, secured a job, got married or remained single? Would he have a home to call his own? Reality bites, and the truth is prison has become his second home. My tears flow freely when I think about my son's present state of life. Nothing has changed in the past 11 years. My son has generously exchanged 11 years of his youth and life to drugs. I wonder what this means to him. Does my son know that his loss is my pain, and his gain is my pride and joy?



I love my son, but I do not like his errant ways. When he is on drugs, he is unpleasant and impossible to speak to. He always seemed so disconnected from reality and talking to him was as good as talking to a wall. How do I get through to him? When would he successfully break the chains of drug addiction? Would he have a chance to lead a normal life, or would he end up old, lonely and withered in prison? Thankfully, my daughter did not choose this destructive path. I wish they remained close, but my son's drug problems have driven a wedge between them. My daughter refuses to visit him so I end up making the trip to prison by myself. I went through a divorce in 2013 and I cannot lose another family member again. I can only cling on and hope that I would be able to get through to my son one day.

"Imagine [a person you love deeply] continually twisting and turning the knife in your heart while you bleed; that was exactly how I felt each time he relapsed."

# Drugs Robbed Me Of My Father


It is tough being the child of a drug abuser. You would never know what to expect. You can feel contented living with an intact family in this moment, but you may find yourself visiting your parent in prison when you least expect it. I learnt that my father was incarcerated for drug offences when I was a young child. This revelation did not affect me at all as I had fond memories of my father being there for me until I turned 16. He was my favourite companion and teacher who taught me right from wrong, encouraged me to study hard and helped me make sound decisions. I felt fortunate that I had a wonderful father who doted on me and wanted the best for me. I trusted him implicitly and hung on earnestly to every piece of advice from him. I loved the values and life-skills he imparted; he gave me lessons on forgiveness and taught me not to focus on the mistakes of others. Little did I realize that these nuggets of advice would come in handy when my father relapsed to drug use after an astounding period of sobriety spanning a decade. I know my father fought hard to stay sober, and I would like to believe he did this for me. I would like to think I meant the world to him, but now I know that this is not entirely true.

My childhood ambition was to be a police officer. When I told my father this, he urged me to join the National Police Cadet Corps to gain some exposure. I did, and ironically it was there that I acquired knowledge on illegal drugs and their effects. When I was 16, I noticed some changes in my father's behaviours. He turned from a patient, kind and fatherly soul to someone who was quick-tempered, nasty and violent. I suspected that my father was back on drugs. I had stumbled on some drug paraphernalia at home although I did not dare question him. I disliked this man my father had become. Where I once felt safe in his presence, I now felt fear whenever he was around. He was like a walking time bomb who was antagonized by the most mundane of situations. I avoided speaking to him because I was afraid of his "explosions".

I vividly recall an episode where he "exploded", possibly after he used drugs. I came home from school one day and he instructed me to perform some household chores. Instead, I innocently proceeded to do my afternoon prayers. For reasons I could not fathom, my father flew into a rage and threatened me with a samurai sword. I was scared out of my wits and ran into the bathroom to hide. I decided that I did not want to be around him, especially when his behaviours seemed so out of control. I was afraid he would harm me. I quickly packed up my belongings and left him to live with my mother.

Things did not get better for me. I had flashbacks of what my father did. The more I ruminated about that incident, the more traumatised I became. I sank into depression during that period and unsurprisingly, my school grades plummeted. I was not accepted into the school of my choice. I told no one, especially not my friends as I did not want anyone to find out about my father's drug addiction. I wish I could tell my father how that incident affected me. Sadly, I could not. Although I was upset with my father, I missed the times when I could approach him for man-to-man talks. I was later informed of his arrest and his stint at the DRC. Even though I was reluctant to face him, I had to do my duty as a son.





I visited my father and learned that he had relapsed as his then girlfriend was actively using. I know the blame should not fall on me, yet I thought of myself as a failure. As his son, should I have summoned up the courage to speak to my father about his addiction, or encouraged him to seek help? Had I done that, would he still be sober today? What can the child of a drug-user really do or say to save their parents from their addiction? What do we have to do so that drugs do not rob us of our parents, childhood and family? What is life like for children whose parents are not addicted to drugs? I am still not brave enough to ask my father but I hope I can one day.

*"Where I once felt safe in his presence, I now felt fear whenever he was around."*



## Keeping the Hopes Alive

I have been keeping count and this is my son's third stint at the DRC. Jacob was out there for about 2 years working as a mover, earning a decent income, and enjoying romance with his girlfriend. We were proud that he managed to live a drug-free life for 2 years, but now we are not so sure. We discovered that fateful morning that Jacob did not return home the night before, so we called a few places to check on his whereabouts. We cannot describe how horrible we felt once again when we found out that he was detained at Tanglin Police Station. All this time, we trusted Jacob and did not even suspect that he was back on drugs.

Jacob started using drugs during his National Service days. Our whole family was devastated when we found out that Jacob's life was now tainted with drugs. We could not accept this fact as we had instilled good morals and values in all our children since they were young. How did Jacob end up in this state? Whose influence was greater than that of his parents? We do not know Jacob's friends but if they were indeed the same people who enticed him to use drugs, then we must concede that Jacob was a blind follower who could not make wise decisions. We have heard that people are

curious when they first experiment with drugs. Now we fully understand what it means when they say, "curiosity killed the cat."

We had always advised our children against drug use. We thought Jacob was sensible enough to understand that drugs can cause irreparable damage to one's health and destroy many aspects of a life. Why did Jacob make so many promises just to break them repeatedly? While Jacob went through cycles of addiction, we were put through cycles of crushed hopes. It has been impossible to think of him and not cry. This is one of the many consequences we have had to accept and suffer for our son's drug use. Sleepless nights are common for us when my wife and I talk about how much we miss Jacob.

Jacob was a wonderful son when he was not on drugs. He showed love for the family by helping out with domestic chores and was respectful towards us. You would not believe what he was like with his drug-addled brains; negative, sneaky and dishonest. We found it hard to accept this version of Jacob. It was not like him at all. We could not trust anything he said and he would get upset when

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he felt distrusted. He must have been very confused when he had to struggle to discern between right and wrong. We pray for Jacob's recovery but prayers alone might not be sufficient. Jacob has to work on himself and trust that we will support him through this process while we are still alive.

We have hopes and aspirations for Jacob but we are not sure if Jacob has any for himself. To all of you with a drug problem, please remember that you are never too old to set another goal or dream and work towards it. Things always seem impossible until it is done. Although you cannot change the beginning, you can definitely do something about the ending.

**"While Jacob went through cycles of addiction, we were put through cycles of crushed hopes."**

# Waiting For The Light To Change

"I cannot wait to say "Brother, we are so proud of you! You have indeed changed and brought happiness to our family!""

I always remember you as the elder brother who sometimes bought food and clothing for our family. Those were heartwarming times, and your acts of kindness were a great relief to us. I recalled it was 20 years ago that we discovered you were on drugs. We were so devastated and angry as we could not understand why you chose this destructive path. We wish you could spare a thought for our aged parents and your siblings and not let us lose sleep over you as we are so stressed and worried for you. More importantly, we hope and pray that you can lead a normal, drug and-crime-free life and have a stable job.

I always looked forward to seeing you at our parents' home when we gathered there about once a month and during the Chinese New Year period. We had meals together, talked to one another, watched television programmes and played cards. We felt that it was great having you back home with us once again. In our hearts and minds, we were hoping and praying that this time round, you can stay strong in faith, be diligent, disciplined, remove yourself from your drug peers who always influenced you negatively, and live a fulfilling life without drugs and crimes.

I hope you would not mind me sharing with you that we painfully and sorrowfully struggled to support you. You asked us for a daily allowance when you were unemployed. Instead of actively looking for a job, you were either out the entire day, or at home hiding in the toilet for 45 minutes with no sound of running water, no bowel problems and denying that you had gone back to drug taking. During those times, we could not help but think, "This guy is useless! We give up already. Sigh." It hurts us to think of you in such a manner, but we could not help it. We had experienced countless waves of disappointment and anger which ultimately drained us of our love for you. Moreover, we also have our own families and other commitments to take care of. I hope you understand how we feel as humans with our personal struggles.

However, another part of us says, "If we don't support him, who is going to care for him?" Each time you go to prison, Mother and I would visit you twice per month with heavy hearts and tears of sorrow in our eyes. Prison should not be the place for families to meet each other. Now that Mum is gone, I continue to visit you twice a month despite my family and work commitments. It has been an uphill task for me to juggle so many responsibilities at once, but I persist because you are family. Also, I believe this is what Mum would want me to continue doing for you. Unfortunately, our siblings may not feel the same way and I think you can understand why. Still, I will fight to do all I can for you so you would always feel the love, care and concern we have for you.



I felt great joy and comfort when I last visited you. “Refreshing and healthy” were the words that sprang to mind when I saw you. I felt like I was seeing a renewed version of you. I was happy to learn that you had done well in the prison programmes. I hope your capability extends beyond the prison walls and that you would make full use of your ability to do better in life. It is never too late to start afresh, for the journey of a thousand steps begins with the first step. Confucius said, “It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop.” Please do not give up on your goal of achieving a drug and crime-free lifestyle for we have not and will never give up on you.

I look forward to the day when we can shed tears of joy and not sorrow. I cannot wait to say, “Brother, we are so proud of you! You have indeed changed and brought happiness to our family!” I pray that you find meaning and fulfillment in your life. I am longing for the day we can reunite again.



# We Stand With You



"We are a family, and nothing will alter this fact... Therefore, we stand with Keith and hope that he will find a way out of his addiction with our support."

Addiction is a serious problem that takes a family through a whirlwind of emotions. It taxes the physical, emotional, mental and even financial well-being of families. I learnt this a long time ago when my son Keith was in secondary school. One day, he came back from school reeking of a nasty chemical odor; he smelled like a tin of glue. A part of me was in denial. No way was I going to believe that I raised a glue-sniffing son. But the signs on Keith were too obvious for me to ignore, and I had to address it immediately. I flew into a rage and scolded him, caned him and ordered him to get out of my home. He stayed put. In my heart, I was afraid for Keith. He did not know that he was killing his brain cells before they were fully developed. He did not know what he was getting himself into. As a father, it was my duty to educate him. But was I too late? Probably. Around the same time, I found other drugs in Keith's room, and what followed was a slew of criminal activities committed by Keith. I cannot count the number of times I have had to trudge down to the police station to bail Keith out.

I know we must shoulder the blame for being so preoccupied with work, so much so that we had inadvertently neglected Keith. We continue to

pay a high price for this. Keith probably has no idea how devastating it has been for us to discover that our one and only son – the eldest child of our 3 lovely children, had chosen a life of fraught with drugs and crimes. Keith's younger sisters were wondering where their once-loving brother had gone. Three of them used to be so happy in each other's company but now they hardly communicate. No words can describe our depths of despair; yet there is precious little we can do.

Some years later, Keith was arrested and hauled to Jurong CNB for a urine test. I went there fully expecting to take him home but was informed that he had to be detained because he had tested positive for drugs. I made my way home alone, and my mind was swirling with thoughts on how he'd survive the lock-up. Silly as it sounds, I wondered if he would get to shower, eat or sleep. His mother and I were jittery until we learnt that he was admitted into the Drug Rehabilitation Centre (DRC).

After Keith's release, we thought he would honor his promise of not touching drugs again. Sadly, this seemed to be the beginning of many



nightmares to come. Keith started inviting his DRC friends to our home and we were outraged to find out that he turned our home into a drug den. As if this was not hard enough a blow for us, Keith mindlessly allowed his so-called friends to subscribe mobile phone lines in his name. He even took up bank loans on their behalf. These loans and interests remain unpaid till today. We tried to understand how Keith landed himself in this mess. We attempted to talk some sense into him, but he refused to give us the time of day. His reactions made it seem like we were the ones at fault. Or maybe he did feel ashamed but did not know how to express himself.

It was hardly surprising when Keith was hauled back into the DRC again within a short time. The mess he left behind meant that we had a lot of “cleaning up” to do. We had little savings, and our tiny business at the market does not yield much even though the hours are long and arduous. Despite this, we emptied our savings to help pay off Keith’s outstanding debts.

It has been a while since we have enjoyed good news. Thankfully, we have good news for Keith. He is officially an uncle to his newborn nephew. His second sister has graduated from university. They reminisce often about the good old days when they were close to their loving brother. It has been Keith’s mother’s yearly birthday wish for all three of our children to reconcile. For this to happen, Keith must step up to restore the trust and respect his sisters once had for him. We are a family, and nothing will alter this fact. Families stick together and lift each other up. Therefore, we stand with Keith and hope that he will find a way out of his addiction with our support. This is the only way forward.

# Conclusion

You may have read the final chapter of this book but the journey does not conclude here. Witnessing a loved one battling with a substance addiction can be the most heart-wrenching and tormenting experience for families. As such, it is understandable that family members may still be vulnerable while they learn to trust again. Through these narratives, recovering persons may become aware that relationships damaged in the intense battle with substance addiction need to be rebuilt and restored. As family involvement is integral to the strength and duration of a person's recovery, we hope you begin the healing process by reflecting on the questions below while your families are still "waiting for you".

What can we do to make amends to those we have hurt?

How do we show our gratitude to our families who have weathered storms with us and remained hopeful towards our change?

What can we do to build each other up?

How can we have open communications with one another to improve our familial relationships?

How do we adequately express our challenges in recovery so that our families understand the complexities of a substance addiction?

How can we enlighten our family members such that they comprehend when "helping is actually harming"?

How can we capitalize on our family strengths to support our recovery?

How can we support one another to enhance and strengthen our family functioning?

For families and individuals in recovery who require information, support and assistance, please visit us at <https://go.gov.sg/spsfamilyassistancebooklet>