

# *The View*

Newsletter of the Ridgeview Alumni Association

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Winter 2003

Smyrna, Ga.



## **Challenges in Recovery**

The Ridgeview Alumni Association  
3995 South Cobb Drive Smyrna, Georgia 30080

## *Winter Focus:* **Challenges in Recovery**

### Challenges in Recovery

Many of us think that the **Challenges in Recovery** are limited to the efforts we make to just stay clean and sober. However, while those *are* formidable challenges, when we begin to look at them in the context of the 12-Step Program, we may see that those challenges are a lot more than that.

The 12-Step Program guides us to a way of life that makes it possible for us to not want or need artificial substances in order to feel happy, joyous and free. As we learn to live according the spiritual principles of the program, we find a life that is satisfying, meaningful, and worth living. However, the efforts we must make to follow those 12-Steps may be the most significant challenges. Without meeting *those* challenges, any other efforts to stay clean and sober may not work.

In this issue of The View, you ll read how some of us are meeting those **Challenges in Recovery**, practicing those principles in all our affairs.

John Wheeling

The Ridgeview Alumni Association

### **Spring Fling Weekend 2003** **May 16, 17, 18**

Friday, May 16, 2003 — Speaker Meeting

6:30 pm — Becky Moon (Ala-Non)

8:00 pm — Chuck Moon (AA)

Saturday May 17, 2003 — Workshop

Terrence Gorski

Concurrent Workshops

Sunday, May 18, 2003 — 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 — March 29, 2003

Lake Outing and Picnic — June 2003 (TBD)

Dinner and a Movie — August 3, 2003

Fall Retreat — September 2003 (TBD)

Halloween Dance — Saturday, October 26, 2003

Gratitude Dinner — Sunday, November 24, 2003

New Years Eve Dance — Tuesday, December 31, 2003

Contact any Alumni Steering Committee Member for more information.

## Winter Focus: Challenges in Recovery

### Our Story, Our Gift

By  
John T.

We tried, we tried, we really, really tried  
We fought for many years  
On the inside we died  
We could not accept that we were one of them  
We said, how could this be? I'm not one of them  
This is not me - here on my knees  
While everyone who loved us was begging us please  
Please they asked why can you not get up from your knees?  
You obviously don't love us as much as these  
These pills, these drinks, these needles, these hits,  
these lines, these joints, these bars and these trips  
All of these things  
These things that lie, that cheat, that steal, that deplete,  
that drain, these things that kill  
That killed our desires, our hopes, our dreams, our goals,  
and our relationships - everything it seems  
It even killed our will to live

So we could not get up, up off our knees  
Because we had reached an even more humiliating state  
We had gone from our knees to a crawl, to our face  
And we were staring right down through the ground  
What we saw was a dark and desolate place  
A place of fear, despair, of angers and hate  
Day in, day out - Day in, day out  
Day in, day out, every hour, every minute,  
Every second, every fraction of every second  
We saw this place of fear, despair, of anger and hate  
Incapable of loving or caring for you or me  
Hopeless, hopeless, we were hopeless you see  
All our stories were different - but really the same  
One thing for sure, to Club Ridgeview we came

We came by foot, by car, by ambulance, by plane, by kicking,  
by screaming, by begging and pleading, by coercion, by deception  
We came broken and bleeding, by police escort in handcuffs we came  
Came through the doors of the Admin building where the nice person said  
Don't worry, you'll just be here for a three day assessment.  
We were whisked off to Cottage A, Cottage B or Cottage C

Some of us we called the alphabet warriors because they stayed at all three  
Slowly, slowly, slowly  
We came out of our shell - a glimmer of light we saw from our hell  
We were introduced to this thing called recovery  
AA, NA, CA, LA, OA, GA, RxA, SLA  
These they said were the places we could reclaim our lives, our families, our hopes and dreams, our jobs, our relationships  
Everything it seems  
Some of us thought that we were here only to save our jobs, our children, our husbands and wives  
But we found out that we were here to save our own lives  
We have a deadly disease that will and does kill  
A disease that can not be cured by a pill  
But we can become recovered of the obsession to use  
if we work the 12 Steps given to us by the grace of God and a man we call Bill  
They are simple - not easy and often demanding  
But they lead us straight to the God, of our own understanding

So we took our education and walked up the hill  
To rooms three and four of the conference center and opened the door  
Someone said Welcome to the winners' circle, welcome to the Ridgeview Alumni Steering Committee where the only requirement for membership is participation in a 12 Step program and a desire to serve - not ourselves, but others  
Then we looked to the head of the table and what did we see - A man with white hair staring right at me  
He is the man with the plan  
The man with the tan  
The man with the loud bike and the rock and roll glasses  
He's like a cool uncle to you and to me, like a father, a grandfather, a great grandfather  
He prefers brother  
And when we act like little children, which is often, he's then like our mother  
He's our staunch supporter, our advocate, our friend, and our driving force  
And he's the one who straightens us out when we veer off course  
I would now ask our fellow Alumni to join me and give a big, Big hand to our fearless leader  
The man we call Sam

(continued on page 4)

## Winter Focus: Challenges in Recovery

(continued from page 3)

We tried, we tried, we really, really tried  
 We fought for many years  
 No longer do we hide  
 Behind the things that put us on our face  
 We now live in a much, much better place  
 Because of the 12 Steps, Ridgeview and the  
 fellowship  
 No longer hopeless are we  
 Full of hope, full of hope, we are all full of hope you  
 see

That was our story and this is our gift  
 This is a gift of love, gratitude, appreciation and  
 thanks to all the people involved in the operation of  
 this, this great place

To the staff on the cottages, we thank you  
 To our doctors, we thank you  
 To our group therapists and our personal therapists,  
 we thank you  
 To all the administrative staff, we thank you  
 To the kitchen staff, we thank you  
 To Jack G., we thank you  
 To Mr. Fink and the Board of Directors, we thank  
 you

To all the people who work here that make this  
 place run, we thank you  
 And last but not least  
 For those of us who tried to break out of Cottage C  
 and run down to South Cobb Drive and flag down a  
 cab  
 But were apprehended before we could succeed  
 To the brave men of the Ridgeview Security, we  
 thank you

This is a gift of sight, of sound, of smell, of touch  
 Of azaleas, of rhododendrons, of hydrangeas, of  
 ferns, of Japanese maples, of annuals, of perennials  
 and much, much more  
 A gift of reverence to God and the beautiful things  
 he has given us  
 This is a gift of prayer, of meditation, of swings and  
 benches  
 Of light breezes and of a peaceful dappled light and  
 unique dimensions  
 This is a gift of fellowship, of service, of dedication,  
 of hard work, of tranquillity and hope

This garden is a gift that makes me much higher  
 than dope  
 This is a gift of the celebration of life

So to those who feel like I've gone on too long  
 Well, I do beg your pardon  
 So on behalf of the Ridgeview Alumni Steering  
 Committee, Mr. Fink  
 I now present to you, our gift, The Serenity Garden

### Challenges in Recovery

By  
 Mickey M.

I've always said, my Higher Power knew I  
 was too weak for challenges, I caught a pink cloud  
 along about month three or four that lasted six or  
 seven months. The next year and a half things just  
 kept getting better every time I thought about it.

About six months in recovery there was one  
 upsetting experience, my addictionologist a brain  
 surgeon with six years relapsed. This was a man  
 that really did have what I wanted, when he walked  
 in to a room peace and tranquillity entered with him.  
 He did not have a judgmental bone in his body. I  
 asked him one time how to tell the difference  
 between turning something over to HP and copping  
 out he answered, wait a year and you will know.  
 Most of the time it takes less than a year but I found  
 out every time which choice was made.

Losing that doctor was my first real use of  
 the aftercare meetings I had been going to. Those  
 meetings went a long way helping me understand the  
 fragility of anyone's recovery. My natural self-  
 centeredness helped, better him than me, a cold  
 approach granted but also very true.

Other than that one early experience there  
 were no real obsessions, problems or triggers until  
 my third year when several potentially major  
 situations developed one on top of another, BAM!  
 We spent close to 18 months waiting for the other  
 shoe to drop.

My daughter was 3,000 miles away, on her  
 own, and we were unable to contact here for a little  
 over ninety days. I'm sure my wife had a much  
 harder time than I did. With no extra money we  
 could not go to California and find out what was  
 going on. No one we could think of could  
 investigate for us.

(continued on page 5)

## Winter Focus: Challenges in Recovery

(continued from page 4)

All contact numbers, work, friends, apartment, did nothing except tell us she had quit the job we knew about and was not in touch with anyone we had a number for. This was probably the first time I turned something over to HP completely. Nothing we could think of to do led to anything other than we were powerless. Surrendering to that condition and relying on nothing but prayer was the hardest and the easiest thing I've ever done.

My wife's mother suffered an extended illness with many hospital stays for short periods and eventually a nursing care home where she died. Again, what we had learned with our daughter about being powerless and turning it over was put into practice on a daily basis. The funeral, thanks to our friends from several different Ridgeview meetings and a Minister in the Program was beautiful and well attended.

Those eighteen months also contained some serious legal contingencies, financial and job related problems and overall an extended period of stress I had never before dealt with drunk or sober.

During my fourth year of recovery all of these situations had been resolved and three things happened.

It turned out our daughter had gone through a very difficult growth experience of her own. Even with my genes and a workplace full of temptation, bartending, she never got into drugs or more than a social drink. There was an attitude change toward both of us and especially me that made for a vastly improved relationship.

The illness and death resulted in our marriage becoming a much more sharing, loving, friendly relationship that still amazes me.

The third result of all the stress potential, including Job, Legal, and Financial all being resolved in ways that were equally positive and beneficial? My anger came back stronger than ever. Rather than having the weight of the world taken off my shoulders and feeling great, two previous anger management courses were wiped out as if I had never gone.

Back to the Psychologist: New diagnosis, I am suffering from Cognitive Dissonance. How about *that?* I *love* psychobabble but for some reason this condition really hit home.

Through 34 years of being my own worst enemy, (with a little help from my former higher powers), I have developed an elaborate and detailed facility for dealing with failure in such a way it does not immobilize me. I can, with my superior intelligence and great denial system, rationalize failure and start over. New family, new job, new industry, new location, etc., etc.

What I could not do is deal with success. Nothing in my life experience had resulted in success in any lasting way. I had met my own goals and found them unsatisfying. When success started to come due to the gifts and disciplines of the 12 step program of AA and the connection with a Higher Power I was unable to assimilate the benefits without inner conflict. Trust me, when I have inner conflict no one around me is going to enjoy any peace and tranquility.

The best advice I've ever received about working to make changes in my character defects came from this experience. Recognize and Accept the problem, Pray for Help, and use the 10<sup>th</sup> step every night, until my awareness of inappropriate behavior becomes real time. My family can attest to the fact that in my case this was a very, very slow process.

Since all this growth, (what a word), in my third and fourth year living life on life's terms has become a much more manageable concept. In my fifth year I experienced open heart surgery. This is a sure fire way to quit smoking. In my ninth year I experienced throat cancer and an operation to remove my larynx. The miracle of modern medicine has allowed me to regain the ability to speak. It also brought on another period of frustration, anger, and a loss of a peaceful home life for quite some time. The experience did diminish one of my major Goodbyes more often.

Half way through my eleventh year I was encouraged to retire by a truly wonderful company that stood by me all the way through the cancer trip. They created a job for a salesman that could not talk and kept me on the payroll for two years after the surgery. I am pleased to report that this did not lead to my old behaviors. There was some economic insecurity but no anger or disruptive behavior at home. I call this progress.

(continued on page 6)

## Winter Focus: Challenges in Recovery

(Continued from page 5)

I have always described myself as an ass, a wonderful word that encompasses selfishness, fear, manipulation, being a control and anger freak and very judgmental.

I have been blessed by having my need/desire for alcohol and drugs taken away. I believe my character is the bottom line cause of my addictive personality.

**Every challenge while in recovery has resulted in an improvement in my life.**

As I look back, my challenges were of the living life on life's terms variety and the only method that has worked for me boils down to name it, claim it and ask for help; from my family, friends, and most of all my HP. Right this minute it is working, my life is truly wonderful, every effort I made has been repaid a hundred fold. Every challenge while in recovery has resulted in an improvement in my life.

Here I am, able to enjoy early retirement with very few economic concerns. A wife that loves me and considers me a friend. A daughter that is on the road to a good career, and likes me a little. Even my mother likes me.

I am however still an ass waiting to happen, stay tuned.

### **SCARED, PANICKED, NERVOUS, EMBARRASSED, ANGRY, GUILTY**

By  
Susan A.

These were the feelings absorbing my mind and body the day I came to enter Ridgeview. Thankfully, one of my sons was with me or surely I would have left. I didn't know what to expect and so I was filled with an overwhelming fear of the unknown. The last thing I wanted was to be around a bunch of alcoholics and drug addicts. I would certainly be treated like scum. The jig was up! What were they going to do with me?

The admission process took FOREVER. What if someone came in who knew me? What would I say or do? Could I successfully hide this

event from my friends and business associates? What clever things could I come up with to get myself out of this situation? I'm smarter than they are. I'll think of something.

But I didn't. I couldn't fool them completely. They saw through me. The best I was able to do was to talk my way into the outpatient program. After all, I said, I am the sole support of my family.

That lasted only a short period of time. One of the night program managers was able to detect my dishonesty at missing some meetings and called my hand on it. How did he know? (If you are reading this, Thanks Walter) Beaten at last I came into cottage C.

WOW! The other patients here were mostly like me- professionals who were hooked on good booze, not wins that slept on the streets and urinated in the stairwells of downtown parking lots. And, the employees here were, for the most part, former addicts themselves. They had been exactly where I was. They could understand and empathize with the way I felt, both mentally and physically. They weren't judgmental. This was a disease, not a character failure. Look at them. They beat it. They don't use alcohol (or drugs) anymore, and are happier for it.

Now, whenever I drive through the Ridgeview entrance, I feel uplifted. I love this place and what it did for me. I enjoy my friends here and the professionals with whom I maintain contact. It just puts me in a good mood to be here.

I started volunteer work in the Access Center as a way to give back to Ridgeview, the place that had given so much to me. I soon discovered that my work here with incoming patients and their family members is a great way to give to those people who are now the way I was three years ago. I can answer his or her questions to the best of my ability or I can find someone who can. I can reassure them that they are doing the right thing. I can give them some hope. I can help them pass the time by waiting with them. I can stay with them until their admission process is complete. I can stop them from leaving by using some gentle, but persuasive words. I can also dry their tears. I can give them hugs. I can be a meaningful beginning of a life changing experience for them. How fortunate I am to have this opportunity!

## Winter Focus: Challenges in Recovery

### Challenges of Recovery

By  
Sean C.

Being a veteran of numerous relapse tracks, I was often asked, "Why do you want to quit drinking?" My standard answer was "because I want to improve my penmanship." If I was allowed to stay after that response, the next question posed to me was "What are you going to do differently this time?" I honestly didn't know I *had* to do anything differently. I thought that was God's job. I figured I would just attend A.A. meetings and I would be struck sober.

My first challenge in recovery was *change*. The first change for me was very simple. Instead of leaving the office at 5:00 and heading to the liquor store, I would go to Dunkin' Donuts for my coffee. From there, instead of going home, I would go to my home group. The members in my group spoke about honesty and open-mindedness. They spoke about change and the willingness to do so.

Getting used to a new life isn't easy. Staying away from booze doesn't come naturally to me. Because I know what it's like to have a buzz, I always had an escape. I was afraid to find out what made me tick and learn about my feelings. Quiet moments with my higher power aren't as exciting as chaos and commotion I can create with alcohol. This is why I had to get a sponsor. I needed someone to show me how to live this new way of life. My sponsor cheated though, he used the "steps" to guide me, to guide us.

Another big challenge was convincing the people around me that I was serious this time. They told me in the meetings, "The best talking you can say is the walking that you do." It was my actions that spoke volumes, not what I said. People saw me at a ton of meetings. When I told someone that I would be at a certain place at a certain time, I would show up and be on time. I found out that it's perfectly natural to be thinking of an excuse why I can't go, as I'm driving to my commitment. As long as I did as I promised, I earned the other person's trust.

Again, this kind of proper behavior went against my nature. When I share at meetings, I often compare "doing the right thing" with walking on a sheet of ice with a pair of dress shoes. I have to walk very gingerly and think of every step because it isn't instinctive to me. Even today, I don't always

practice these principles in all my affairs. My first impulse is to take the easy way out. Being self-centered, I want to do what pleases me. The program of Alcoholics Anonymous teaches me a different but better way of life.

Helping others has always been a challenge. As a sponsor, I think I'm terrible. My first thought is, "I don't have anything to offer. I've been a loser all my life, what makes me think I can get anyone sober?" Well, my sponsor told me that it's not about getting other sober. By working with another alcoholic, I am staying sober and I am exposing the newcomer to a new way of life. The results are up to God.

This is a program of action. As long as I keep moving, my Higher Power will take care of me. Challenges in recovery can be frightening if I think I have to do this alone. With the help of the people I have met in A.A. along with God's love and strength, I don't have to be afraid anymore. For the first time in my life, living is exciting to me!

### Little Accidents

By  
Steve K.

I'm Grateful to be alive today and for my sobriety. The Fellowship of the Program, and RVI helped to save me from the ultimate peril of my sickness.

**How would my Sponsor instruct me to act or respond?**

The obstacles I've confronted during recovery are mostly little accidents that pop up unexpectedly during an otherwise normal daily routine. These obstacles aren't so much barriers or challenges that test my powerlessness and courage. The obstacles aren't situations for which I have prepared answers nor are they as if someone asked if I want a drink, and me hesitating with my answer. My challenges come like a well-thrown curve ball with me at bat in the bottom of the ninth, and the score tied. In moments such as these, I pray to my Higher Power and ask: "How would my Sponsor instruct me to act or respond?" I usually try to call someone in the program for help, if not my sponsor. Most of all I must be honest with others, and myself if I am to overcome these obstacles.

## Winter Focus: Challenges in Recovery

### A Real Life Challenge

By  
Ken M.

My name is Ken and I am an alcoholic. Through the trials and tribulations of addiction, I managed to totally wipe out any chances for, what I considered a normal life. Or so I thought. My credit was a conglomerate of unpaid balances and a trail of despair from which there was no beginning. I no longer attained the legal right to operate a motor vehicle. Nor was I aware that this would be possible again. I had allowed my warped perception to influence my motivation. So there you have it, my road through life had been paved with automobile-sized potholes.

Overwhelming does not even describe the task at hand. The only thing that I knew was that my sponsor would be guiding me through the steps and that I had a faith that no matter what, as long as I could move in a positive direction, all things would happen as they were supposed to, not necessarily to my satisfaction. With that and the serenity prayer, I was ready to begin.

The first place that I called was the credit bureau to order a copy of my credit report. This would list all of the institutions with which there was a discrepancy along with phone numbers. Slowly but surely I contacted every one and set up a payment plan. Some of the payments were only 50.00 a month. After 3 years I was paid in full for the amount of several thousand dollars.

At the same time I also had targeted the Georgia State Patrol. I was going to get my driving privileges back no matter what I had to do. Once again, when I called, I found out that I owed a large sum of money and I would also have to wait several months for the last suspension to end. It had been more than 2 years so I also had to take the driving test again. All in all, I made several phone calls and payments every month always keeping in touch with my balances. It was very discouraging, however, MEETING with my sponsor once a week helped me to stay focused.

When I started, I could not even get a fifty-dollar loan on credit, and now I own a house, a new car and, well, there is just too much to list. All I had to do was move in a positive direction. Meetings and contact with my sponsor were part of my weekly routine. Some how I managed to tap into the compulsive and obsessive nature that allowed my

addiction to flourish and use it for my benefit. I was not going to rest until I reached those goals. Today I am one of the most fortunate people that I know and I will pray that it will happen for everyone who really wants it. Thank you, God.

### Challenges in Sobriety

By  
David H.

When I went home from Ridgeview, I was absolutely terrified of relapse. I had not thought it was possible to stop using drugs in the first place, and let's face it: Not everyone stays sober after they are discharged. I didn't know whether or not my parachute would open until I jumped out into the world.

All I knew to do was follow the instructions given me: Get a sponsor, work the steps, and go to meetings. As I did these things, particularly the steps, the obsession to use went away completely, and I began to notice the change in my personality. I now know that I *never* have to use again under any circumstances.

Once my drug problem was solved, though, I had to learn to deal with ordinary life, which I had neatly avoided all the years that I was in the grip of my addiction. I have faced unemployment and punitive action from my licensing authority as consequences of my disease, but I never had to use.

I would like to say that I handled these things with grace and aplomb, but that wouldn't be true. I kicked and screamed a little until I was forced to apply the spiritual program of action outlined in the steps to my problems and allow my higher power to take care of things. Because I stayed sober, however, I had the chance to learn from my mistakes and grow in my recovery.

I recently undertook a new type of challenge: Dating an earth person. As a friend of mine says, If you're every unclear what your character defects are, get into a relationship and they will be revealed. How true.

The challenge, of course, is not to try and make it work, but to try and be the most honest, caring, responsible man I can be. Fortunately, in following the principles of the program I become exactly that type of person.

(continued on page 9)



## Winter Focus: Challenges in Recovery

(continued from page 8)

It's really neat that I have such a powerful tool in my life that will handle just about anything.

What I have discovered is that the same things that kept me safe and sober during the first days of my recovery work on *all* my problems still today. It's faith in action, and it really works.

### **Cunning, Baffling and Powerful For All of Us!**

When asked if I would write of a challenging experience my first thought was hmmm, just what has been a real challenge since recovery? After some genuine and extended thought, I have come to the conclusion that I have been blessed with a marvelous forgetter!

Since beginning our recovery - both individually and together - my spouse and I have lived through, and in some ways enjoyed our journey through, several events that could be perceived as very challenging. Indeed, we have experienced deep sadness in the death of loved ones, we have watched our child struggle with the decision to change colleges less than a year after being admitted, we have watched our other child's company plunge into bankruptcy, one of us has lost a sponsor of nearly 10 years, and the other has watched a home group slowly die on the vine.

It occurs to me that the key word in all of this is perceived. When I was deep in the throws of my alcoholism/addiction, any one of these would have been an irrefutable reason to drink/use. Any such calamity - even of my own making - would have been perceived to be a devastating challenge that could not be overcome without the help of alcohol.

However, in our recovery we perceived these events for what they were - challenges, opportunities, and events - all part of our sober life. During the term of our recovery we have not found it necessary to return to old behavior over any of these events - nor any others for that matter. We consider ourselves mightily blessed by our Higher Power.

In my case, AA has taught me how to behave, how not to drink if I do not wish, and helped me live one day at a time. For that fact alone, I am genuinely grateful, as is my spouse. Similarly, Al-Anon has taught and helped my spouse live one day

at a time. For that my spouse is equally grateful - as am I.

Having said that, there is a challenge that I face, my spouse faces, and we face together. It is as cunning, as baffling and as powerful as anything we could imagine. That challenge is learning to live in a loving and meaningful relationship with our families of origin. Unfortunately, the challenge is equally challenging for them - perhaps more so. It seems the healthier we become in recovery the more we see just how sick we were. How much we participated in, contributed to and just went along with behaviors we now find unacceptable. We love our family members, but we do not like the behavior we see on occasion. From their standpoint, they love us - but in some cases there is an uncomfortable distance, at times they find it difficult to deal with the new us.

We are more open and keep fewer secrets - that can be unsettling. We are less tolerant of unacceptable behavior - that can be embarrassing and frustrating. We are more insistent on personal responsibility - that can be maddening. On both sides we continue to learn how to interact. We are making progress.

We are also aware of the burden we may inadvertently place on certain family members. Surely it must be difficult at times to accept that your child is an alcoholic, or that your child is married to an alcoholic. What must be even more baffling is how these individuals can not only stay together, but also seem to relish their new life with a vigor that was unmatched in pre-recovery years!

Our family members and we try our best to communicate. Both they and we are open and honest - for our part, we only temper our honesty with kindness these days. Yet, as we speak the language of recovery, our family members at times have trouble with the translations. Boundaries are sometimes mistaken for selfishness. Honesty is sometimes mistaken for rudeness or intolerance. Struggles with our addictions are sometimes seen as lack of will power or discipline.

Indeed most perplexing is that at times we find they simply do not - and can not - understand. When we stop to think about it - how could they, and why should they? Asking a non-alcoholic to understand my alcoholism is a bit like asking a person who understands multiplication to comprehend algebra or calculus.

(continued on page 10)

## Winter Focus: Challenges in Recovery

(continued from page 9)

While the numbers are the same, the concepts and reality are fundamentally different. It is a gap that simply can not be bridged completely, nor without great effort by all concerned. We experience the same gap with the drinkers and codependents in our families. Our family members and we perceive many aspects of life today in a fundamentally different way. Both ways are OK, both ways may be paths to serenity but they are not the same. They are parallel, yet fundamentally different.

Today my spouse and I seek to maintain our individual and shared recovery. We enjoy our lives - with each other, and with our family. Individually, and together, we are making progress. And, at this stage of the progressive journey, our lives have never been better!

*Recovering in Al-Anon (10 years) and AA (9 years)*

### Challenges and Change in Recovery

Life through recovery has presented great difficulties. It has been a little over six months since I had any mind-altering substances. I have had to make many major changes in my life during this period. Today, I am struggling through (1) a very malicious divorce; (2) financial insecurity; (3) physical and emotional health issues, and (4) lack of gainful employment.

#### Divorce

I am going through a divorce after 16 years of marriage and two children. I left my spouse 13 months ago due to physical and emotional abuse. We used together. I have been afraid for my life since I left him. The divorce process is moving slow, and my spouse continuously escalates malicious actions against me. He is fighting for sole custody of the children and does anything possible to discredit me. He remains in active addiction, yet he aggressively reports to all that will hear that I am an alcoholic and addict.

#### Financial Insecurity

I owe creditors 4 times more than I am able to pay. Most of the debt is in both of our names. I

am still responsible for the mortgage on our house even though I no longer occupy it. My Veterans Administration (VA) loan financed the house. He wants to keep the house; however, his credit is too bad to qualify for refinance. Most of our personal assets remain with him. I have had to start all over in an apartment. My legal expenses are piling up. I exhausted most of my retirement fund when we were together. Now, he is using all funds he can get legally and illegally from our family assets to fight me in court, and manipulate the kids. He has cashed several of my checks that came to the house, forged my name on a tax rebate check, and claimed both kids on his tax return (even though I have legal custody). We currently have joint physical custody, pending final divorce.

#### Physical and Emotional

I suffer from chronic migraine/tension headaches, degenerative cervical vertebrae, myospasms, and scoliosis. Also, I have a diagnosis of severe emotional stress, depression, and anxiety. This is complicated by the fact that I was physically and emotionally abused in my marriage. I have all the signs of what is termed battered.

#### Lack of Gainful Employment

I have been unemployed for a little over two years. My previous work was very fulfilling and I was very accomplished at my duties. I believed that a job well done really made a difference. I came to relate who I was with what I did. I was greatly disillusioned when I finally resolved to the fact that knowledge, skills, ability, morals, and integrity was of no value. Additionally, fraud, waste, and abuse were the norm, rather than the exception. Public interest and safety was considered only after political interest and personal desires of management/executive officials were met. As a result of these conditions and my disabilities, I required time out. It is taking some time to build my self-esteem up. One of these issues alone would be enough of a struggle; however, all at once has required a lot of hard work. With the help of the AA program, my doctors, therapists, and other alcoholics and addicts like me, I am maintaining. My faith in God has given me the Courage to cope with the Challenges of Change, albeit the process does get painful.

## Winter Focus: Challenges in Recovery

### Struggles in Recovery

By  
Anonymous

As I examine the difficulties I've experienced with cessation since having finally reached my bottom and come to the self-irrefutable decision to stop drinking, I find myself in a curious position respective to what I'd like to be able to report. I'd prefer to catalog a myriad of problematic elements, each overcome with a Herculean effort culminating in an achievement worthy of great pride and sensation of self-achievement. However, I simply cannot specify any such inventory. First, I perceive no self-achievement; success is a gift of partnership with the Lord. However, I've manifested the prerequisite willingness. But, the simple fact of the matter is that I've been quite successful in resisting my urges to drink. That's not to say that I haven't experienced any, I have. They're fleeting and repugnant. I am mindful of the fact that sobriety is the natural state and, being under the influence is pointedly unnatural. I cannot unduly congratulate myself for achieving normality by not submitting to a weakness for imbibing.

I might liken my temperance to the removal of a body-cast after an extended period of confinement. Suddenly everything becomes available and achievable. I had come to the end of my rope once before and accomplished some eight years of sobriety subsequent to my first treatment. I fell prey to the delusion that my proclivity for spirit had been eliminated and that the problem was in the past. I remarried, moved from Illinois to Georgia and proceeded to completely lose grip on any contact with AA, sponsorship or fellowship. When the second marriage deteriorated and conditions aggravated, I had no relief mechanism in place when conditions appeared intolerable. Surely I had no intention to return to the *habit* of drinking, it was only one drunken release I sought. That one drunken release lasted 3+ years and progressively retrograded, culminating in a two-week binge that consisted of only two states: either drunk or passed out. Such was my second bottom and I realized that I had nowhere to go but down. Moreover, this bottom would consist of my demise in a most ugly mannerism. I chose not to do that. My surrender required seeking help Ridgeview. I emerged from Ridgeview with a renewed commitment to and participation in A.A. Moreover, I experienced a

refreshing renewal in sobriety. I experienced an abrupt return to normality. I could go anywhere I wanted anytime I desired. I didn't have to worry about smelling like alcohol on a regular basis, DUI or a malaise that rendered me useless. In short, the entire world reverted to me. As an added bonus, my regenerated participation with peers in meetings now allows me to work on the various underlying psychological frailties that contributed so significantly to my drinking in the first place. I live life thoroughly alone, but am committed to sobriety while experiencing little, if any, compulsion to drink. It no longer assuages my consciousness that whether I'm drunk or sober makes no difference to anyone else; it's preferable and urgent to *me* that I remain sober. That's more than enough; I'm able to retain my attitude of dissociation with the mind-set of the populace along with my sense of individuality. Yet the piquancy for belonging that comes from regular participation in A.A. is a benefit beyond value.

This is all a challenge, to some extent. It's somewhat difficult to achieve a facile acclimatization with the freedom that sobriety embodies. I am constantly amazed at my increased state of productivity, comprehensive awareness, improved physical state and general ability to function. I seek to serve the Lord with an augmented sense of Thanksgiving and desire of servitude in restitution for His blessings bestowed. And I will continue to do so one day at a time.

### My Dear Friends:

My name is Sam B. and I am an alcoholic. I send you greetings from Freetown, Sierra Leone, West Africa. Though the country is in a state of war, I am grateful to say that I have not found a reason to pick up that first drink. I am also grateful to my sponsor, Frank B., who has consented to pick up my six year chip and to deliver my birthday message to you. Indeed it has been a wonderful journey and I want to say thank you to the Saturday men's group at the Triangle Club. You are a group of very special men and you have influenced my life in profound ways.

Today, I heard a Non-Governmental (NGO) called The Missioners of Peace and I run a program

(continued on page 12)

## Winter Focus: Challenges in Recovery

(continued from page 11)

for orphaned children and one that serves the poor in my community. We are simply trying to do small things to touch lives. The truth is that 70 percent of funding for my program in Sierra Leone comes from alcoholics. Forty percent of that money comes from alcoholics from the Triangle Club. What a story! I humbly thank you for your love and support.

The lessons that I learned in this room are just too many to catalog. You gave me life-sustaining and life-enhancing tools. You also taught me to replace my God of judgment and rejection with a God of love, grace, forgiveness and acceptance. I have accepted God's grace and God's mercy in my life. Even when I mess up, God's mercy is with me. Today, I am able to relate to a loving God who says to me;

*fear not for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you and I will help you to not take that first drink.*

You also taught me that life is not about perfection but about progress — I must take things one day at a time. You taught me about service — service to my alcoholic brothers and sisters, service to my family, and I must add, service to my nation. You taught me not to take myself too seriously. You taught me that unearned suffering is redemptive and the truth is that I could better relate to the poverty, pain and suffering in Sierra Leone because I know how it feels to be in poverty and pain. The list goes on.

I have started an AA group in Freetown. We meet on Sundays at my house (I wish we had more days). I have been focusing on steps 1, 2, and 3. I want to add a second day for Big Book study. With the encouragement and suggestions from my sponsor, I am beginning to get a better understanding on how to do about being spiritually active and passing the message across. I also stay sober by reading the Big Book to my girlfriend and explaining this disease called alcoholism. I pray everyday — sometimes several prayers a day.

I have a lot to say but I also realize that I need to keep this simple and short.

TO THE NEWCOMER, my message is a simple one. The program works if you work it. The reality is that things turn out best for those who make the best of the way things turn out. You must be willing to accept the suggestions. Go to meetings.

Get a new set of playmates. Turn your will and your life over to the care of a loving God as you understand him. God is never intimidated by our crisis.

GET A SPONSOR WHO KNOWS THE PROGRAM AND HOW IT WORKS. It is working for me and I hope that it will work for you.

My prayer is that God will give me the wisdom to remain humble and also give me the ability to continue to serve humankind. Let us continue to add meetings to meetings, hope to hope, and love to love.

I love you and God Bless  
Forever Grateful,  
Sam B.

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### Struggles in Recovery

By  
Anonymous

Struggles in recovery. My first thoughts were of hardship, suffering, difficulty, challenges and all the things that I didn't like to deal with. Struggling with something seemed to me to be a negative subject. The more that I thought about it though, I began to realize that over all the years of abusing drugs and alcohol, I had created a life full of bad habits. If I wasn't willing to work hard and make some changes in my life, then I might as well go back to where I came from. My mother always told me that if I didn't climb the mountain, I would never get to enjoy the view. These struggles we face in recovery will uncover parts, wonderful parts, of ourselves that we never knew about.

More often than not, I would try to change the world around me rather than to look inside myself for the solutions to my problems. I didn't want to admit to myself or anyone else that I was less than perfect. Learning to focus on my inner self has allowed me to explore the very nature of my being. Changes that I have made in my life are a direct result of this. I make changes in my life by changing the way I think. If I don't change the way I think, then my actions will never change. The twelve steps of AA have helped me tremendously with this constant struggle and, as long as I keep working at it, the more satisfying my life will become.

The program gives us advice and suggestions only. We are the ones who have to process it and weave it into our own lives.

## Winter Focus: Challenges in Recovery

### To My Dear Beloved Alcohol

By  
Montine A.

I want to thank you for all that you have done for me.  
Thank you for giving my life meaning when it had none.  
Thank you for saving me from despair and depression.  
For the sheer exhilaration and excitement when I was so bored I couldn't bear it.  
For hope again when there was none.  
For helping me feel, for helping me not to when I didn't want to.  
For giving me strength, confidence and courage to go on when I didn't have it within myself.  
For getting me through so many situations.  
For giving me the control I needed.  
You helped me through those long days at home.  
For taking away the guilt. For the pure fun and pleasure of it.  
For the wildness and craziness.  
For the feeling of total liberation and sense of freedom.  
And the freedom of expression.  
For making me feel pretty when I felt ugly.  
For my sexuality when I felt dead inside.  
For easing so much physical pain.  
For healing me when I was sick.  
For the journeys with people and to places that just wouldn't have been the same without you.  
Thank you for sharpening my senses and allowing my imagination to run free.  
To have passion and be creative without inhibition.  
To be an individual, to be different.  
For knowing that you would always be there when I needed you.  
I knew what to expect of you and that I could count and depend on you.  
Life has become unimaginable without you.  
I've loved you as you made me feel safe when I was scared.  
I don't know what I would have done without you.  
I've needed you as much as I've ever needed anyone, if not more.  
You've been my best friend.  
But I have been growing sicker and sicker over the years.  
I have been compromising, bargaining and borrowing more and more.

My life is no longer my own.  
It belongs completely to you now.  
I have lost all of myself to you. I have no control left.  
I no longer know my own mind or can I act in my best interest.  
You have convinced me that it is O.K. to die for you.  
You have put me in dangerous positions.  
To this point I have been willing to follow you, knowing full well how bad it could be.  
Just on the chance that maybe, just maybe, once again it would be all right.  
For that tiny glimmer, I am totally consumed.  
It has become time for me to reclaim my soul, my life, and myself.  
I know I will miss you terribly, but there was life before Alcohol.  
So, therefore, there must be life after Alcohol.  
I can see it all around me and there are people that want me to believe this.  
And I know some of them have loved you as much as I have.  
I would stay with you forever if I could, but I can't.  
You have romanced me like no other, and you're killing me.

Love and Goodbye

### Positively Negative

We drank for joy and became miserable.  
We drank for sociability and became argumentative.  
We drank for sophistication and became obnoxious.  
We drank for friendship and became enemies.  
We drank to help us sleep and awakened exhausted.  
We drank to gain strength, and it made us weaker.  
We drank for exhilaration and ended up depressed.  
We drank for medical reasons and acquired health problems.  
We drank to help us calm down and ended up with the shakes.  
We drank to get more confidence and became afraid.  
We drank to make conversation flow more easily, and the words came out slurred and incoherent.  
We drank to diminish our problems and saw them multiply.  
We drank to feel heavenly and ended up feeling like hell.

Reprinted

## Winter Focus: Challenges in Recovery

### Ridgeview Support Groups

<b>Al Anon</b>	
Monday, 8:00 p.m.	Day Hospital
<b>Ala Teen</b>	
Monday, 8:00 p.m.	Day Hospital
<b>Alcoholics Anonymous</b>	Day Hospital
Sunday, 11:15 a.m.	
Sunday, 8:00 p.m.	Speaker Meeting
Monday, 6:00 p.m.	Pro North (Men s AA)
Monday, 8:00 p.m.	
First Friday Speaker Meeting 8:00 p.m.	
Saturday, 11:00 a.m.	Women s and Men s
Saturday, 7:30 p.m.	
Relationships in Recovery	
<b>Cocaine Anonymous</b>	Pro North Bldg
Monday, 8:00 p.m.	
Tuesday, 8:00 p.m.	
Wednesday, 8:00 p.m.	Big Book Study
Friday, 8:00 p.m.	
Sunday, 8:00 p.m.	
<b>Codependent Anonymous</b>	Day Hospital
Thursday, 6:30 p.m.	
<b>Nar-Anon.</b>	Day Hospital
Thursday, 8:00 p.m.	
<b>Narcotics Anonymous</b>	Day Hospital
Friday, 8:00 p.m. - Friday Night Freedom	
Sunday, 8:00 p.m. - 12 Steps Closer	
<b>Depression/Manic-Depression Assn. (DMDA)</b>	
Twice-Monthly (2nd & 4th Wed.)	
8:00 p.m.	Day Hospital
<b>A.N.A.D.</b>	Pro North Bldg.
(Anorexia/Eating Disorders)	
Wednesday, 6:00 p.m.	
Saturday, 10:00 a.m.	
<b>Emotions Anonymous</b>	Pro North Bldg.
Monday, 7:15 p.m.	
Tuesday, 7:15 p.m.	
Wednesday, 7:15 p.m.	
Thursday, 7:00 p.m.	
Saturday, 11:00 a.m.	

**F.E.D.** Admin Bldg Con. Room  
**Friends & Family of People with Eating Disorders**  
 Mondays, 6:00 p.m.

**Gamblers Anonymous** Day Hospital  
 Tuesday, 7:30 p.m.

**Gam-Anon (for families and friends)**  
 Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. Day Hospital

**Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous**  
 Tuesday, 8:00 p.m. Day Hospital  
 Thursday, 8:00 p.m. Day Hospital

**Interfaith Approach to Spiritual Growth**  
 Sunday, 10:00 a.m. Day Hospital

[www.ridgeviewinstitute.com](http://www.ridgeviewinstitute.com)

Visit our website for up-to-date information  
 regarding programs, professional seminars, and  
 more.

Former ways brought misery  
 At last a spiritual path is sought  
 I pray each morning, night and day  
 The battles won and those yet fought

I have new hopes and dreams  
 For me this is a brand new way of life  
 I pray for courage, strength and peace  
 The days ahead hold pain and strife

Yet focus on the future hurts  
 My progress grows when I slow down  
 I pray for God to guide me on  
 The good in me may come around

It s not the past that matters most  
 The many things I m leaving now  
 I pray for me and others too  
 The God I love will show me how

To live a life full of such hope  
 That wisdom comes to me I know  
 I pray for all that I do need  
 The love for me must always grow

Cover Photograph courtesy of Aspen Productions  
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# Winter Focus: Challenges in Recovery

## 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



3995 South Cobb Drive  
Smyrna, Georgia 30080

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