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RETURN TO SELF

by Alvin Proudly

It's taken me almost fifty years to realize I was wrong. Wrong about the life I once knew. People can change. And often do, when they are shown a little bit of hope from the inside of their mind. I am one of those people.

As a youth, adopted, alone, and full of self-pity I had no resources to rely upon. My parents were Catholics. Strict believers but lazy practitioners of the faith. "Do as I say, not as I do" kind of folks. How was I to react to such a conflicted message as a youth? So, I began to rebel.

I remember one time, mom punished me for some untold reason I've long chosen to forget. I was banished to my square box of a room. Grounded for the time being and I was okay with that. My Nonna had gotten me a beautiful notebook. She was rosy cheeked, and delighted to see my desire for life put to words. The notebook was light blue with scattered clouds on the cover. It overlooked a farmhouse that was plopped on top of a lime-green grassy knoll. In the far distance the sun glimmered between the shades of the Virginia pines.

I used that notebook as my tool to vent. An outlet to the anger that brewed like an old coffee pot. I remember it filled me with deep, murky memories of how my mother abused me.

It was written evidence, a testimony to a child's pain, who suffered in silence. *Then I got caught.*

My adopted mother snatched the book from me and said:

"How dare you!" Steam rose from her head. "How dare you...treat me like this."

I looked up at her. Eyes filled with golden tears. However, she could not reach the agony that burned like a furnace within my belly. How could she?

I grew into a caged animal after that experience. I used hate to fuel my desperate attempt to fit in with our broken society. But in the end, the only one who I hurt the most was myself. Lack of emotional intelligence plagued me like a poverty stricken country.

No matter what, I could never *make* her feel what I felt. I wanted at least some of my torment to rub off on my adopted mother. But it didn't. So, I became despondent. When I got older, I found sunshine in a bag of heroin. This took me to the outer brinks of reality and almost

never led me back. The devil's lair was within my mind and there was nowhere to hide.

Eventually, I got sober. Yet, the mindset I held was still miserable. Still the wounded little child masquerading as a man. My relationships were burnt bridges. My connection to self was under a boggy swamp of despair. Would I ever return home?

I was released from California State Prison-Los Angeles County, on April 18th, 2026. After spending nearly thirty years back and forth throughout the country locked up in jails and penitentiaries. What I've learned is RETURN TO SELF. In order to heal we need to change our mindset. How do we do that? The first step is to listen. Listen to others who have our best interests at heart. But, it is more important to listen to your heart the most. Follow your heart. And begin to love yourself once again; become that joyful, happy, soulful child you were before the trauma of life stepped in. I have returned to myself. What a wonderful feeling!