

BECOMING A PERSON AGAIN

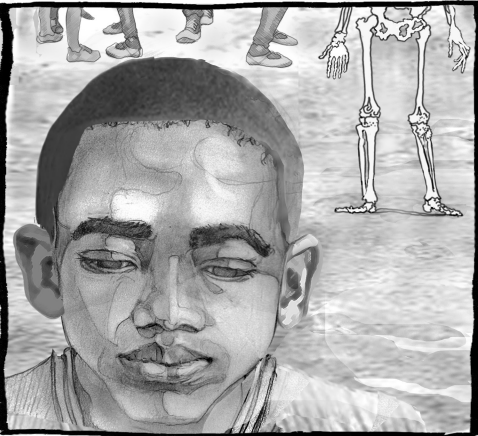
When I was 5 years old, I was put in school. It was such an unfamiliar environment.



I knew she really loved me but I just felt alone. I was so small and so withdrawn.



I remember feeling abandoned by my mother.



In middle school I was unpopular with the girls, probably because I was shy and relatively poor and dressed in off-brand, hand-me-down clothes.

In high school I was introduced to weed and alcohol.




I badly wanted to fit in so I began to get high pretty regularly. That made it easier to deal with the anxiety.

I began smoking weed and drinking a quart of beer before going to school.



It soon became clear that I was out of control.




In freshman year I was failing everything, so I was put into Job Corps, a program for dropouts.

I found myself with a bunch of strange teenagers. I had Jheri curl dripping from my head, trying to act cool. I took up brick masonry but mostly got high and sat there like a bump on a log until I was kicked out.

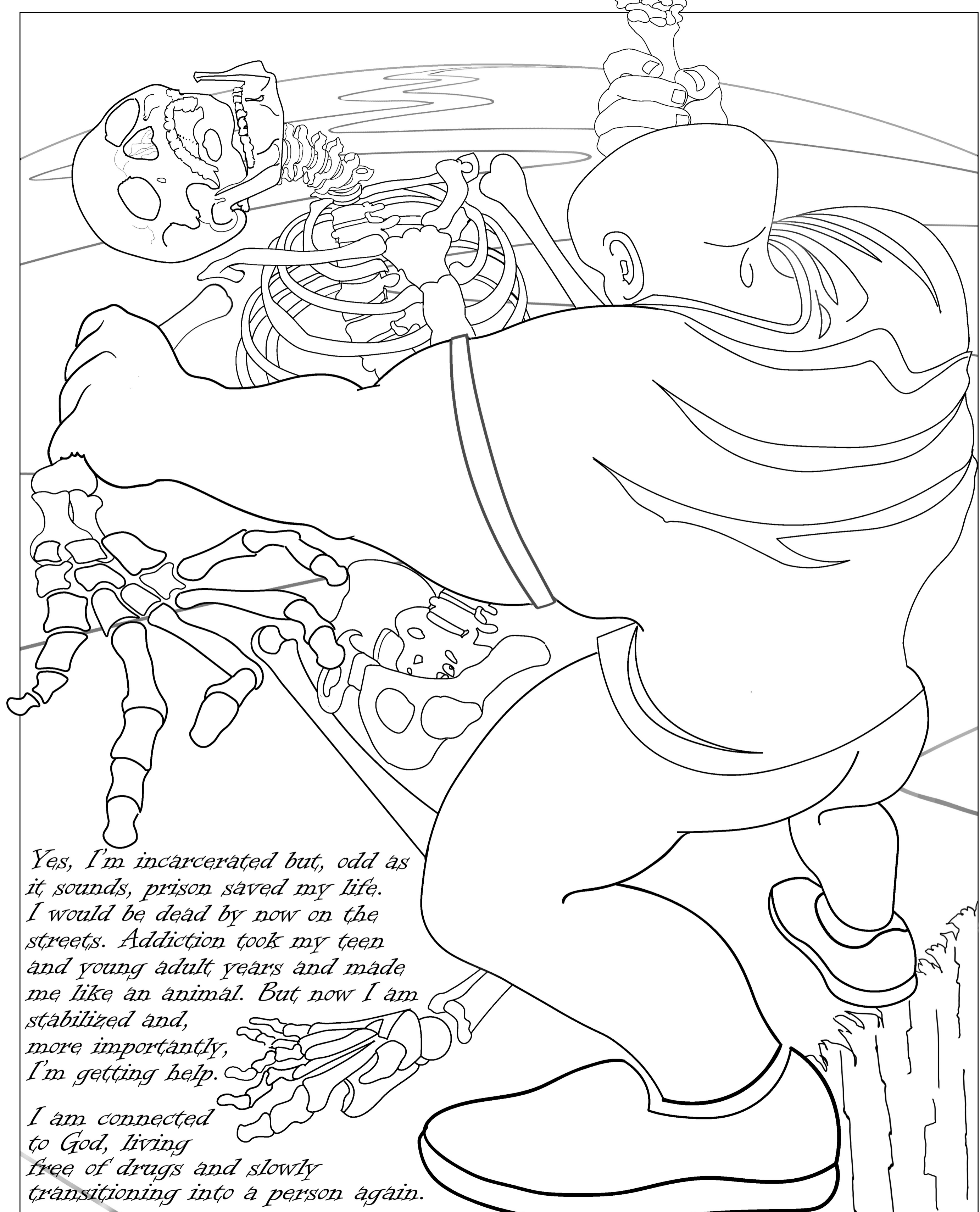
I began hanging out at a bar, selling crack. One night someone put something in my drink and it triggered mental illness. I wandered the streets from '89 to '91. until I was put in a state hospital.

After release, I continued my downward spiral, driven by impulsiveness and addiction. I was now 28, with an estranged wife and a 9 year old son who I rarely saw and living with my brother and father in a crack house with hookers and addicts.



Well, that period of my life ended in tragedy. One day I was high on crack and alcohol and hallucinating horribly and I did a terrible thing: I killed my father. I am now serving a prison term of 'natural life'...but that's not the end of the story.





Yes, I'm incarcerated but, odd as it sounds, prison saved my life. I would be dead by now on the streets. Addiction took my teen and young adult years and made me like an animal. But now I am stabilized and, more importantly, I'm getting help.

I am connected to God, living free of drugs and slowly transitioning into a person again.