

Introduce myself: Fully Pardoned ex-convict, recovered addict/alcoholic, ex-gang member, spent a good portion of my early life homeless.

1. Everyone deserves to have a home, live in peace and to thrive!
2. Everyone deserves to feel safe, cared about not judged
3. Have you ever known or seen a homeless person, a criminal, an addict? No one is born a criminal, drug addict, violent gang member, trauma shapes us.
4. Have you ever heard a toddler, you know a baby, gugu gaga say: "Daddy, when I grow up I want to be a drug dealer, a drug user, a gang member? I really want to live homeless in the streets when I grow up" "No of course not, these things are the furthest from their little minds, after that they are traumatized and they slowly Start on those paths.
5. Not all abused kids grow up to become addicts and homeless, gang members etc. but all addicts and homeless people were abused as children, in some way!!
6. I have spent the first half of my life feeling not good enough/ that was my conditioning and children live what they learn, if no one cares about you, you don't care about yourself.
7. I have now spent the last half of my life working on recovering, getting some of myself back, my job isn't over yet! I just had to have the courage to come back

This is my story!!

First, I want to talk about my history for a moment!

My life struggles started long before I was born.

My family are Indigenous, the Sami people of northern Finland, from my father's side, my mother was Irish and as a Celt her ancestor's were also persecuted by the colonizers. My grandparents and their parents and 400 of their friends, escaped the racism and persecution of the churches, Government and the Industrial schools in Finland and came to North America. They arrived with their spirits fractured and had to hide their race, lie about who they were because they were afraid just to escape what was happening to the Indigenous peoples here in North America. To cope they turned to alcohol and extreme religion, this was their medicine. They just pretended they were white people just to fit in. I became collateral damage; I didn't have a chance. My family lived in fear their whole lives and we all know that fear is the opposite of love! As the song by the Black-eyed Peas goes, "Where is the love" I wanted it and needed it. I didn't have any other choice but to run from them, the same way they ran from their tormenters in Finland. They also grew up homeless, their homes taken away and lands given to the colonizers, their children taken away and put in special schools, their culture and way of life destroyed, no more reindeer herding. Assimilation they called it. This was the life of my ancestors several generations back, what could they give me from their broken minds and broken hearts. This is what so many of my Indigenous brothers and sisters around the world have endured. I am not alone!!

Now my own story

How Violence is Born: By Jim Mandelin

My whole childhood was filled with violence.

My mother escaped that violence. She ran away when I was three, brother was one, she was only 18, she had to survive, didn't want to be killed She never came back, I became homeless after that, but yearned for her hugs

My Father was a member of the Klu Klux Klan

He drank, and beat everyone up, including me.
He would punch me to ground over and over again
When I could stand up and not cry, He would say, "That's my Boy"

My Father sexually assaulted me in his drunken darkness.

His sister molested me by night. By day she was just mean
I became terrified by 4, peed my bed until fifteen.
At 8 I ran away to drink alcohol with my Indigenous brothers

I had nowhere to go, but my uncle yelled, "This is not your home"

I had to work for my keep he said, If I didn't work hard enough,
I would be shipped off to the Mental Hospital, or other terrible places
When I would cry when my back hurt, I was told to just be tough

My uncle beat me often, I never knew why.

See, I was **always** a good kid, **always** obeyed.
One day at gun point my uncle made my brother and I kill our puppies.
I was twelve and brother was 10, the dogs were are only family
He made us hold our puppy's heads under water, they all died.

I started to hate that day and Crime entered my life.

I tried to burn the school down, I drank alcohol and started to steal,
One day when I was 11, I tried to hang myself, my aunt cut me down
I screamed at her to take me to the Mental Hospital, now!!

I was bullied every day at school, couldn't speak English. Even some teachers were cruel

One of them, wouldn't let me go to the bathroom, I pooped my pants 6 times that year in her class!
I was in grade two, I was only 7, she would strap me and send me out
Between my father's heavy hand, my Uncles whippings, and the bullies at school
I suffered seven concussions by the time I was thirteen, a series of brain injuries.

Severe Poverty is what I have had to live with as a kid, **never** had a pair of shoes that fit.

Never saw doctor or a dentist, pulled one of my own teeth out, used a pair of pliers, that is what they did with cows with bad teeth, I gave it a try, even though I was only 11 at the time.

My family are Indigenous, the Sami people of northern Finland, they escaped the racism and persecution of the churches and Industrial schools and came to North America. They arrived with their spirits fractured and alcohol and extreme religion became their medicine, I never measured up, I didn't have a chance. There was no other choice but to run from them as they ran from their demons.

So, at 15, I too escaped the violence, but then, in the streets, there was just a different kind. I was searching for a home, but I didn't trust a soul. So, I became a drug user, drug dealer and I went to prison. In prison I was recruited into a gang, where **I finally got a hug.** Felt good to be accepted! My new gang family swept me up, then, soon, I too became violent and way out of control.

At 22, a drug and alcohol seizure led to my cardiac arrest and I was pronounced dead. In this place of death, I had an epiphany which brought me back to life I wanted to then change. That was over 44 years ago, and I am still here, and I have survived, I had the courage to come back and to restart with the help of some remarkable counselors and Mental Health workers, I was able to forgive myself, see my family through a Trauma lens and I have moved on. I pride myself on becoming vulnerable, open, sharing, it has become my greatest strength.

I learned that hurt people, hurt people. Now, I dedicate my life to helping hurt people, heal that hurt