

Everything you've ever wanted to say to an ex...

...or an enemy, or someone you've wronged—now's your chance to finally express it and get closure. Five women who booted the skeletons from their closets show you how it's done.



Got some unfinished business? Go ahead, pick up the phone.

I faced up to the people I stole from.

I started drinking at age 13. By the time I was 18, I was addicted to alcohol, meth and crack, and I would do anything to pay for a fix. I'd grown up in a middle-class suburban town full of ranch houses, and I would often return there to steal anything I could carry out of them. One night, after breaking into a family's beautiful home, I stumbled into the son's room. It was peaceful and sweet, the bed perfectly made. There was a five-gallon water bottle full of change on the desk. I tried not to see it. I tried to walk away, but I couldn't. There must have been \$250 worth of quarters, nickels and dimes in that bottle. It must have taken the little boy all the years of his life to save that much.

But I needed it. I broke open the bottle and took the money, all of it, cringing at the thought of what that boy would feel when he came home.

Three long years later, at 21, I found myself on the cold tile floor of a homeless shelter, unable to breathe or move or see. Just as I felt my body moving toward a bright welcoming light, a shelter employee came upon me and shook me back to life. After that, I realized for the first time since I could remember that I did not want to die after all. I was ready, finally, to get better.

During my recovery, I learned that if I were ever to be free from my burning regret and self-hatred, I would have to face my past and make amends for all the wrongs I had done throughout my years of addiction.

I decided to make the hardest apology first, to face the family of the boy whose savings I'd stolen. Driving to his house, I pulled over (continued on page 181)

three times to throw up on the side of the road; then I knocked on the door, so terrified I could hardly stand. A pretty woman in her thirties answered. I was sure that my words would not come, but softly, carefully, I began to speak.

I described what had happened three years ago—how I'd broken into her home and stolen her silver and her televisions, and how I'd taken every cent of her son's coin collection. I said how terribly sorry I was and that I was willing to pay full restitution to her and her son.

Speechless at first, the woman gathered herself together and told me, slowly and deliberately, that I had taken much more than her belongings. "You took our sense of safety," she said. "You took our comfort in this neighborhood. We changed our locks, installed a security system and, when my husband travels, I still have my sister come to stay. You cannot pay that back." She asked me to go. I left with a feeling of deep remorse about the pain I had caused her and her family.

That day I went to 22 more homes I had robbed. I stood in front of stranger after stranger, telling them what I had done. I listened to their every word, never defending or justifying. Part of making amends was to hear how I had affected their lives. Only then could I collect the parts of myself that had broken off in the middle of their living rooms. I learned the definition of bittersweet that day. It was hard to hear what those people thought of me, but now I was free, free to walk with my eyes up and take my rightful place in the world. That night was the first in years that I had no nightmares. I was not proud of what I had done in the past, but I was proud of who I was becoming.

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