

The View

Newsletter of the Ridgeview Alumni Association
Fall 2003

Volume XIV

Smyrna, GA



Victories in Recovery

The Ridgeview Alumni Association
3995 South Cobb Drive – Smyrna, GA 30080

Fall Focus: Victory in Recovery

Victory in Recovery

Victory (vik'tə-ré)n. **1**, the winning of a contest or battle. **2**, any successful performance.

Upcoming Events

Halloween Dance – Saturday, November 1, 2003
 The Shrine Feed the Homeless – Saturday, November 22, 2003
 Gratitude Dinner – Sunday, November 23, 2003
 Caroling & Lighting of the Serenity Garden – Sunday, December 7, 2003
 The Shrine Feed the Homeless – Saturday, December 27, 2003
 New Years Eve Dance – Wednesday, December 31, 2003
 The Shrine Feed the Homeless – Saturday, January 31, 2004
 Super Bowl Party – Sunday, February 1, 2004
 The Shrine Feed the Homeless – Saturday, February 28, 2004

Spring Fling Weekend 2004 May 14, 15, 16

Friday, May 14, 2004 – Speaker Meeting

6:30 pm – TBA (Ala-Non)

8:00 pm – TBA (AA)

Saturday May 15, 2004 – Workshop

TBA

Concurrent Workshops

Sunday, May 16, 2004 – Spring Fling

Noon to 6:00 pm

Hot dogs, hamburgers, music, activities for kids, swimming, crafts, etc.

Poolside 12 Step meeting immediately following the activities.

Other events for the year include:

Endowment Fund Silent Auction – TBA

Lake Outing and Picnic – June 2004 TBA

Fall Retreat – September 2004 TBA

Contact any Alumni Steering Committee Member for more information.

The Ridgeview Alumni Association is moving into the 21st Century. After this current issue the Ridgeview Alumni Newsletter will be posted on our website www.ridgeviewalumni.com. We will no longer print and mail out thousands of copies of the Newsletter. The website will carry the full newsletter and archival copies. Furthermore, we will be able to incorporate more color graphics and content. The Newsletter will be in an Adobe PDF format; our website will link to download the FREE Adobe reader; allowing you to read and print the Newsletter at your leisure.

If you would like to be added to our E-mail notification list when a new Newsletter is placed on the site, E-mail us at steering@bellsouth.net or contact us thru the Web site, please put "newsletter" in the subject line.

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Finding the Real Me

Sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly!

I did not elect to go into treatment; I went out of desperation and fear; fear of losing my job of all things. My job at that time in my life was how I defined who I was. I was closer to the people I worked with than my own family and friends and I know now that if anyone was going to recognize that I needed help it was them.

So, at 36, I was fortunate enough to find Ridgeview through the help of my colleagues and therapist. As I went through the assessment I was told my insurance would cover 5 days; at that time I still had not accepted my addiction and told myself I could do anything for 5 days. After the first 3 days I spent the first weekend soul searching and realized that I was right where I needed to be; I was so tired of hiding, tired of trying to figure out what I thought everyone else expected me to be. I began to finally accept responsibility for who I was, instead of continuing to play the victim, a role I had perfected over the last 32 years.

While still in treatment I joined an AA Big Book Study; it was a saving grace for me. It brought me close into the program and gave me an understanding of how it worked and what I would need to do to make it work for me. Don't get me wrong, I was scared, constantly hearing that I would have to change my entire life; that meant everything. One of my greatest challenges was learning to trust people. After spending so many years keeping people at arm's length and not allowing them in, how would I do this? I knew that no matter how afraid I was I had to.

Gradually, as I completed each step the fear began to subside. My sponsor at that time was the greatest gift God had given me. She constantly pushed me through each Step. I found that writing my 4th Step brought about fear, shame, pride, victim, omnipotence, and many other character defects, but through the 5th Step I was able to obtain freedom - freedom from self, freedom from my chosen role of victim. I had fully accepted responsibility for my own life. What true joy it is to have the burdens of my past become just that, past. There were no more secrets!

With each Step came more trust and faith in God, the people around me and a greater self-confidence in myself. The joy of giving back to others what was so freely given to me is one of the greatest gifts I continue to give myself in recovery.

Dawn B.

Hopelessness to Hope

I was fortunate to grow up in a home with two parents that were, and still are, both very loving people. My father worked very hard and my mother was a house mom that had the full time job of raising my younger brother and myself. We were the All-American middle class family. My first memories of true self-awareness as a child were centered around a feeling of being different from everyone else. The only thing that I wanted was to fit in or be normal. I wanted to be accepted. In hindsight, I was just a small child looking for his place in the world. I was full of the many emotions that any growing person would experience. The problem that I had with emotions was that I never developed a way to express them or deal with them in a healthy fashion. Therefore, whenever they reared their head, they progressively manifested themselves into fear.

I believe that this fear of emotions came about as a result of an incident that happened early in my life. When I was about eight, I remember one of my friends in the neighborhood confronting me and telling me that a group of them had been talking about me behind my back. He proceeded to tell me the laundry list of items that the group had come up with that were, in essence, my faults or the things that they did not like about me. I remember being shocked at first and then really upset that they were talking behind my back. I thought that maybe something was wrong with me, because how else could a group of kids come up with such a list of faults if they were not true? Anyhow, I was upset and went to my mother in tears and told her about the incident. She responded by telling me that I could not let what other people thought about me get me so upset. Therefore, I processed this to mean that I should not get upset or recognize my feelings. I did not like the way that this entire incident made me feel and I was determined not to experience it again. So, in my infinite wisdom as a young child, I determined that I could have avoided all this pain by not allowing my friends to know the true me. It was my fault for taking risks and letting my friends know that I was a human being with emotions and feelings. I figured if I stopped wearing my emotions on my sleeves and did not allow myself to be vulnerable, then I could never get burned or hurt again. Thus, I believe that I made a subconscious decision that emotions were for the weak and would only get me hurt; therefore, they were to be bottled up and avoided.

I went on through my early life growing and learning how to interact with people and the world. Just like any other kid or people in general, I wanted

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to be liked and accepted. I longed for a sense of belonging. I was full of doubt about myself and my position in life. I was afraid of emotions, I never discussed fears, anxieties, desires, or dreams with anyone, they were buried. I did not want to rock the boat; I thought that I was the only person having these thoughts. Externally, I was a very happy kid. I loved to play sports, be outside and play with my friends. I was curious and adventuresome. I was just like any other kid, trying to figure out what I was going to do next.

I found the answer, alcohol, or it found me. I remember the way that the very first drink made me feel. It took away all the fears and worries and allowed me to be myself. For the first time in my life I felt like I belonged, that I fit in with everyone else. It gave me the courage to do and say the things that I wanted to do and say without the consequences; because I could always say that it was the alcohol that caused me to behave that way. I believed that I had found a true friend, one that would not talk behind or stab me in the back.

So began my drinking career. I drank every weekend through my high school years and rarely did I drink a little. I got in a little trouble drinking through high school (3 minor possessions) but, for the most part, I just drank as a part of my social life. Next, I went on to a college in Georgia, and that is where the real drinking and full time partying began. By my second year of college I was drinking until I blacked out four or five nights a week and had started dealing and using drugs on a regular basis. The more that I used and drank, the more horrible I felt. In turn, I used and drank to cover and suppress these feelings. I was stuck in this never-ending cycle until after the first quarter of my second sophomore year, or my third calendar year of school. It turns out that I had withdrawn from all my classes that quarter to dedicate myself to partying. Of course, I spent the tuition refund (my parents' hard-earned money) on living and not going to school. Anyhow, I had the sense that my life was rapidly spinning out of control and I needed to do something to change my luck. So, while I was at my parents' house (home) for Christmas break, I decided that I needed to get away from the drugs and my situation at the school that I was presently attending. Like any good alcoholic or addict I thought a geographical change would cure all my woes. So, off I went to a Mississippi college. Of course, the problem was that I was going to be taking me with me.

The change in schools worked to some extent because I was doing really well academically at my new school. I was still drinking heavily, but

only on the weekends, and I had given up drugs altogether. In essence, I was a functioning alcoholic. I managed to graduate from college with a masters in accounting and got a job with one of the Big Six accounting firms in Memphis, TN. It was during this same time period that I was also going through a painful breakup with my college girlfriend, and yes, the breakup was a direct result of my drinking. I was doing well at the accounting firm and in line for a promotion at the one and half year mark, which is six months ahead of the normal schedule. However, my drinking was steadily increasing, to help me deal with the additional pain of the break up. I just could not effectively blot out the pain with alcohol alone, so drugs came back into my life with a vengeance. It was a matter of three months from the time that I reintroduced drugs until I had quit my promising job in accounting. In addition, I burned bridges as I left and had no other job prospects. I came up with all kinds of good reasons about why that job was not right for me, but the truth of the matter was that it was getting in the way of my partying. A couple of months of unemployment went by and I was getting restless and bored. It was time for another geographical cure. So, back to Atlanta I went, and, once again, I took me with me.

The return to Atlanta was the beginning of the end. It was a seven-year haze of drugs and alcohol. It was more pain for me and for everyone that cared about me than I could have ever imagined. I had many nights in bed wondering if my heart was going to come out of my chest, and not really caring one way or another. There was more unemployment than employment and more than enough hurt for everyone involved. There were the teary-eyed pleas and every other talk known to man from friends and families about my behavior. There were numerous, sincere promises of change, only to be broken shortly thereafter with the next bender. I had given in to the fact that I was incapable of change. I had lost the ability to think of a future or care about one. I had died on the inside and was doing my best not to feel until what I considered was the upcoming inevitable pathetic end. I had lost all hope!

After my last epic bender, I came home and my girlfriend of four years had thrown all my stuff, which fit into about three grocery bags and a suitcase, on the front stoop of the apartment and kicked me out. I had no idea what I was going to do. I contemplated suicide. I was just desperately looking for a way out of my existence. I stayed with a friend and waited for my father to come into town; he was on his way after the phone call from my girlfriend, to yet again clean up the mess of his thirty-one year-old

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son. My father, brother, and sister-in-law sat me down and asked me what I was planning on doing next. I threw out a few crazy ideas like joining the military because I thought that it would maybe straighten me out, but I was really just looking for a way to die with some shred of dignity, I was hoping I would get killed in war. Anyhow, they asked me if I thought that I had a problem and if was I interested in getting help at Ridgeview. I was hesitant at first because I truly believed that I was beyond help. As I was silently pondering the impossibility of a life without drugs and alcohol, my sister-in-law began to share the experience of her aunt. She told me that her aunt was very similar to me; she was always the life of the party and for years struggled through life as an alcoholic. Her aunt's story mirrored mine, one of family and personal disappointments and financial ruin. Then she began to tell me how her aunt had repaid all her former debts, led a productive life, and still managed to be outgoing and the life of the party. She had turned around her life. She also told me that she was recently at her grandmother's funeral, and her aunt placed her thirteen-year chip in the casket with her mother. Suddenly, I felt the slightest glimmer of hope. I agreed to go to Ridgeview.

A little over five months have passed in my life since that day and the results have been better than I ever could have imagined. The first-class, caring counselors, especially Bonnet, at Ridgeview helped me begin to pick up the pieces of my shattered life. Bonnet's caring attitude and patient demeanor helped me regain faith in people. Ridgeview gave me the crash course in recovery that I needed and showed me the way to a life of recovery. Ridgeview introduced me to the program of Alcoholics Anonymous and AA has reintroduced me to my higher power, God. I asked God to take over my life and show me the kinder, softer way of life. He has moved in full force and has removed the obsession to drink and do drugs. God constantly puts the right people in my life at the right times and only gives me what he knows I can handle. By no means is every day perfect, but I now have and continue to acquire the tools to solve any problem. I have been transformed in short time. My gratitude list grows every day: I have a good paying job, I was able to reconcile with my girlfriend, I am able to contribute to society; I no longer live my life in fear and chaos, I am able to go to sleep at night, I am able to be part of life. I dream about my future again and look forward to tomorrow with excited enthusiasm. Lastly, I am very grateful for the program of AA and the amazing way that it has changed so many lives and endured all these years. It has taught me that once a person truly

comes to the end of self, then the true journey begins. God is good all the time and all the time God is good!
C.L.

Reflections of Recovery

"My name is Tanya and I'm an alcoholic." I grew up in a Southern home where alcohol was consumed on a daily basis. I thought it was part of everyday life. I attended the First Baptist church, sang in the choir, and began to learn about God through my music. But I was always looking for something to fill a "void", I was highly competitive in school activities...state basketball and tennis championships, cheerleading, literary meets and theater. I always thought if I succeeded at these things I would gain my parent's approval, especially my mother's. By the end of high school in 1969, a friend turned me on to pot. I realized all my activities did not fill that "hole" the way pot did. I was on my way. I left my hometown of Louisville, Georgia, off to the University of Georgia, where I continued to smoke pot while attending journalism school and working at Channel 8, Georgia Public Television. After college I worked in Governor Jimmy Carter's press department. I could not handle the political red tape and corruption around me...even though Jimmy Carter is one of the finest human beings I've ever met. What was going on in this country sent me off to Europe where I began to drink on a daily basis. When the going gets tough this alcoholic "escapes"! I returned to the U.S. and started skydiving. I met my husband and was hired by Delta Airlines as a flight attendant. My husband and I traveled all over the U.S. to compete in world record skydiving attempts and operated a skydiving center in LaGrange, Georgia. My alcoholism and drug use escalated in this environment.

I drifted away from my Christian upbringing and found myself in a series of events that led me to two treatment centers and Alcoholics Anonymous. After getting sober in December 1985 and working the Twelve Steps, I became open to develop a relationship with God like I had never known! In spite of a divorce and raising my son on my own, I stayed clean and sober for 10 years.

To this day I can't believe I drank again. Due to a series of events...this time all was going great. Oh well, its like Sam says. What does a fish do when he's lying on the bank of the lake and there's water all around. I jumped back in too! Oh, I "nearly" controlled it this time. I stayed "out there" for ten

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years. Let me tell you, 10 years sober and 10 years drunk.... SOBER IS BETTER!

Another series of events...my father's suffering for years, his death, job problems and most of all dealing with myself led me back to God by way of Ridgeview. Seven months ago I surrendered again; Cottage C was a spiritual experience even though I don't remember much of it. I do remember the things I learned about others, this disease and myself from my intense relapse group, living in the half way house, my addictionologist, and now my after-care and home group. The bond I still share with my friends from the halfway house and the alumni from Ridgeview totally overwhelms me! Thank you God!

Thing Called Life

I started my recovery process a little more than a year ago and things actually seemed to get worse for me. I was in treatment for thirty-eight days when I had my first relapse.

My program, without surprise, got extended and I ended up in the halfway house. After completion I then got myself a sponsor and attended AA meetings regularly for a while. But something wasn't clicking for me. I began to quickly isolate and meetings slacked off. Then more problems...my precious pet "Abbey" had to be put to sleep, and it just about killed me. You see, it was only about a year before that my partner of ten years had died.

So many mixed emotions came rushing through - here I was losing ANOTHER precious thing in my life. I was sad, angry and completely lost, hopeless to say the least. I just wanted to die.

After my partner died (which was not fast or pretty) and filing bankruptcy a week after his death, I felt I had nothing left to live for, after all I was a hopeless drunk with AIDS myself. Dying would be a relief. One night I had an idea of how to do it; I would research assisted suicide. After all, I had all the qualifications, a terminal illness. I was on the computer one night, very excited that I had found a way out, when my dear pet companion Abbey came and laid her head on my foot. I took one look at that beautiful face and broke down as I pushed away from the computer. How could I be so selfish I thought, not to mention how Scott, my partner, loved life so much and very much wanted me to live.

So now I had to give this thing called life a shot. I worked very hard at my recovery...from alcohol, grief and financial ruin, yet something still seemed to be missing. I was getting frustrated and depressed, what more could I do!!!! Then "it"

happened one night. I had a dream - this is it, I seem to be at a reunion or some gathering where I knew and loved everyone. I was talking with a female about someone I really missed a lot and would give ANYTHING to see and hold them just one more time. She replied, "You can, he is standing right over there waiting on you." My eyes teared up and my heart raced...(I just knew my Scott was there), I ran over and literally threw myself around him and held on so tight. Then he turned around to me. It wasn't Scott at all; this person was blond and blue eyed. Scott had brown eyes. At any rate the love for this stranger was so great, unlike any I have had before. He asked me if I wanted to come with him right now, I said I had some things I had to do first. He replied, "That's OK, just know I am always here for you anytime you need or want me." I felt so much joy and peace. As I slowly woke up I still felt the love and joy, just like the dream was still happening. I just lay there in bed enjoying the feeling, then tears began to flow down my face, I knew who the blue-eyed blond was...you see, I have blue eyes and blond hair. It was me that I had not been able to love since a small child. I was learning to love me for the first real time.

After that night I have not been the same. My recovery has skyrocketed (still tough at times, but I welcome the challenge now). I will be picking up my six month chip soon, now I have the love it takes to win this victory!

Brian J.

A Bigger Toolbox

Looking back at that fateful day I entered treatment, I had no idea what was in store for a drunk like me. I never was very good at "fixing things," so surely I could let these nice people "fix" me and send me on my way.

Like the many cars I'd had in my life, I drove my body (and soul) into the ground. A complete overhaul and then maybe an occasional tune-up might add a few more years to my miserable life. Sure enough, the *new* me was more than willing when I left treatment after six weeks. I had eagerly gobbled up all the info I could on my disease and proceeded to enter the real world with the "tools" of the program. The question was: would I use them?

Since getting a sponsor seemed important, I hooked up with the coolest guy I could find. Image was very important to me. Forget the fact that two months earlier I was a puking, pants-pissing, paranoid mess, who was begging God to end his nightmare one way or the other.

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The other thing emphasized was the importance of meetings. I actually enjoyed these from the beginning. I felt right at home with these other drunks! It wasn't long before I actually started to listen to what was being said rather than obsess on my profound musings.

Next came working the steps, and even working with others. With the addition of service work I was sure my "toolbox" was pretty full.

Thankfully, I was wrong. Every year I'm finding more and more tools that make this recovery project (me) easier and much more rewarding. I had been to speaker meetings the first four years, but this year I attended my first round up. As usual it was better than I anticipated. I met Dr. Bob's son (the oldest living Ala-non), and actually got the chills listening to his story. The history of AA has become a new passion for me.

I have been to "big book" studies before, but this year I found a special one. We read the whole book cover to cover. The answer might be in the first 164 pages, but you're missing out big time if you stop there. The stories in the back of the book have touched me deeply. I'm still amazed at how closely I relate to the message from alcoholics from all walks of life. I'm always underlining and hi-lighting parts of the personal stories that particularly hit home. Recently, I found myself making up every other paragraph of a certain story we were reading. Of all the stories I've read in this God-given book, the one that hits home the most to my diseased mind is titled "Women Suffer Too". The author puts into words, the way I never could, the pain and desperation of my sickness. She describes my mental make-up and my utter hopelessness. Then she describes the feeling of freedom and hope I too found in Alcoholics Anonymous.

The author was a female pioneer of AA in 1939. I'm a married man living in 2003. Go figure! Young or old, black or white, male or female, the bottom line is: drunks relate to drunks. That was the miraculous revelation that God gave to Bill W. and Dr. Bob almost seventy years ago.

As I go forward on this amazing journey, I find myself picking up more and more tools as I go. I've gotten a new sponsor, who has been a spiritual guide as well as a great friend. I also have a close network of people in recovery who keep me accountable. I've decided to revisit a step study meeting I went to early on, spend time reading the long version of the traditions in the twelve and twelve, go on a weekend retreat, and who knows: can a road trip to Akron, Ohio (the birthplace of AA) be far behind?

Excuse me, but it's time for me to end this. I've got to run and get a bigger toolbox. THANK GOD!!!

E.C.

Victories In Recovery

When the topic of "Victories In Recovery" came up, I immediately thought of my time playing for the Lunatics, the softball team sponsored by Ridgeview Institute. My career was from 1999 through 2001. I think we actually won a game in 2000. It was by forfeit. The other team thought it was going to rain so they didn't show up.

Seriously, the victories I've had in recovery are a bit more spiritual in nature. They're painfully slow. Sometimes I don't even notice them and sometimes they have to be pointed out to me.

When I first came into Alcoholics Anonymous, I thought I was being sentenced. This was punishment for all my drinking and misbehavior. My first thought was, "I wonder how long I will have to do this? If only they would leave me alone so I could drink in peace. I'm not hurting anyone but myself and who cares about me?" Little did I know what was about to happen. By being willing and open-minded, I embarked on a new way of life that I never dreamt was possible for me.

My first victories were very small. I was painfully shy and just wanted to sit in the back where no one would notice me. At the same time, however, I was lonely. My sponsor suggested I clean the ashtrays. By doing that, I got to know people. When I ran out of things to say (which was a big fear), I could look busy by washing the ashtrays. The very first victory I noticed was when I started to feel comfortable. I was starting to fit in. People recognized me and called me by my first name.

There were other small victories. For instance, when I could read "How It Works" or "The Twelve Traditions" without squirming. I was deathly afraid of giving out the chips but I got over that too. How about the first time I realized that when people got up to get coffee, they weren't going out to the kitchen to talk about me. There were a few instances (which the old-timers in my home group still like to retell) when I would share and then run out of the room. And I kept running! I ran straight out to my car and went home. I vowed I would never show my face in that meeting again but I'd be back the next night. It took a while to get over the embarrassment of sharing because I thought I had said something stupid.

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On pages 83 and 84 of the Big Book of Alcoholics' Anonymous, it states, "If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through." They ain't lyin', brother! "We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness." It is by living with a new freedom and experiencing the happiness that I find my victories in recovery.

However, the opposite holds true as well. There are many victories to be found by going through pain. Some refer to this process as "another growth experience." It is usually the things that I don't want to hear that help me the most. The same holds true with the things that are "suggested" that I don't want to do.

As time goes on, I look at these victories as blessings. To me, victories imply something that I accomplished. The only thing I can take credit for is that I go to meetings and I DON'T DRINK! Blessings on the other hand, are gifts that I don't deserve but are given to me anyway by a loving power greater than myself.

There is a quote that states, "A man who conquers himself is greater than a leader who conquers many nations."

Today I live with a gratitude for what has been so freely given to me. If I keep doing what I've been doing, I can look with hope to the future. I was dead spiritually and emotionally. The fellowship I have found and the program of Alcoholics Anonymous has brought me back to life. I can think of no greater victory.

Sean C.

Prayer As A Treatment Against A Fear Magnet

Everyone knows today that man's greatest enemy is fear. If I really get rid of fear concerning any danger it has no power to hurt me. It is no mere platitude to say, "There is nothing to fear but fear itself."

What I really think about any person or any situation is my "treatment" of that condition, and if I wish the condition to change I must know how to "treat" it differently by a change in thought. Thinking of God, at the beginning of every prayer, if only for a moment, and affirming my faith and trust in Him, overcomes my fear.

The advantage of a written prayer or treatment like this is that it makes me think certain powerful healing thoughts, and, it is the right thought

that demonstrates. It is not the prayer itself but the change that it brings about in my thinking that does the work.

"So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. We began to see that the world and its people really dominated us...The wrong-doing of others, fancied or real, had power to actually kill."

On a Thursday, a woman was referred to me to compound a prescription. She said she would wait for it, but was in a hurry to leave. When she returned, she asked to have the Rx returned to her and she refused to pay for the compounded prescription. She asked if we knew that there was staphylococcus in the pharmacy. The following excerpted letter was sent to the County Board of Health and pharmacy authorities:

"When I entered, a pharmacist on duty was seated at a table in the center of the waiting area. He was eating watermelon, the room reeked of it, and juice was on his hands and most of that part of the table. I'm familiar enough with infection control standards to recognize a flagrant violation. Some have argued that mouths are "dirtier" than any other part of the body. I did not want a Staph-contaminated product to infect my husband's surgical wound, so I took the script to a compounding pharmacy in another part of town. Please investigate, or take appropriate action to address this grossly unsafe practice."

Copies of the letter were distributed to drug inspectors across the state.

"Fear...touches every aspect of our lives. It set in motion trains of circumstances we felt we didn't deserve." I felt a sensation similar to being punched in the stomach with a resulting loss of breath, only to hear from the chief drug inspector, "That's the most ridiculous letter I've ever seen. Send me a copy, because I gave mine away."

I believe that God does for us, what we cannot do for ourselves, and all power over fear lies in constructive thought. "Perhaps our trouble was not that we used our imagination. Perhaps the real trouble was our almost total inability to point our imagination toward the right objectives. There's nothing the matter with constructive imagination...meditation helps to envision our spiritual objective before we try to move towards it.

My current thinking makes me what I am. My mental conduct, my hour-by-hour, minute-by-minute thinking, produces specific conditions, and may be thought of as the weather of my soul and it is these thoughts that mold my destiny. Why is it that learned men and philosophers are notoriously unsuccessful in the business of personal living, if it is

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really true that “knowledge is power?” I now realize that my considered attitude ultimately determines everything in my life from the state of my body to the daily work that I do and the kind of people that I meet. And it may be possible to explain the most profound spiritual truths in the simplest language. I am a fear magnet.

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Who is this young man that I have just met? Him, all wrinkled and pink with his fist in his mouth. Who are you? Who will you become? How will I be of help to you?

In my arms lies a pink, wrinkled little bundle. You see it is my grandson, my first grandchild.

How does this come into play in an article about Victory in Recovery you may ask? Well, let me explain.

I was requested to be present at my grandson's birth by his father, my son. This is the younger of my two sons who saw me in my addiction at its worse. He is the son who had given up on his dad ever being anything more than an alcoholic and drug addict. This is the son who didn't and wouldn't be part of my life because of my addiction. This is the son who had cut his dad out of his life.

In his last years of high school I could not be counted on to be at anything he was involved in. I may have promised to be there, but I may have just not shown up because I was out “using.” And I may have been gone for days at a time. This had continued throughout his college career. And he had lost trust in my being there.

But, that was then. Now, after two wonderful years in recovery, working the steps with a sponsor, going to lots of meetings and helping as many alcoholics as possible, I was trusted with a very precious event. I was fully present at the birth of my grandson. What a wonderful victory.

I could just as easily have told you about the other “victories” in my life that have come about as a result of working the program of AA. Like the fact that I have someone in my life who calls me his best friend. I never had that before. That was one thing I had wanted for so long, but my disease kept me from that. And not only is he my best friend, I get to be best man at his wedding. That is a victory.

And I can tell you that I have somehow, through some miracle beyond my capabilities, been able to return to college to work toward the degree that I started 34 years ago, that endeavor being

curtailed due to my drug and alcohol use. And not only am I in school, I am making straight A's. That is a victory.

I could go on, but I believe you get the picture. This life that I lead today is so wonderful. And it all comes from and is based upon working the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. My prayer is that you too will find “victory” in your recovery.

Rapping into Recovery

*You don't want to regress,
cause' it will hold up progress.*

*Like when you are stumbling
out there on the block*

*Or when you are cruising
in that sleek Jag,
it's so easy to roll into a snag*

*Some early morn
when that crash
feels like a thorn*

*When an obstacle
becomes like a barnacle*

*Because you became
a regrettable spectacle*

*It's like a replay
when you have freaks
and geeks trying to avoid the cops*

*We do want to regain that much
sought after sane state of grace
without a trace of the condition
our condition was in*

*So lets take a reprieve
to retrieve our sustenance
out of the substance and recapture
the rapture we can now say
with ease that was my disease*

Wanda G.

God's Help

Who would have thought I - Patsy S., successful employee, great wife, loving mother and

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grandmother - could have turned to alcohol and drugs to fulfill a gaping hole of loneliness, low self esteem and depression? At age 53, I tried to commit suicide, but as the pills spilled into the commode, I knew God had intervened and had given me a second chance at life. As it turned out, it was the beginning of a new life. With the support of Ridgeview and family I am now understanding that I have a disease. I know that I will always be an alcoholic and drug addict, but as long as I work the program of AA, I can stay sober one day at a time. Ridgeview gave me the tools to understand why I felt so unworthy. I am in my seventh month of sobriety and happier than I have been in my entire life. With the help of my sponsor, my therapist, and AA meetings and doing volunteering at Ridgeview, my life has new meaning. Also I must take personal inventory every day. I have an awesome support group, people who all went through the program at Ridgeview together. With God's guidance, and one day at a time, I know life will be fuller. I only wish that I could have seen this a long time ago. It is really great to see the young people who are reaching out for help. Without God's help, I would not be here today to write this letter. God must see something in me that I could not see myself. Thank you!

Patsy S.

The Gift

I was unhappy with my job and the person I worked for. Plans to leave were discussed with some spiritually fit men. It was suggested I align myself with a few men to form a support foundation. I consider them an intricate part of my recovery. I share with them my plans to leave this job and start my own gig. I told them how much I hated my job and who I worked for. They all listened and unanimously told me my motives were all wrong and that I was building a resentment. They suggested I pray for my boss and his family. I followed the suggestion, at first struggling and then it started getting easier. Time passed and I was given an opportunity to join a new and exciting work environment. The suggestion of prayer allowed me to leave my old job with grace, honor and dignity, something I was never able to do before. I ran into my old employer about 9 months later for the first time since I had left. I was able to feel complete and free of any resentments. It was such a gift...truly a gift in recovery.

V. Paribello

AA Opened My Eyes

In the past I lived in the dark. Not the darkness of night, where at least you have the light of stars to show you the way, but the darkness of active alcoholism. Where my mind, body and soul were dark and sick. I lived in a place of dark isolation, with dark fears, and dark slow suicide. A black pit where nothing lives, no light shines, no hope.

I had to endure all those years to find out what life should and can be; absolutely wonderful.

Alcoholics Anonymous and The Twelve Step Program of AA opened my eyes to a life. Before I was in darkness. Now my Higher Power has guided me to a happy life, full of friends and family. A life where my eyes want to be open to enjoy and see all that my Higher Power provides for me.

My Higher Power provides me this daily victory over alcohol as long as I work the program of AA.

I also see the victory in recovery in others, some may have twenty days in recovery or others may have twenty years, but the triumph over addiction is prevalent in all who work The Twelve Steps of AA. When it was suggested that I try Alcoholics Anonymous, I found people that had achieved this victory, and I wanted it too. More than I ever wanted anything else in my life. I see these victories in recovery in the rooms of AA, at Ridgeview Alumni meetings, at Alumni outings and work duties. I thank my Higher Power every day for opening my eyes to see the victories in recovery that I and others have received from the God given program of Alcoholic Anonymous.

R. L. Davis

To Tell or Not To Tell...That Is The Question.

My name is Debbie and I am an alcoholic and an addict. It now rings like music. I say it in the mirror every morning. Why? Because every morning now for 7 months, I've been sober. I wake up refreshed, rejuvenated, and aware. I wake up with passion and purpose. I wake up ALIVE.

In those first few months of recovery, that statement was more important to me than breathing. If I forget or dismiss it, I will die. That is true. This recovery was my second attempt. I wanted sobriety and I wanted it badly.

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I listened to everything. Attended everything. Jumped as high as they asked me to. I wanted this, I needed this, and now, I'm living it.

Returning home was terrifying. That statement made it easier. I still announced it daily, at my meetings and to myself. Next, to my family.

Within 4 months it was time to move out into the real world. Now who to tell.

I thought very long and hard. So many questions. The first was what was my motive?

During my last recovery, I told no one. The reason? It was my own out. I could still use my friends. I could still scam my family. I could still manipulate my physicians. I could use.

This time though, there was a new feeling. A new fear. What if I don't tell?

Truth was, this disease would use it. It would grow and once again control me. Never again.

I shouted it from the rooftops. Friends, family, neighbors, strangers. Of course I said it when appropriate. But I said it! I claimed it, I owned it and each time it felt like a mighty blow to this evil disease. It fueled me. And there were surprising results.

The response I received brought me to tears. Things like "I'm proud of you, I'm inspired by you, you have given me strength, tell me more, you're not what I expected alcoholic to be." And finally, "Can you help me?" I listened to each and every story. Never telling anyone what to do, only telling him or her where there is hope. That hope for me was AA and Ridgeview.

This for me was not a 12th step. I am far too young for that. This was an affirmation that I am not alone. That my experience MATTERED. That I mattered. That I was strong, courageous and best of all sober.

My life today and hopefully tomorrow has been full of miracles. Every day is better and better. And still every morning, in the mirror, crazy hair, with sleepies in my eyes I say, "My name is Debbie and I am an alcoholic and an addict." Time to take on the day.

Debbie R.

What we do does not define who we are.
What defines us is how well we rise after
falling.

I Feel Like Going On

"Though the storm may be raging, I feel like going on."

Recovery to me is like an old gospel song that keeps replaying itself over and over again. Only it's not music notes, it's seconds and minutes of each day of my life. Living each day in recovery is hard, and even harder if you have more than one addiction. My addiction kept me sick for several years, but now my fear of my addiction keeps my recovery strong. Until I realized that I could not beat it or conquer it, but co-exist, co-habitat with it. This allowed me to have peace, knowing that it was not dead, but only dormant.

I have lost a lot because of my addictions. But Lord knows that my good days out weigh my bad days and like the song says, I won't complain. My family and my true friends have stuck by me and that made recovery possible. I wish that I had some magical words that say that it will be all right and that it is easy. The truth is that it was hard and still is.

I heard someone say once, "The measure of a man is the dash. The time between the time he is born and the time he dies." The only thing that they will remember is how well he did in recovery. For me that is a good thing.

Betty A.

Victory in Recovery

When I think about blessings and successes in my recovery, not one stands out to me more than the day I finally could see the Lord's will. It was at the end of a long eight months in Mississippi. Although I felt like I was in the middle of Southeast Asia after all the mosquitoes I killed.

However, it began in July after multiple relapses and with Ridgeview's blessings, I was sent to COPAC in Mississippi. I can't describe that day or many days thereafter. I know that I just wanted to be dead. I hated the person that looked back at me in the mirror, the wife Kevin was married to and the "Mommy" my little girls needed. I even remember, to hide my guilt, I wanted to be mad at them for needing me. But COPAC was supposed to fix all this. We had a rigorous schedule to follow, a lot of responsibility to be accountable for, and living with thirty-one other women trying to learn and do all the same things. Not to mention the sweltering heat. Ugh! In retrospect, I should have seen another fall coming when all this started becoming too

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comfortable and I wanted to stay here rather than go home to Georgia. I wasn't using, but I still thought about things I should have been talking about and reservations I should have been canceling. But more importantly than those awful thoughts was the fact that I still did not know what a spiritual program was or meant. I had been at COPAC for 6-7 months by now. I had learned a lot about character defects. Mondays were always my favorite days because we had Big Group; which is where all thirty-two women sat in a circle and confronted one another on our fear and concerns for each other. I always left this group feeling my "very best" because I seemed to usually nail at least 2, maybe 3 girls. I would later learn why this group in particular made me feel better.

Kevin and the girls were moving along with all that was going on for them as well. Although I knew that Jordan was having problems, I didn't know the extent and wouldn't for years to come. I knew deep down that I still felt empty on the inside and lost as can be on the outside. After moving to phase IV, I moved off the COPAC grounds and into an apartment off campus. Next phase was home. But, and I mean a big but, that day came later too. Not long after being in phase four, but feeling a lot "cocky," I relapsed with my roommate who was a crack addict. I had never tried crack but that had never been a prerequisite for me. After being busted once again, I left COPAC for a 28-day program called Harbor House. My addiction and crack had brought me really down and the only thing that I could think of was suicide. I was angry. Angry for getting caught, for the embarrassment, mad at my sister for successfully committing suicide, angry for what I had done to myself and my family once again and angry because I was so close to coming home. But obviously not ready. How was a twenty-eight day program going to do what a seven-month program hadn't? But, whatever! I was just going where I was told for the moment. Hadn't I always been told what to do? But, praise God. After being in the Harbor house with these very few women (mostly prostitute), I felt like the Lord hated me so why shouldn't I hate myself. My counselor had me get up every morning and for 5 minutes stare at myself in the mirror and then write down what I saw. I did this every day, even though I was still angry and mad at God for letting me wake up. One day my counselor asked me when I was going to take the first Step and quit pretending to have taken it and the next two steps. Well, let me tell you, that shut me up. And that's not often. I realized that I wasn't unique and living Dawn's twelve step program was not "that special" either. So, going back to my room and

attempting to read my Big Book for the first time was what I intended on to be a real experience. I knew I was stubborn and I felt that I was too stupid to get this program, but it was all about to change for me. I found out about behavioral containment, which began to give me cognitive insight on my anger and the disease of addiction. I actually started to get up and really meditate. I was trying to learn "How" to be real. When I shared in group, I learned to check my motives and if it wasn't inspired by the spirit and not me, I kept my mouth shut. Before, I didn't realize my anger but knew I didn't feel right inside, so degrading other people helped me feel a little taller and a lot better about me. A true false sense of self and pride. I wasn't any different from these women who were hurting too. The only difference that I could see was that I just hadn't reached the point to prostitute myself out...yet! They taught me so much. It didn't impress them that I was a nurse. They saw me as an addict in the same boat as them. I was beginning to work on my character defects, one at a time. I began to work with these women asking them to help me. I wanted to quit feeling punished all the time. I saw that I was punished by my sins, not for them. That everything that had happened to me was from "MY" choosing. I had a choice and now was the time to take responsibility for those choices. I had an addiction and I would have to take daily reprieves to "help" my disease. At \$1 a day, especially after the thousands I had just caused Kevin to spend, it was a price that I could pay. I started to want to live and "see" my children. I missed the girls so much. The Lord gave me such a sweet and peaceful feeling one afternoon, and it was then that I knew I was going to be all right and everything was going to be O.K. Even when Kevin sent me papers at the Harbor House, and when I fell and fractured my knee cap in half, 5 days before leaving treatment. The Lord was my medicine and healed a true broken spirit in me. I found the meaning of Faith and growing a little one day at a time. It was going to be just fine. He was there. I was the one lost. Not stupid, just lost and real. I was powerless. What a relief. I didn't have to even pretend I knew anymore. He had planted the seed in me. The Lord is the tree, I am only a branch.

Dawn Haim

Small Victories

Although my recovery consists of just 17 months, I have experienced many "small" victories. I refer to them as small but when I examine them closely they are in fact huge because each of these

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victories are a direct result of a lot of hard work. But, they come with a price tag, and more often than not that price tag is pain, the kind of pain that sometimes is a result of change.

Of course there have been the economic victories that come as a result of working the "Steps," paying off some old bills, and actually paying a bill on time now and then. Being able to purchase a new home and automobile was a tremendous victory early on in recovery. As is said in the promises, "Fear of people and economic insecurity will leave us"... Certainly my economic situation is a bit uncertain but my H.P. has relieved me of quite a bit of the fear. My Higher Power has proven to me again and again that he will lead me to a solution if I am willing to follow.

As I sit here struggling to complete this assignment all my thoughts keep going back to the promises and that specific sentence I wrote about above. As I turn that around in my head it suddenly strikes me, my H.P. has relieved me of my fear of people. How else can you explain the fact that I have been able to break that pathetic cycle that my life revolved around. Seventeen months ago my life consisted of the following, waking up at 4:00 A.M in order to pop two Xanax, that way I would be able to get up at 7:00 A.M. without too much anxiety. Then I would go to work and take two more Xanax and a painkiller at about 10:00 A.M. At around four in the afternoon I would take two more just to get ready do some real drinking at quitting time. Drinking started at 5:30 in the afternoon and lasted until I passed out. I never could really give a precise time on when that would happen. My family? Well, they just happened to be in the same house but were planets away from where I was.

My life really did not start changing until I accepted the challenge my Higher Power placed in front of me. In August of 2002 I was asked if I would preside as President of the PTA in my son's school. Boy, did they have the wrong guy! I thought. If ever there was a poster child of someone you would not want to have as president of anything I was he. I prayed a lot and then I prayed some more. I accepted. That's when the pain started. You know the pain, that pain of "if they knew the real me they would kick me out of here"... the pain of "how am I going to conduct myself around all these children, parents and intellectuals?" Pain! Pain was having to stand in front of a packed auditorium and make a speech on why I would make a good president when deep inside I believed these reasons to be lies. But I said yes anyway, and that in itself was a victory.

I started participating in the Ridgeview Alumni and in the activities it sponsored. I started

participating in my family's life, in church, in AA, in NA, and in CA. I started meeting new people. I started listening to the birds and watching the clouds move across the sky. People started having conversations with me, asking my opinion, asking my advice. I started work in a new job that actually recruited me to be part of the management team.

Things started happening. I can't tell you what happened or when it happened but I started to *feel* different. I started to feel part of. *Part of what?* I could not figure it out at first, some days it's hard for me to believe but I started being part of *LIFE*, part of the world, the planet, part of nature. I simply started being the man God wants me to be and live the life he wants for me.

I'm still full of a thousand forms of fear, still full of some long lasting resentments and still full of many character defects, but I have started working on those too.

That's why the greatest victory I've had in recovery is simply that I've started to live life one day at a time **WITHOUT** the need to take any mood-altering drug, and that need is **just for today**.

Edgar A.

Faith Fights Fear—Being Myself Before God

I always looked at prayer as getting things for myself, or getting out of situations, but I have learned that prayer is the way to get to know God Himself. When a man is born from above, the life of his Higher Power is in him, nourished not by food, but by prayer. I move from speaking to God to listening to that wonderful loving presence of God, with quiet confidence, trust and surrender. Why do I fight my relationship with God? Because my ego wants to be bigger than God. My false sense of self (my ego) wants to fight God's acceptance of me.

"Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall be opened." Do I have the faith to believe it? I have always complained before God, been apologetic or pathetic, but I have *asked* very few things. But what a splendid audacity a childlike child has! "Except as you become as children." Ask, and God will do. I would not give God a chance, except that I am at my wit's end, and now, it is the only way to get into touch with Reality.

I quit my job on Tuesday, after two weeks notice, because I had another job. That is, I had another job until I was told by phone that I had failed the physical. So, what was I going to do? Look for another job, a voice inside told me, your kids start

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college Monday, and you have \$97.33 in your bank account. Can you really get a job, the voice asked incredulously? It will take weeks to get a job, the voice intoned, and you have been irresponsible, quitting a job before you have another one. You did not do the right thing, the voice went on, you have done it again, don't you see? So, tell me what's different, now, that you have stopped drinking.

I kept doing what I have been doing these past three years. I went to my home group meeting. Instead of going job hunting, I visited with my sponsor and the old-timers who always ask if I want to go eat with them after the meeting. I went to an aftercare meeting at a treatment center. Shared my experience, strength, and hope. Maybe someone needed to hear my story. While I was driving to the meeting, a man called to tell me that if I was interested in a job he had, that he could re-route his flight home Thursday to include a layover in Atlanta. He would rent a car and meet me halfway. I told him, that, coincidentally, I was off on Thursday, and could meet him at the airport. He said he would call me when his plane landed at 9:06 and we would go from there.

As I entered the airport, I wondered where to wait. I sat down across from the Delta section, but soon became anxious. Thinking I probably needed to go to the bathroom, I got up and walked past a man talking on a cell phone, and not paying attention, entered an Interfaith Chapel. "God, I don't know what's best, and maybe you don't want me to have a job now, because I am arrogant and condescending and I have gloated over getting this new job (which I really don't have). This proves I don't know what's good for me. And if I don't know what's good for me, then I don't know what's good or bad for anyone. So I am better off if I don't give advice, don't figure I know what's best, and just accept life on life's terms, as it is today—especially my own life, as it actually is. Before AA, I judged myself by my intentions, while the world was judging me by my actions."

I passed the same man talking on his cell phone, sat down, and my phone rang. "Where are you, I said?" "I am standing here in front of you. You are sitting where I was sitting. This is bizarre. Let's go somewhere we can talk," he said. I had entered the airport, sat down where he had been sitting, walked past him twice and met him, all for the first time. He talked about his family, the business, interviewed me, offered me the job, shook my hand, and said, "Let's eat. If I hurry I can run to the terminal and catch a flight out." It was noon.

As I drove that afternoon to my sponsor's home group meeting, I wondered, "*What are you*

saying to me, today, Lord?" It is not so true that prayer changes things as that prayer changes *me* and I change things. Prayer alters the way in which I look at things, not externally, but by working wonders in my disposition. I asked "simply that through-out the day God place in me the best understanding of His will that I can have for this day and that I be given the grace by which I may carry it out. Thy will, not mine be done." I had been "*humble-ized*" or "*humble-sized*" to the right size, again. I discovered that I received guidance for my life to just about the extent that I stopped making demands upon God to give it to me on order and on my terms. There is a prayer for each Step. Applying them to my life, my life changes. God is doing for me what I could not do for myself. It works, it really works.

George M.

A New Life

Near death or there I am not sure,
New fear like none I'd ever known.
No time before or since I've seen;
All Heaven and Hell inside of me.

A vision seen of which I'm clear,
A field of Angels, to me, appeared.
Battles fought and my soul torn;
But, for God's Grace, I was reborn.

Shaking from my near escape,
Call it *Nature, Will or Fate*.
What I know now is How I live;
A purpose, plan, a gift to give.

Now, on this day, I hold a thought,
My life is worthy and has use.
With Love and Patience, Honesty;
I feel I have new Faith in me.

Now God's Will I can always trust,
His messenger through daily prayer.
I meditate to hear God's Way...
For "Thy Will Be Done," I live *Today*.

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Ridgeview Alumni Association Endowment Fund Campaign

Yes, I want to contribute to the Alumni Endowment Fund. I've been in Recovery _____ years and would like to give back \$_____.

Yes, I am not an Alumni, however, I wish to contribute to the Endowment Fund. As a family member, friend, business owner or corporate representative/sponsor. Here is my donation of \$_____.

Name _____ Phone (_____) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

The Ridgeview Alumni Association is a non-profit organization and all contributions are tax deductible.

Make checks payable to: Ridgeview Alumni Association Endowment Fund

Mail to: Ridgeview Alumni Steering Committee, 3995 South Cobb Drive, Smyrna, Ga. 30080-6397.

Serenity Garden Memorial Brick Order Form

Name _____ Phone (_____) _____

Message to be engraved on brick: (2 lines / 14 characters per line)

(Line 1) _____

(Line 2) _____

\$25.00 per brick

* Please fill out name and contact number, even if you wish this to be an anonymous contribution, so we may contact you in case any questions arise about the inscription.

The Ridgeview Alumni Association is a non-profit organization and all contributions are tax deductible.

Make checks payable to: Ridgeview Alumni Association, Bricks

Mail to: Ridgeview Alumni Steering Committee, 3995 South Cobb Drive, Smyrna, Ga. 30080-6397