

To: Back On Track Addiction Ministries, Lynette and to whom it may concern,

I am writing this letter first and foremost to extend my gratitude and to thank each and every person who looked past my addiction, my appearance, and my criminal lifestyle. My addiction took my life into a world filled with darkness, pain, violence, and death. Throughout this time, your thrift store and ministry showed and gave me more care and compassion beyond what I deserved. Year after year, I hid from the world and exiled myself into a prison that I made myself and ironically called it freedom. Drugs took me further into chaos than I ever wanted to go, and I thought that was the only way I could survive.

I buried my pain but, instead of a shovel, I dug with a needle. I could see everything, except a way out. I masked my pain with drugs, deceit, and chaos. I created an illusion, and many believed I was fearless, but the truth is fear consumed my life. I appeared fearless to many, but while I faced many people's fears, I would never face my own. I adapted over the years and became comfortable living a life without almost all the major necessities. Normally I would trade away everything in order to stay high, to stay numb, to stay lost.

Kind acts of providing me with food, clothing, and moral support slowly planted seeds in my way of thinking. I started to fight with myself. I realized that I hated myself and the emotions were too much for me to bear when I was even remotely sober. I looked at my reflection in a bathroom mirror after doing a shot and realized that I had become a true junkie. I had been at rock bottom so long and using so much that being homeless was my home and that needle was my best friend while I was my own greatest enemy. I wanted to change, but I couldn't, nothing else in the world interested me. I would try to detox, but with each attempt, I would relapse and then I would overdose. More overdoses than I can count, yet somehow, I survived. My brother, _____, and several others were not so fortunate. I just found out this morning that my friend, _____, was found dead behind a dumpster and for the sixth time since I've been here, I'm nearly overwhelmed with sadness. It's September 3rd and I arrived on July 28th. As hard as it is to handle these feelings, I know that I can't give up. I can't use, I have to find a way to be the best I can be and be a voice for all the addicts that I've lost. I believe that I can honor these lives and that those deaths won't be in vain, if I keep moving forward and sharing a message of hope, love, and encouragement. A message to the gutters, bridges, and train tracks, a message to every addict trying to survive in a world of darkness. There is a way out. It's worth it, and they are not alone no matter what like lighting a match in a cave. God and recovery will light up your whole world and the darkness will RUN! It might sound crazy, but it's true. I promise you it's a lot easier than spending all day wandering and doing only God knows what to get your next fix that is always either not enough or too much.

I just received my chip for 30 days sober. It's not been easy for me, but every day gets better and even the bad days here are better than the best days I had before when I was still on the streets. After all of my relapses and overdoses, the majority of society only saw me as a junkie and a lost cause. I even believed that myself. I don't believe that anymore, in fact I know that was never true and that I'm alive for a reason. I might not know what that reason is. In recovery rehab you hear terms that at first you don't understand and one of those is grace, God's grace. Grace kept me alive even when I died intentionally and attacked the friends that narcanned me. Grace carried me through. God's grace carried me when I couldn't carry myself and I don't know or understand why. The only thing I know with certainty is that God does everything for a reason, God Kept me alive, this means that me being alive has a reason. I'm alive for a REASON, a PURPOSE! It would not only be ignorant, but stupid for me to live by

any other conclusion when the truth was staring back at me through my own reflection in the creek water where I bathed.

August 30th, 2020, my brother passed away from an overdose on fentanyl and every day I cry for him, but God has given me a way to honor his passing and the passing of so many of my friends lost to drugs and violence. I can be a voice for the lost and the broken. Their deaths will not be in vain and it's no longer possible to bury the pain, but from the pain and the struggle I can learn and change.

I no longer live in the dark, I no longer look at myself with hate, my days of aimlessly wandering and hoping for death has passed. God has got me and where he leads, I will follow. No more running, hiding, and fighting. I'm proud of me and I know my brother and friends would be also. I used to think sobriety and recovery was a fairy tale, I thought death was my only way out, but by grace life showed up.

Thank you for not giving up on me..... C. R. C.