

NO LONGER ASHAMED

ELISHA BELL

I was the only girl and the next to the oldest of five children. Ever since I was very young, I was always helping my mom cook and take care of my brothers. I was fast at learning when it came to taking care of children and cooking, but when I got into school, I had a hard time paying attention and understanding. I didn't know at that time that I needed glasses, so I also had a hard time seeing the board.

And I realize that a lot of adults have learning difficulties and I'm not alone.

I was in Special Education classes. I felt like I was the slowest, dumbest one in my classes. I got pregnant in the 11th grade and had my first child during the Thanksgiving break. But I didn't drop out of school until after my mom and the principal pressured me into staying home with my baby.

I also grew up around domestic violence. My stepfather used to beat up my mother. When we were younger, sometimes he would knock us around

too. But one day when I was in high school, a neighbor told me that he was beating up my mother again. I rushed home and grabbed a bed post and knocked him upside the head so hard that he fell out the front door. Then one of my brothers busted a flower pot up side his head. My stepfather ran off down the street. When he returned he

didn't hit my mom again. I have also been in relationships where men have tried to hit me, but after I got through with them, they too didn't do it again.

So years went by and I raised my three children, two boys and one girl in the middle. I always had a part-time job at night. But the hardships of life made me depressed. So I went to Grady Hospital's Behavior Center and that's where I heard about Literacy Action. Now, I no longer feel ashamed that I couldn't read even in the eleventh grade. I feel like I'm progressing slowly but surely. And I realize that a lot of adults have learning difficulties and I'm not alone.

Elisha Bell was born in Atlanta, Georgia. She takes reading classes at Literacy Action, Inc., to work towards receiving her GED. She has three grown children. She worked as a general cleaner in office buildings and hotels for twenty-five years before having to receive disability.



I TOOK A HUGE RISK

SERGIO HYLAND

In prison, only inmates who are nearing release get access to educational and vocational programming. The rest of us are forced to sit idle, waiting, hoping for a chance. I've been in prison now for a very long time, and through the years, I've made numerous requests to be placed in a vocational class. All my requests were denied. I was ready to quit trying.

Then, everything changed.

One day when my family was visiting, the Deputy Warden strolled through the visiting room. I don't know where it came from, but I found the courage to approach him, in front of everybody, and demand that I be placed in a vocational class. I told him that if prison was truly about rehabilitation, then I'm just as worthy and deserving as anybody else.

I took a huge risk that day. The Deputy Warden easily could have issued an infraction against me and punished me for what I did. I was a little on edge after that.

Later that day, a yellow sheet of paper was slipped under my door – the very same color paper that infractions are written on. I picked it up, nervous, anxious to see which charges were brought against me for my outburst. But it wasn't an infraction. It was a personal letter from the Deputy Warden, informing me of my placement into Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC). I was thankful, humble, and appreciative. I also knew that after the stunt that I pulled, I couldn't blow this opportunity.

I ended up graduating at the top of my class, and because of my performance, the prison now allows long-term prisoners to be enrolled in classes even if they are not near

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