



### Join the Voices for Recovery

Every year for **National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)**, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment shares the voices of many who have been through their own journey of addiction, treatment, and recovery.

This year's theme for **Recovery Month** is **"Join the Voices for Recovery: Real People, Real Recovery,"** and with that in mind, the following stories represent the unique, real people who have seen their lives renewed through treatment and recovery. Share these vignettes to raise awareness of substance use disorders. Take what you learn from them to help someone you know realize he or she may have a problem with alcohol and/or drugs. Most importantly, spread the word that treatment is effective and recovery is possible.

#### Art Zwerling

##### Registered Nurse Anesthetist



I'm an alcoholic/addict who has been continuously sober since October 21, 1987. I am employed full time as a certified registered nurse anesthetist in the Philadelphia area.

In October 1987, I was admitted to the Friends Hospital Alcoholism Recovery Program following a death-defying relapse of my addiction to alcohol, sedatives, and pain medication. I was indeed fortunate to have been given the gift of desperation. I had been so completely defeated and spiritually eviscerated by my addiction that I was ready and willing to do whatever Doris, the director of my program, suggested to begin the road back to sobriety. While undergoing an excruciating detoxification, I was sent to a meeting with the Philadelphia Recovering Nurses

Association. Doris introduced me to the group. There began my journey in recovery and adventures with advocating for health care professionals with the disease of chemical dependency.

I have been tempted with relapse several times. In one particular example, I landed in the emergency room for a back problem. Despite my protests that I'm in recovery and I'll do fine with a mild pain reliever, the hospital staff indicated that I needed a stronger analgesic to be able to take an x-ray. I wanted another shot before the nurse had removed the syringe. Fortunately, my fear of relapse outweighed my rationalizations about trying to get more pain medication. When I got home I tore up the prescription for Percocet®.

My recovery has helped me to further my career over the years. I have been a certified addictions counselor, group and family therapist, physician assistant, research associate in neuropharmacology, and critical care nurse. Currently I am completing my doctoral program at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in Memphis, TN.



## Barbara Nicholson Brown

Publisher, *Arizona Together*  
 Founder, The Art of Recovery



With over 17 years of continuous sobriety, I am still amazed at how my life has changed. As a young girl, I received the message that drinking was *fun*, made people laugh and joke, and caused you to think there was not a care in the world. Later I would see it destroy our family due to my alcoholic mother. I swore I would never be like her. But I followed in her path, step by step. From my first drink to my last, I was a blackout drinker. Somehow I managed to keep a job (sometimes), but I lost friends, respect, and self esteem along the way. I never wanted to admit I had a problem, though I knew it all along. Like many others I lied, cheated, and stole to get what I wanted. One drink led to 5 or 10 or 20, one bottle led to 5 in a sitting. At the end of 24 years of living driven by getting high, I am amazed I made it out alive. As a single woman, I was unable to have relationships because everything depended on how much others used. It was a selfish existence based on fear and self loathing.

By the grace of God I hit my bottom in 1990. None of it was pretty. The bright side is I was given a chance to take a different course of action and I chose to do so out of desperation. Today I am publisher of a recovery newspaper, *Arizona Together*, and am the founder of The Art of Recovery Expo in Phoenix, AZ. We are part of **Recovery Month** and we offer others a place to discover how to get help for themselves or their loved ones.

Whose life is not touched by addiction? The work I have done to stay sober has been well worth the effort and I can never say thank you enough for the help I received. It really is one day at a time. Life does not end because we get sober, life gets real and we get real with it. Drinking and drugging never made anything about my life better. My hand is out to help anyone who needs it.

## Tonja Myles

Co-Founder and CEO, Set Free Indeed Ministry and Free Indeed Treatment Center



I had a traumatic experience early in my life, which accounts for many of my poor decisions. Once I started using marijuana, I said that was as far as I would go. I was fooling myself, and not long after, I started abusing cocaine. To help finance my habit, I started taking money from my parents. Addiction makes you become a different version of yourself; all my conniving and manipulative behavior was rooted in my drug dependence.

Eventually, I got sick and tired of being sick and tired. I went to my grandmother for guidance. I think it is because of her prayers that I am still alive after all I've been through. She said, "Tonja, God can heal you from this mess." It was a blessing to hear that through my faith, I could be forgiven.

That night, I gave my life to the Lord and vowed to work toward sobriety.

I have started faith-based recovery treatment facilities, with the help and support of my husband. Even though I have committed my life to helping others, I still make sure I am sustaining my own recovery, no matter how long I have been sober. Ensuring that I continue to stay healthy is the only way I keep fighting my cause.

My wish is for people to look within their families and their communities to know that addiction isn't pretty but it's real—and people do recover. If I could do anything, it would be to make it better known that people don't have to suffer in silence. There is hope, help, and healing.

## Lynn Marie Smith

Advisory Board, Partnership for a Drug-Free America

Author, Speaker



I never wanted to become an addict, but it happened anyway. When I was offered drugs in a posh New York City apartment, it didn't seem like a dangerous choice to make. Once I'd experienced the "high" of drugs, it was easy to go back to them, to ease my nerves, to get over a bad day, to numb the pain, for an extra burst of energy. My life quickly spiraled out of control. I rarely ate or slept, and when I did sleep I had nightmares and panic attacks. I ignored my deteriorating condition until one night I began to hallucinate uncontrollably. I spent 14 days in a psychiatric ward receiving treatment. I was placed on antipsychotics, antidepressants, sleeping medications, and mood stabilizers; basically they traded one set of drugs for another. The outcome was frightening and life-altering. I was lucky enough to survive and, with faith and determination, recover.

I have come to a place of love and understanding not only for myself, but also for all of the dark roads I have traveled. All that is left from these experiences are the lessons, the love. Today, I fulfill my life's mission by inspiring people to live their *truth* and look *within* themselves for peace and happiness. I travel throughout North America, speaking in schools, jails, colleges, churches, and rehab programs. I have appeared on several television shows, including *Oprah*, MTV's *True Life*, and *The Dr. Keith Ablow Show*. I am an advisory board member of the Partnership for a Drug-Free America and have testified before Congress for reforms in drug education and policy. My book, *Rolling Away, My Agony with Ecstasy* was published by Simon and Schuster and I am currently in the process of publishing two more books: *Dear Addict* and *Dying to LIV*. I have been given a second chance, and that is not something everyone gets.

## Regena Grant

Center Manager, Haight Ashbury Free Clinics Smith House/Smith Ryan Residential  
Detox for Women



As of April 8, 2008, I have been in long-term recovery for 7 years and 8 days. With every passing day, this number changes. Every day is better than the last; each is a true blessing. I was dependent on crack cocaine, alcohol, and marijuana. I started off with recreational use, which quickly became abuse. I then became completely addicted.

Once I got into recovery, I heard traumatic stories of abuse, abandonment, molestation, and more. None of those things happened to me. I had a secure family, a great childhood. However, I now know that addiction doesn't care who you are.

The day I celebrated being clean for 2 years, the center manager where I received treatment asked if I wanted to work for the program. I became an on-call counselor and soon, became a permanent part-time counselor. Not long after that, I was promoted to lead treatment groups. I couldn't believe that I was working full time, providing for my family, and helping people who were just like me before treatment.

I couldn't have gotten clean and sober without my family. My kids lived with my mother and grandmother when I couldn't take care of them. They all helped each other. My life has completely turned around, and I am so lucky to have the opportunity to help others do the same.



## Reverend Hugh Tudor Foley

Priest and Treatment Center Chaplain



In 2001, I was confronted for my increasing alcoholic behavior—drinking at work, which happens to be a church—and a visible lack of ability to function. As a result, I went to Silver Hill Hospital in New Canaan, CT. The gifts I received there gave me the foundation of recovery that continues today. Much of my work as a priest reflects what I have learned from meetings, sponsors, reading, and study. The wisdom I have discovered, as I see my Higher Power working through others, continues to be awesome.

In addition to my parish service, I have begun a part-time chaplaincy at my treatment alma mater, Silver Hill Hospital. As I walk the same paths on that campus today that I walked as a patient, I am reminded daily of the gifts of recovery. The acknowledgement that spirituality plays a major role in recovery by clinicians encourages my own ministry. As chair of two diocesan committees on substance abuse, I have discovered that education of clergy is critical to helping so many who are in harm's way. I try to follow the example of the many in recovery before me, while the support group to which I belong and all who attend remain anonymous. I am open about my continuing recovery so I can teach, counsel, and write. I encourage public awareness and clergy understanding, and I am an advocate for legislative support for equality in insurance coverage for addiction recovery and mental illness.

## Donald Kurth, M.D.

Chief of Addiction Medicine, Loma Linda University Behavioral Medicine Center

Associate Professor, Departments of Psychiatry and Preventive Medicine

Mayor, Rancho Cucamonga, CA



I count my recovery starting with my sobriety date, October 8, 1993; it was a long journey to get to that day. I was just a kid, really, when I started getting involved with alcohol and drugs. I come from a family where drinking is a part of many social activities, and it seemed to me that getting drunk and knowing how to drink was a rite of passage when I was growing up.

When I was about 14, I started really drinking with my buddies. I was using heroin before Christmas break my senior year of high school and got addicted right away. I got arrested in my early 20s and the judge gave me probation with a stipulation that I had to enter a drug program. I entered treatment on December 29, 1969, and was there for 27 months. After that, I never touched drugs again.

My initial treatment didn't address my alcohol dependence, and in 1993, I entered a treatment program for it, stayed for 31 days, and got connected with 12-step recovery. This has been the anchor in my recovery since.

In treatment, you learn to overcome the challenges that you will continue to face in life, but you do it in a protected environment. Unfortunately, a huge wall of discrimination exists for individuals who have been in jail or have had legal problems with drugs. Luckily, I am very persistent and recognized the importance of accomplishing my goals, such as finishing my education. My perseverance helped me overcome some of these barriers people in recovery experience and helped me circumvent any preconceived notions others had.

## **Brenda Shebanek**

**Doctoral Candidate, Clinical Psychology**



My addiction began when I was 13 after the death of my beloved mother and brother. I was lost in addiction for 21 years. The barriers to my recovery were unresolved grief, a lack of family and financial support, and a lack of services. However, recovery has given me the life that I deserved. Life now is richer in every way. I have healthy and rich family relationships, an interesting and gratifying career, a home, and a passion for helping others find their way out of difficulty.

I have been in recovery now for more than 12 years and I am currently completing a doctorate in clinical psychology. My research interest is the stigma of addiction. The higher I go in my education and career, I can't help but wonder if my past history of addiction affects the way people will view me, and if the social stigma associated with addiction and the discrimination that grows from this stigma will be a barrier to my future success. It makes me wonder how anyone can find the hope to recover when they face so many obstacles, especially if they have gotten into trouble with the law as a result of their addiction.

As I study stigmatizing attitudes and stereotypes that people hold about those who have struggled with addiction, I am amazed at the obstacles that people face and yet still recover! It takes a lot of courage and determination. If you are struggling, don't give up. If you know someone who has had an addiction, please remember that this does not mean that they are a bad or untrustworthy person, but more likely that life events, genetics, personality, the era that they grew up in, and environmental factors have all converged into this problem. It is not a life sentence. Change happens.

## **William Moyers**

**Vice President of External Relations, Hazelden  
Author**



I've been clean and sober since October 12, 1994, and my story is like many others. I had no idea that my casual use of legal and illegal substances could hijack my brain and steal my soul. I'm not what you expect. I had an idyllic childhood. I'm the product of two parents who loved me unconditionally.

My first experimentation was around age 16 with marijuana. I voluntarily tried it and knew what I was using. This eventually led me down a path of drinking and a dependence on crack cocaine. I didn't have any consequences early on. It's clear to me now that, even though I tried to maintain a semblance of normalcy, those substances started to take over my life.

I'm proof that addiction doesn't discriminate. It doesn't care if you are from the quiet suburbs of Long Island or the inner city of Chicago. Whether you are white or black, Jewish or Christian, it doesn't matter. In 1989, I hit bottom in New York City. In the fall of 1989, I was sent to a treatment program. However, between 1989 and 1994, I was in and out of treatment four times, even though I was sober for nearly four of those years.

In 1994, I was 35 years old and relapsed, again. I got one more chance, and I've been clean and sober ever since. Then the rest of my miracle happened and now I continue to live in recovery. Treatment is not a cure; it's a solution.



I finally took personal responsibility for my disease and accepted the fact that I have a chronic illness and, to survive it, I have to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

I'm more than a treatment provider; I'm a recovery advocate. I advocate shifting the debate from just talking about the problem to working toward a solution—recovery. It doesn't really matter how someone finds their way on a path of recovery. Whether they find an inpatient program, work the 12 steps, or find it on their own, I just want people to get well.

### **Benneth Lee**

**Father, Advocate, Teacher**



I first joined a gang when I was 10 years old. A gang provided protection and a way to escape the shame of poverty in my rough neighborhood where I lived on Chicago's west side. I learned to hustle—as a result I had nice clothes; I drove nice cars. I also was becoming more and more entrenched in a life of crime and addiction.

Arrested repeatedly, I served my first of several prison sentences at age 15. At 17, I began using heroin and eventually became addicted. My life consisted of drugs, crime, and jail time—a cycle repeated over and over again. At age 30, I was a high school dropout, could barely read, and I hadn't held an official job in my life. What I had was an extensive criminal history, a serious addiction, and a reputation as a high-profile gang leader. I wanted out, but I didn't know where to start.

Things began to change for me in 1984. My cellmate at the time was an individual I used to hustle with on the streets. He told me that an organization called TASC could help me achieve the changes that I now desired. I was assigned to TASC as part of my probation and received my first chance at treatment for my substance use disorder.

Over the course of two years, I went through the whole spectrum of treatment, starting in a residential program and gradually moving to less supervised forms of treatment. Each step strengthened my recovery and my resolve. With the support of my TASC and treatment counselors, I began looking for a job. I looked for three months before I even got my first interview. I finally entered the workforce with a position at a warehouse, and successfully completed parole and probation at age 32.

I wanted to do more and help others struggling through life experiences similar to mine. So I enrolled in a training program for addiction counselors. That was almost 20 years ago. Today, I continue to work with individuals who are gang-affiliated and addicted, along with the agencies and institutions where they are involved. No matter how busy I get, I reach inside of myself every day to show others who might feel like I felt—as a kid of 10 or a man of 30—that there is another way. And, there are people and organizations that are here to help.