



LAUREL HOUSE

Dear Friend:

This holiday season, Laurel House supporters like you ensure that men, women and young adults living with mental illness — people like me, actually — will not feel alone and friendless.

It's a special time of year. In just a few days, Laurel House will celebrate the holidays. I've been told that we have served more than 1,500 holiday meals since Laurel House opened its doors 25 years ago — and more than 235,000 total meals during that time.

That's amazing. And I know because I prepared and ate many of those meals. It took a lot of dedication and hard work.

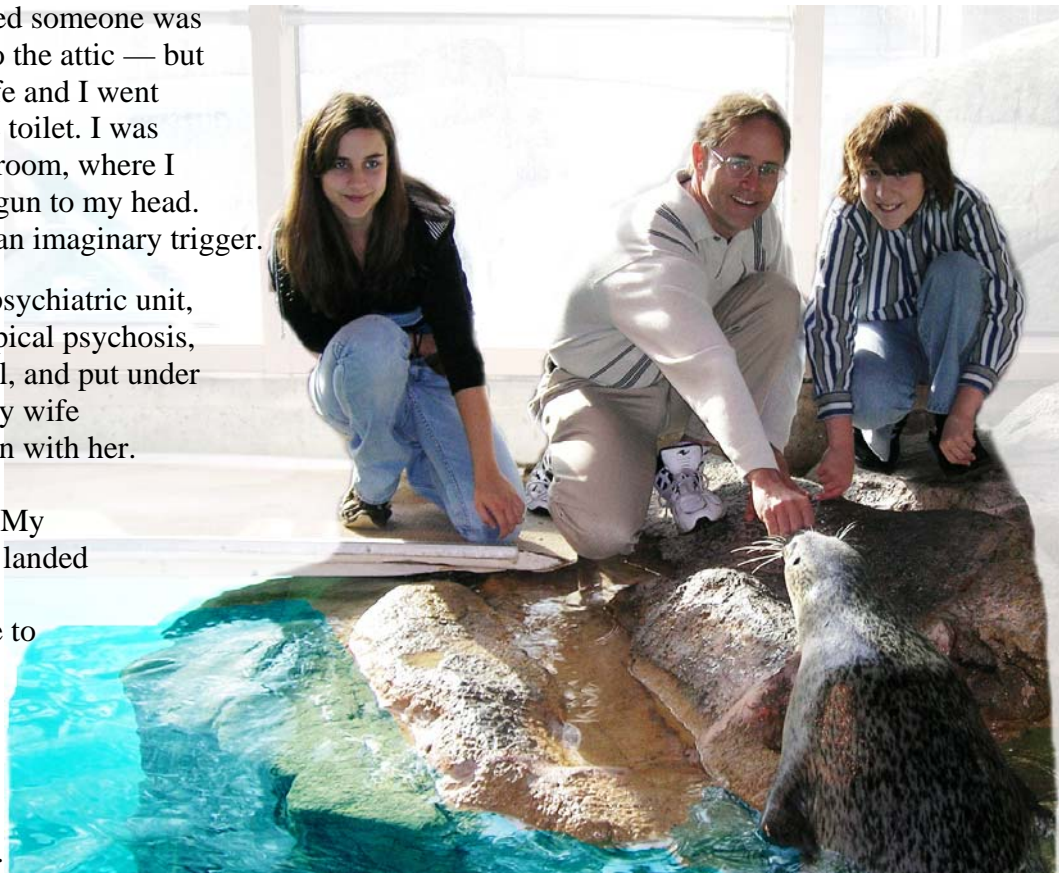
But there's more to my story than preparing holiday dinner at Laurel House. More than a decade ago, I was a happy man. I owned a construction company, had three kids, and lived in a renovated Cape in Norwalk. I was married to my high school sweetheart. Sounds like the perfect life, right?

Well, nine years later I was *homeless* — one of thousands of people in Connecticut who live on the streets. It happened without warning. One night, driving home from work, I was overwhelmed by an intense fear that someone was following me. I took a 10-mile detour, driving fast, using only service roads. I couldn't breathe until I got home and slammed the front door shut behind me.

A few days later, I was convinced someone was trying to "get me." I raced up to the attic — but no one was there. Then, my wife and I went out to dinner. I passed out in the toilet. I was rushed to a hospital emergency room, where I lay in bed raising an imaginary gun to my head. Using my finger, I kept pulling an imaginary trigger.

I was then sent to the inpatient psychiatric unit, where I was diagnosed with atypical psychosis, given 100 milligrams of Mellaril, and put under the care of a psychotherapist. My wife divorced me, taking our children with her.

In 2005, the police arrested me. My symptoms had reappeared and I landed in jail for 75 days. My business collapsed. I had to sell my home to pay debts. I left prison with nothing and ended up in a shelter. If it weren't for Laurel House, I'd never have gotten my life back. The staff helped me focus and gave me direction.



I went to work in the third floor unit at Laurel House, working in the Bistro. In addition to preparing holiday dinners, I handed out many of the 6,000 free bags of groceries given to members from Laurel House's food pantry.

There was an opening in an affordable housing program, but I had to have a steady income. I needed a job. I was anxious, but Laurel House took me on more than 30 job interviews. It was tough. No one wanted to hire someone with a history of mental illness—not even to wash dishes.

Then I met a man called Oz at the Maritime Aquarium in Norwalk. I told him about my illness, about losing everything and becoming homeless. The Aquarium is a partner of Laurel House's **Supported Employment Program**. I started as a cashier and usher, taking tickets from visitors. I was later promoted to Training Coordinator/Junior Supervisor. Last month, I celebrated my three-year anniversary, and Oz has added another Laurel House member to his staff.

Every day I talk to my children on the phone. I made a promise to myself that there would never be a day when they didn't know me. Daniel is 19 now, in his second year of military college. Samantha is 14, in her first year of high school. Kevin turned 11 in August. I spend every other weekend with them. Thanks to Laurel House, I'm part of their lives. We ride bicycles, watch *Hannah Montana* and the *Suite Life of Zach and Cody*, go to Kevin's baseball games and Samantha's ROTC air force drill unit competitions. We also visit the aquarium and watch the seals kiss, wave, spin around and hi-five.

My kids are happy, and for the most part, so am I. Money is still a major worry. Medication is expensive. For some Laurel House members, a co-pay can be \$400 a month for the 30 pills they take each day to function. If Laurel House raised the price of a cup of coffee to more than 10 cents, there are many members who could not afford it. These are the same people who live on less than \$650 a month and who face greater cuts in services and care because the State of Connecticut is cutting back.

Without you and Laurel House, I would never have recovered. Mental health recovery takes people working together. No one can do it alone. I know that better than anyone.

We need your help. I know, because it was thanks to the generosity of you and others that I could restore my life, my family and my self-respect.

Thanks for listening to my story.

Bob S

**P.S. The Laurel House Leadership Circle will match new and increased contributions to Annual Campaign with a proportional increase in their giving. So, the more you give, the more they give. It's an opportunity to possibly double your gift!**

**["Click here to donate now"](#)**