

## UNIQUENESS

For many of us, the word “unique” is unrecognized. Through society’s standards, human beings have begun to act in conformity with how society thinks another should act. Parents, at times, raise their children as a “mirror of themselves”, not appreciating their child’s unique characteristics. Instead of learning from their child’s uniqueness, they ignore it, pushing their children to feel, act and think like them. Some parents even attempt to lay out their child’s future to resemble their own dreams and expectations.

Some of you might be thinking, “What does this have to do with drugs and alcohol?” Here’s how. One of the many reasons people use drugs and alcohol is to make themselves feel better emotionally. When you’re high and drunk, reality is impaired. When you come down from your high or drunken state, your problems are still there. In reality they never went away.

Every human being in this world has a unique set of feelings and emotions. No two human beings are the same. When we use drugs and alcohol, we flood our bodies with chemicals that infringe upon our abilities as humans to feel and endure. All of us even have our own unique methods of enduring and overcoming.

Our uniqueness makes everyone who they are as people. Our unique set of emotions and responses to situations in our lives assist us in our everyday growth as individuals. We learn our true abilities through struggle.

Putting down drugs and alcohol will allow you to embrace your uniqueness, refusing to let you run away from yourself, which many of us do, even those who don’t use drugs and alcohol.

At the age of 18, I was sent to state prison. When I got here, I faced a reality that I refused to fully accept. Change. I began flooding my body with high-powered psychotropic medications to make me sleep long hours in order for me to pass the time. I would “cheek” my pills so I could save them for a few days, then take them all at once to sleep longer. I hated how prison made me feel. I was using these pills to run away from myself. I refused to endure rather than face reality.

As I got older and came to realize that I was unique, I started facing my emotions. Taming them. Balancing them. I started to control myself rather than let medications decide when I was allowed to feel and what I was allowed to feel. I stopped allowing the “prison culture” to control my thoughts, ideas and actions. I became my own individual. Because I stopped acting like a prisoner, others recognized this uniqueness. Some hated me and called me names. For others, curiosity got the better of them and they were interested in how I changed. No matter what, because I embraced my own uniqueness, I became my own unique individual.

Drugs and alcohol control our uniqueness, control us as individuals. Situations in our lives sometimes cause us to experience pain. But it is only through experiencing pain that we learn to avoid. When a five-year-old child touches a hot burner, that child knows never to do it again. Drugs and alcohol are just like that burner. If you stay away, you face your pain. You learn to accept the pain and move on. When you flood your body with harmful chemicals to drown your painful feelings, you hide from them only to get burnt when the chemicals fade out of your



system. Feelings never go away. They are a part of our humanity. Don't suffocate them. Keep them alive and breathing. It's only when we learn to embrace our human emotions do we actually know ourselves. No two human beings feel the same, think the same, or act the same. This is what makes us so unique and special as individuals.

Below is a poem that I came across during my eight years in solitary confinement, when I started my journey reading books. This poem is about our "uniqueness" and individuality. It was also authored for our parents to see that they do not own our unique characteristics.

*Your children are not your children.  
They are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself.  
They come through you, but not from you.  
And though they are with you, they belong not to you.*

*You may give them your love, but not your thoughts,  
for they have their own thoughts.  
You may have their bodies, but not their souls,  
for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,  
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.*

*You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you,  
for life goes not backwards nor tarries with yesterday.  
You are the bow from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.  
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,  
and he bends you with his might that his arrow may go swift and far.  
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness,  
for even as he loves the arrow that flies,  
so he loves also the bow that is stable.*

Everything about you is yours. Don't let drugs and alcohol own you, especially your uniqueness. Gain control of what is yours. You are the only one who can dictate your destiny. Everyone's success or failure is determined by how much we, as people, embrace ourselves. Learn to love the millions of aspects about yourself before you decide to even attempt to love another, for we cannot truly appreciate the greatness of others unless we learn to value the beauty of ourselves.

By: Christopher Allen Balmer  
Inmate at SCI Forest &  
Proud resident of Potter County, Pennsylvania

© 2015