

The View

Newsletter of the Ridgeview Alumni Association Steering Committee

Volume XIIIIV

Spring 2008

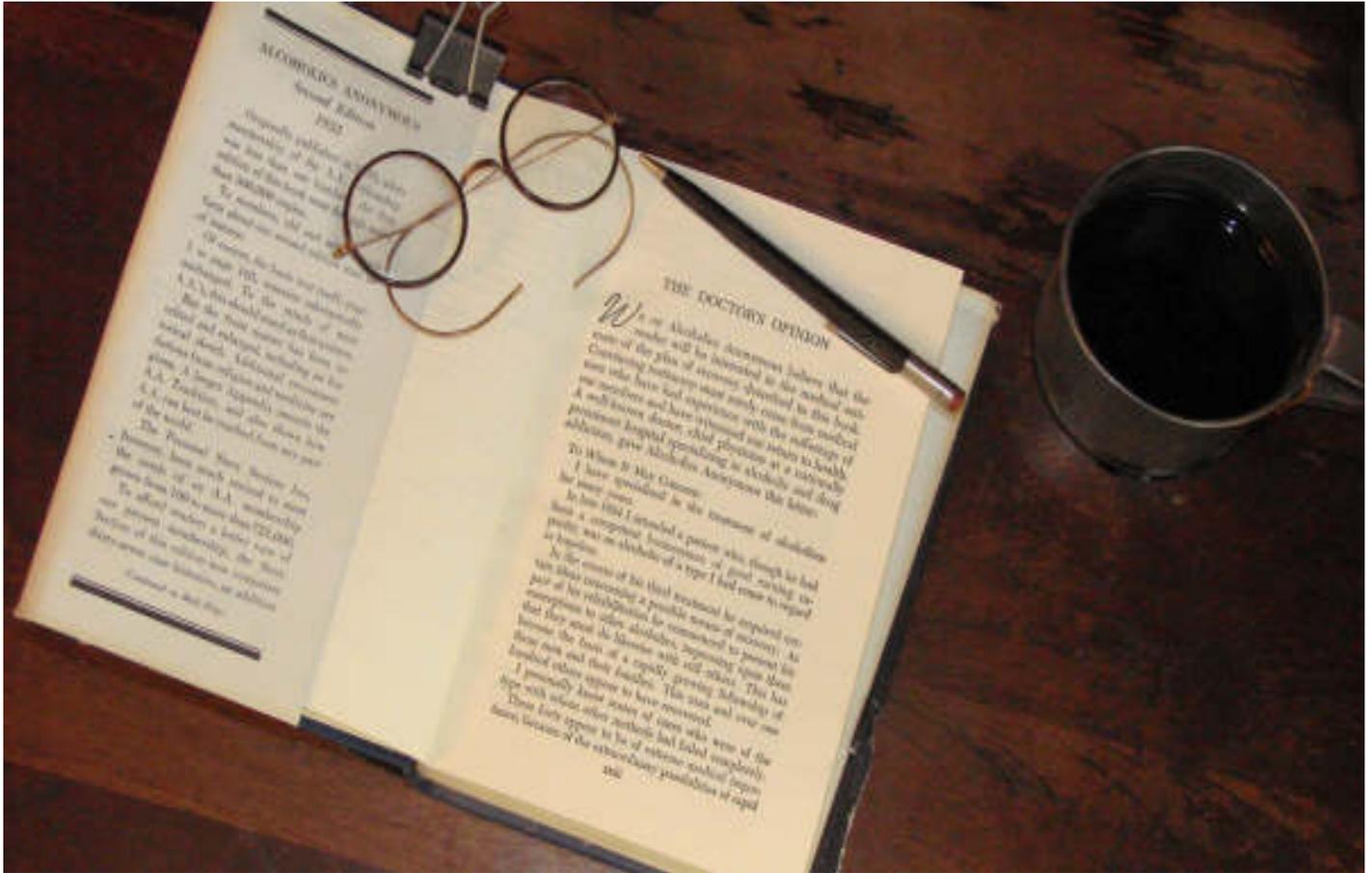


Photo Provided by: Ted McMahan, Jr.

*“God Doing for Us What We Could
Not Do for Ourselves”*

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

Upcoming Events

1st Friday Speaker Meetings @ 8pm

May 2, 2008

June 13, 2008

July 11, 2008

August 1, 2008

September 5, 2008

October 3, 2008

November 7, 2008

December 5, 2008

Spring Fling – Alumni Weekend – June 6 - 8, 2008

Alumni Summer Retreat – July 18 – 20, 2008

Alumni Fall Retreat – TBD

Gratitude Dinner – November 23, 2008

Lighting of Serenity Garden – December 2008

New Years Eve Dance – December 31, 2008

Contact any Alumni Steering Committee Member for more information or join us every Thursday at 5:45pm at Pro North on the Ridgeview Campus.

This issue along with archival copies are available on our website at www.ridgeviewalumni.com. 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 Website. Please put "newsletter" in the subject line.

Thank you to all those who submitted articles for this edition of the Newsletter; if we have learned anything in recovery it is that

We cannot keep what we have if we do not give it away!

If you would like to submit an article for the next Newsletter, please email it to Dawn L. at steering@bellsouth.net or dbliistro@bellsouth.net.

EDITORS:

Dawn L.
Nancy S.

Spring Focus: God Doing for Us What We Could Not Do for Ourselves

Challenges

Submitted by: Steven F.

My entire life, I've felt as though there wasn't a single obstacle I couldn't overcome. Many, I didn't even consider a challenge. Things like losing a job, girlfriend, money, etc... These were things that happen to people every day. Why should I be excluded? That's life and I'm no exception. The more difficult the losses, the more challenging they became to overcome.

Sometimes a challenge would come along and make me feel uncomfortable. I don't like "uncomfortable." Instead of dealing with the problem head on, I would self-medicate to temporarily ease the unwanted feelings. As time progressed, so did my disease.

Challenges were no longer welcome. Actually, the challenges became an excuse to drink. Any port in a storm, right? Somewhere along the way I stepped over the line into the full blown disease of alcoholism. I no longer needed excuses to drink. If I felt bad, I drank. If I felt good, I drank. Most of the time, I just felt like drinking. I liked the effects that alcohol brought me in short order. No waiting around here; temporary relief, real quick.

After completing the IOP program at Ridgeview I became very active in after-care and found a solid home group in AA. Somewhere between Steps 1 and 11, I had a spiritual awakening. I can't nail it down to a certain date, I just know it happened. My Higher Power works like that, mysteriously.

For decades, my Higher Power was found in a bottle. That choice afforded me 7 DUI convictions, 4 trips to prison, 3 institutions, 2 near-death experiences, 2 marriages, and countless misdemeanors and jail time. Once I realized I had another choice, I decided to try a different path.

Today, I find comfort and relief in a HIGHER POWER. I no longer evade my feelings. There are times when I can't resolve a problem or an uncomfortable emotion. I simply give them to my Higher Power and move on. Resolutions and answers come in His time, not mine. Today, I'm okay with that. God is clearly doing for me what I could not do for myself.

God Doing For Me What I Cannot Do For Myself

Submitted by: Warren Taylor

It was mid afternoon and I was just driving down the road daydreaming, as usual. It was a sunny day, with a few powder puff clouds rolling around and just enough breeze to have the car windows down, enough to feel refreshing. Out of nowhere, BOOM! A ridiculous thought flew between my ears that I needed to make an amends to a person I had worked for in the past. This was insane

thinking. After all, this guy had cheated me out of my fair commissions for 10 years!

Here we go again, an impulsive thought of the type that my brain comes up with at various times. Having learned not to trust this mechanism, I just had a snicker deep down inside and tried to move on. But, this impulse felt near to something that was foreign in me. I thought I had cleared up my amends a year ago.

For the first time ever I had finally worked the 12 Steps fully. Previously, there had been various lengths of time when I was dry. The last period of prideful, egotistical dry time had been 11 years. I had, of course, not bothered to do the Steps because they were not for me: I was special, and I was different. Actually, I went to any lengths not to do them because I had it all figured out.

The amends process was in the distant past. I went to my mother-in-law's bedside. She was very sick but still very alert. I had married her daughter 10 years earlier. She accepted my apology with a beautiful smile and hugged me and I was touched deeply. Next was father-in-law. Next were sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law that were extremely graceful. Then finally my step-daughters, but they were not so receptive and there was a waiting time until they one by one agreed to meet with me. This amends step had set me free until this very day when my mind started playing tricks.

Just driving down the road minding my own business, I was feeling a disturbance in my soul. The car sort of steered itself into my former employer's place of business. My arms and hands were steering against my will, as if they were electric and being controlled by a distant remote control. My body, my legs were reacting, my mind was not my own, and I was in the building feeling as if I were in a trance. There he was and there I was, face to face. I was not myself, I was not in control, but a Spiritual Force supported me and I made a sincere amends to this man. His expression showed a cold unfeeling man who was totally unprepared for my visit.

I thanked him and left. Back in the car, having been startled by this amazing experience, I called Ric, my sponsor. This is it Ric, I'm done. This was my very last amends. Right?

Powerlessness

Anonymous

Powerlessness is picking up another drink when every instinct in your heart, mind and body begs you to stop.

Powerlessness is drinking again and again and again and again until you pass out.

Powerlessness is then waking up to repeat the insanity.

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Powerlessness is acknowledging to your family and friends that you have a disease that may kill you and may kill someone else, but you cannot stop. It's a force that controls who you're with, where you go and what you do.

Powerlessness is waking up and not knowing what happened the night before. It's lying to yourself. It's lying to other people. It's a continual, gnawing, mind-numbing fear day after day as you second guess yourself, check yourself and worry about whether someone knows. Do my eyes look okay? Does my breath smell okay? Does this person know? Does that person know? Does everyone think I'm okay?

Am I okay??

Powerlessness is the dry heaves as you stare down into a vomit-filled commode and hope you see no blood. It's shaking with delirium tremens until you can't sign your name or lift a fork to your mouth. And you hope no one notices.

Powerlessness is an awkward look by coworkers as they turn away when you shuffle into the room. You worry about time you've been gone, work left behind and fear a call from the front office. Then the phone rings.

Powerlessness is the blue lights of a police cruiser flashing again in a rearview mirror and you know what is to come. It's an officer pushing your head downward as you're placed in the backseat while staring motorists glide past on the highway.

Powerlessness is a heavy, dull clang of a jailhouse door locking again behind you in a crowded cell as you search for a place to sit. The lights are always on, someone's screaming and cursing and you don't know when you'll eat or sleep again.

Powerlessness is drinking out of a water faucet and going to the bathroom in front of strangers as you worry about begging again for someone to bail you out. It's being guarded by people who hate you and a few who want to hurt you. And they know they can get away with it if they're careful.

Powerlessness is standing again in front of a judge and knowing that all of your second chances are gone. It is being broken and bankrupt with a desperate, shameful guilt. You're too scared to live and too afraid to die and all you want is one more drink. *This is what powerlessness is all about.*

Hooked On the Streets

Testimony by: Douglas H.

Did you ever take the time to look in the mirror? When the pain's deep inside, the hurt shows on your face. But heaven's not on earth, there's something more eternal. To give your life to Christ, it's never too late.

As I'm pulled deeper and deeper into this world of certain death, will I ever turn back, or go on until there's nothing left?

You see, I'm hooked on the streets. I admit I'm addicted to the life that it brings, and all the mess that comes with it.

I'm on a path of destruction, and if I keep going on, if heaven doesn't stop me, well then, it's to hell I'll be going.

You see, I'm hooked on the streets. I admit I'm addicted.

But how can I ever live down all the pain I've inflicted on the people that love me, and hold me deep in their hearts? They give their love freely, and then watch me rip it apart!

How can I ever live down all the things that I've done? Living life on the edge and living life on the run.

All these things that I have done, I hold deep inside with a whole lot of pain, and a whole lot of pride.

But, as I stare in the mirror, I search deep in my soul for a glimmer of hope, one precious moment of gold.

Back when I was a child, living life care free, I was taught right from wrong. My mother, hum... well she prayed for me, but this street that I'm on, it seems to never end I've had a lot of hard times and I've lost a lot of friends.

Now as I gaze in the mirror, I begin to realize, only God can save me, as tears fall from my eyes. And as I fall on my knees and cry out to the Lord, that for him I would live, and not die by the sword.

A Message to Non-Alcoholics

Anonymous

Someday, my friends, I will find the courage to tell you that I suffer from the disease known as alcoholism.

Why should this take courage? Only because you know so little about the disease that I am afraid of your reaction.

Actually, to say "I am an alcoholic," should be no more dramatic than to say "I am diabetic" or "I am allergic to sulfa drugs." But until you know more of the facts, I am afraid that your judgment might hurt my professional status as well as our friendship.

Here are some of the things I wish you knew:

I wish you knew that alcoholism is a disease which can strike anyone, regardless of social position, intelligence level, emotional maturity, moral values, or previous drinking patterns. Even you, after years of normal drinking, may someday find that your body has become unable to process alcohol properly, and even more astounding, some of you who have never had a drink might be alcoholics, medically speaking, right now without knowing it. The symptoms of the disease appear only after alcohol has been taken into the body.

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I wish you knew that alcoholism is not to be equated with excessive drinking. Many people drink too much and, while this may hurt their careers or their family lives, they are not doing permanent physical harm to themselves. An alcoholic's physiological inability to handle alcohol normally means that even a single drink can lead him closer to loss of control, mental deterioration, or premature death.

I wish you knew that although emotional instability sometimes accompanies alcoholism, the primary problem is a medical one. While many alcoholics do use alcohol in an unsuccessful attempt to resolve personality problems, most of the irrational behavior associated with alcoholism is a result of the disease itself, caused by the derangement which alcohol produces in a body which cannot tolerate it. As soon as the alcoholic can recognize the nature of his disease and can accept help in treating it, he has the power to deal with both sets of problems: Those which he tried to drown in alcohol and those which were created by his subsequent progression toward addiction.

I wish you knew that while the disease is both progressive and incurable, it can be completely checked by keeping alcohol out of the body and its victims can be saved for full, constructive lives. The future suffering of millions of undetected victims could be greatly reduced if understanding of the problem and knowledge of the warning signs were more widespread.

I wish you knew the peace of mind which descends upon the alcoholic who has found the inner stamina, and it often takes plenty, to look his condition squarely in the face and to accept the challenge of permanent sobriety. I wish you knew, for your sake, in case you or someone you know should ever contract the disease, how much hope and help there is available locally.

If and when I find the courage to tell you the truth about myself, how will you react towards me?

Here are a few simple suggestions all prefaced with a heartfelt PLEASE.

Don't feel that you have to lock up your liquor when I'm around. My being alcoholic does not mean that I want to drink myself into a stupor, although before I knew the nature of my problem I may well have done so in your presence. On the contrary, now that I know alcohol affects me as a deadly poison, I am most eager to postpone my obituary.

Don't worry about serving drinks in front of me. Maybe in my early days of recovery, it might have pained me to see others drinking when I could not. Now, though, I have made the delightful discovery that I can fully enjoy people and situations without the intake of what acts on my system as a toxic and addictive drug.

Don't try to persuade me to have "a short one" or just "a little glass of wine." The drink I must avoid, literally

on pain of death, is the first one, short or long, weak or strong, wine or whiskey, because the presence of alcohol in my body can trigger a whole set of physiological reactions which are beyond my control. One of these is a peculiar, irrational, and unbelievably powerful craving for more, and then you will have to lock up your liquor as I will be out of control in a relatively short period of time.

Don't ever, in the spirit of so-called fun, spike my drink! Whether I ingest alcohol on purpose or by mistake, knowingly or unknowingly, the same set of reactions will be unleashed and the active progression of the disease set in motion again.

Don't let the DON'TS make you self-conscious about me. Just let me sip my soft drink or coffee without comment. And when you are asking quests what they want to drink, ask me also. I can answer for myself. I am remarkably happy in my enforced sobriety; in fact so much happier than I ever was in my days of periodic binges and prolonged hangovers that I feel neither envy nor self-righteousness towards my friends who drink freely and normally.

Don't hesitate to ask me anything about alcoholism. I don't care if your questions spring from curiosity or from interest in helping someone deal with the problem. As a person reprieved from one of the uglier forms of self-inflicted death, I derive both strength and joy from sharing information which may assist other victims in freeing themselves from the shadows of this disease.

Who am I?

Submitted by: Traci West

"Who am I?" We tend to answer this with what we do, who we are related to, etc. But who are we really when we lose all of that? Or what if we have all that and are still not satisfied? I think that is what a mid-life crisis is all about. I went through mine around age 36. I wish I had parents who could have helped me know who I was when I was growing up. But I didn't. I spent 4 years floundering through a divorce, several jobs, dating/ drinking, making very bad decisions personally, financially, etc. I was finally broken.

I remember sitting in my lonely apartment (moving once again) and opening boxes with a drink in my hand. This is what my life had boiled down, to a pair of candlesticks that I got from my divorce and other knick knock stuff. And I wanted stuff; stuff would fill the hole I felt inside, right? I had lost everything that was important to me. I had lost my marriage, my children, job, various relationships with others and most of all my self-respect. Holding the "stuff" in my hands, I knew it didn't make me happy. It was an eye-opening moment. It was then that I realized "stuff" was not important and trying to get other people to like and accept me was not important.

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I came to learn that everything in my life that is important is free...the strength I get from my family, support from friends, respect, honor and dignity. All of this is free and when I have it, I am happy. This is who I am today. I had to address this recently when I accidentally ran into my son, Daniel, who hasn't spoken to me in 5 years. This is one of many times that God did for me what I cannot do for myself.

I had missed a dental appointment and re-scheduled for the next day. When I got there I was told that Daniel was in the next room. I thought he was at college and couldn't possibly be there, so I walked in and said hello to him. He did not speak and gave me that look of scorn that kids give their parents-you know...when you are getting on to them and they are cussing you out in their heads... I was hurt and prayed about what to do.

Later I wrote him a letter. I once again made amends for my past behaviors. I have done this several times, in writing and in person. I have done my part and know now that I am finished with my amends. In the letter I told him that I couldn't understand that look he gave me. How could he hate a person that he doesn't even know? I'm not the person he remembers and holds resentment against. I explained that I am respected, kind and loved by many people today. No one in my life looks at me that way, and that was why I was shocked to see it from him. I did invite Daniel to get to know the person I am today when and if he chooses to. But I will not accept the look of scorn from him ever again. I realized that God had given my son to me as a gift. I am grateful for the times we had together. I may never see him again, or things may change. Either way, that is up to God, not to me. Clinging to hope and trying to control the outcome had worn me out emotionally. I was done trying to control. Mailing the letter, I felt free.

So, how does God do for me what I cannot do for myself? It's as easy as 1, 2, 3.

1. There are no coincidences-God places me and others in His place at His time.
2. God gives me the words and strength to make amends-and the comfort to accept His outcome.
3. God is inside of me and therefore everything I need to be happy is within me and is free.

So to answer the question, "Who am I?" I would have to say that I am an instrument of God here to love myself and to love others. It is that simple.

Hiding Behind The Steps
Submitted By: George Mize

Anyone can reach sobriety by the path to recovery I've followed up to now. Hiding behind the 12 Steps, my false self (the one I created in AA) denied the guilt and fear which overrode my thinking. Anger and hurt pride, the smoke screens I hid behind, were excuses to blame

others for my fear, my dependence on others, and depression. I've learned to let myself **be** human.

How could you keep this a secret, George? Just like others, I've had friends go back out (some returned, but not all), I've seen death close up (usually detached, but also, my experiences), and know the suffering that wrenches the bones, yet, I have the Hope that makes my heart sing today. And I have the encouragement of friends, such that I choose peace and joy over pain and loneliness. I choose "going with my gut," not my brain.

How did this happen? There's very little risk in AA. Taking risks is important to keep me moving upward. I love the excitement, sense of urgency and purpose that comes from adventure, and recovery is an adventure, isn't it? Having gotten all I could out of "the group," I became restless, confused from my own thinking. Fear of relapse, fear of failure, fear of being wrong, fear of being vulnerable, fear of not being able to protect myself from all these fears, are my "false fears." False in the sense that myself is trying to keep me safe and keep me from taking a risk. This is not a "self-help" program.

I speak the language of "woundology" – retelling and reliving my experiences, using past experiences (divorce, break-up) as justification for my anger, to avoid new connections or relationships, to avoid moving on. While there is value in sharing my pain with another, there is a point where sharing my pain becomes akin to holding back my own growth. The bonding which occurs when two (or more) people experience an injury becomes authentic when I tell how my hopes and dreams have changed afterwards. In listening to a song, "*Live Like You Were Dying*," I realized I was hiding in AA.

Like most people, I let fear stop me. Most often, my fears are False Evidence Appearing Real. How do I know the difference between real and false fear? "Go with your gut, George," I was told by my friends. Knowing the only way to move through fear is to take the risk and do the thing I thought I could not do, means turning words into action. After this tough period of feeling powerful and then powerless, I believe in myself again, my dreams, and my ability to create and manifest all that I am. I focus my attention on how to grow by taking risks and moving my comfort zone beyond where I am comfortable. I notice the gifts that come my way: the friendships, the adventure, and the journey together. Enjoying the AA journey had never been all that high on my priority list, and I wanted "more" work to do rather than "relax, enjoy your life; why can't you just be, George?"

I accept responsibility for forgiving and loving myself, rather than blaming, judging, and feeling shame. And I take constructive risks like self-praise and accepting compliments ("*Thank you, George; Thank you, God*") instead of self-destructive certainty. Showing others who

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suffer how I was given help is part of what makes my life authentic. To protect myself from my own thinking, I ask "Do I have a clear sense of who I am and where I am

going?" Yes, I do. I am in touch with what is most important, **letting myself be human.**

**Alumni Steering Committee
Helping Hands at Work**

Supporting Atlanta's Homeless at the Catholic Shrine of the Immaculate Conception Church

A group of individuals volunteered their time to help feed Atlanta's homeless during the winter months. Each donating their time for their own reasons, but all leaving with a sense of gratitude and humility. We have fulfilled our commitment for the 2007-2008 winter seasons, but will once again be searching for donations and support come September.



Supporting our Troops through the USO

In January 2008, members of the Ridgeview Alumni Association Steering Committee took up a collection consisting of numerous telephone cards, 30 cases of bottled water and \$700 in cash for the United Service Organizations (USO), Atlanta International Airport, to reflect their appreciation to US military personnel, who pass through the Atlanta Airport on a daily basis. On February 12, 2008 this donation was personally presented to USO officials by Ridgeview Alumni members much to their gratitude. Expressions of thanks were also given to the alumni members by some of the troops who observed the donation. One sergeant in particular stated that when he returns to Afghanistan he recalls such kindness of Americans and knows who he is fighting for.

"Since before the United States entered World War II, the USO has been the bridge between the American public and the U.S. military. Through the USO, Americans can show their appreciation and express their gratitude. In times of peace and war, the USO has consistently delivered its special brand of comfort, morale and recreational services to the military. The USO, a congressionally chartered, private, nonprofit organization, relies on the generosity of individuals and corporations to support USO activities."

USO officials explained that military personnel travelling through the Atlanta Airport on their way to and from assignments, including Afghanistan and Iraqi, can stop at the USO lounge for rest, snacks, soft drinks, camaraderie and free phone cards for calls home. They advised that approximately 10,000 military personnel passed through the USO during the past holiday season.

It is noted that delivery of the items to the USO by the Ridgeview Alumni was met with exceptional cooperation from employees at the airport including Atlanta Police Officers and airport security employees who apparently recognized the meaning of the donation.

Ridgeview Institute Young Adults Cottage – Work Party

Nothing compares to the gift of giving back to the facility that gave us our lives.

Work in progress

Completed Garden



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RECOVERY WORD SEARCH – Submitted by Ted M.

E	L	T	E	L	W	B	S	M	Y	R	N	A	C	I	V	E	O	L	S	U
A	A	I	H	E	E	Y	O	P	E	I	D	K	E	B	S	E	O	T	N	R
S	G	D	T	R	I	S	T	B	O	A	E	R	E	E	R	M	O	M	O	E
Y	Y	V	R	E	V	E	H	R	R	N	W	O	D	E	N	I	A	L	N	Y
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O	E	R	A	S	P	I	R	I	T	U	A	L	M	A	U	O	N	L	E	E

AA
ALATEEN
BILL W
DR BOB
FELLOWSHIP
INVENTORY
MEN
RECOVERY
SMYRNA
TEENS
WOMEN

ADDICTION
ALCOHOL
CHIPS
DRUGS
GRAPEVINE
LORDS PRAYER
NINETY NINETY
RIDGEVIEW
SPIRITUAL
TWELVE STEPS
YOUTH

AKRON
AMENDS
COFFEE
EASY DOES IT
HIGHER POWER
MEDITATION
PRAYING
SERENITY PRAYER
SPONSEE
TWELVE TRADITIONS

ALANON
ANONYMITY
DENIAL
FAMILY
INTERVENTION
MEETINGS
PROMISES
SERVICE
SPONSOR
UNMANAGEABLE

Spring Focus: God Doing for Us What We Could Not Do for Ourselves

The Point

Submitted by: George Mize

What's the point, George?

I want to capture enthusiasm

There's so much I want to say, so little time, and space...

Maybe I'll write.

Write on the change I feel from being sad and depressed

Write about discovering the way UP - *Maybe you can help?*

What's the point, George?

This **being** is risky, just **BE-ING, is God's Will.**

Maybe include friendship or fellowship and believing.

What do you think?

Where am I, where am I going, which way did the rabbits go?

I know you want, but I am thinking right now, ok?

Maybe something I ate about 6 months ago –

Maybe I poisoned myself with my thinking.

Can't really say for sure where I was, I felt the lowest.

It was the lowest I felt. Nothing. Apathy.

Maybe you can help?

What's the point, George?

I recall thinking,

'I should be further along than this, almost seven years.'

I was doing everything – a sponsor, home group, being a sponsor, praying, meditating, inventorying, making amends, I don't feel any better.

I might as well end this -- it's not working any more. Just like drugs and alcohol stopped working.

Funny.

Maybe you can help?

What's the point, George?

I set a date.

My birthday, 9/22:

If I don't feel any better by then, I'll go ahead and end this.

Then there was First Friday in October.

Chairing the meeting - not a good time

I set the date for Christmas.

If I don't feel any better by then...

Then Christmas was here, I was working.

I set the date for New Year's Day.

Looking for the way UP and it was in the cigar box. It was real. It was there.

Maybe you can help?

What's the point, George?

I accepted an invitation, for dinner 12/29.

I took a risk, exposed myself; came-out-of-my-box;

A dinner project – make an environment-in-a-box using a seashell, some wire figures, plastic plants, styrofoam, and

fabric. Make a scene, like waves on the beach with a full moon.

This weekend, stayed at the beach, with two friends.

Looking for shells; listening to the ocean. **Just being.**

Still visualizing, sand and sky and waves and sun.

Thinking, how it feels.

To feel, look for shells, laugh, sing, talk,

This **is** real I can just **BE** with friends.

What's the Point, George? What Happened?

Out-of-the-risky cigar-box, I visualized, I believed.

Attitude and Life changed, to Gratitude,

Hope, Faith, and -- Honesty.

Where am I now?

I can sit with my pain and others. I can share a laugh with friends.

I can enjoy life with the gifts it brings.

I can let others just **BE.**

I can just **BE.**

And Celebrate where I am, how far I've come.

Live fully in the present, feel limitless opportunities,

Rejoice in what I choose to do, how to spend my time here.

Follow intuition with people, experiences, creativity, trust strength, support reciprocal relationships, healthy boundaries, sit beside another sharing refreshing easiness.

God Doing For Me

What I Most Certainly Could Not Do For Myself

Submitted by: Mickey M.

When I'm happy, I have this notion it's because I did something right. When I'm running on normal I'm balanced. In both conditions the emphasis is on "I."

When fearful, deeply uncertain, not able to have any input what-so-ever, ah ha! Pray, do the third step shuffle "TURN IT OVER TO A HIGHER POWER!"

There is a cliché in recovery; this is not an oft-repeated one liner that becomes a cliché to me. It is the foundation of who and where I am today.

"Serenity is not a lack of fear, pain, or unease.... it is a connection with a higher power." This, a notion I first heard at an RVI Sunday Service. For some reason this penetrated and I've never forgotten it. As a person whose whole life to that point was based on "God helps those who help themselves," that little one liner has turned out to be more meaningful a gift in many respects than the multitude of blessings granted me in this new life.

My first experience in being totally out of the control, that I remember is when our daughter, age 19, went missing for 90 days in Balboa, California during my second or third year. We were broke—not just bent,

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financially. The relatives we had living several miles away could not locate her. Her friends at work did not know where she was.

"Please, God, let the outcome of this not be family destroying." That is basically all my input amounted to. We have never really found out most of the details of this experience for her. Whatever was going on turned out to be a maturing experience for her. Our relationship since has been rough, good, uncertain and finally today loving, caring, supportive, even before all the other experiences I've had. This has been one of my great joys, a gift received through being in recovery.

I mentioned to my wife one morning that I had felt like I was going to be dizzy several times yesterday. Her response, see the doctor. Now up to this point in my life that would have been shrugged off. Doctors are people you go to; to get sick had been my feeling for many, many years. In our 25 years of marriage I had maybe 10 "annual" checkups.

AA had made me aware that listening and doing what is suggested is an important part of recovery. I went to the doctor. He gave me a stress test and sent me to a cardiologist who performed a cardiac catheterization. When he had been looking in my arteries, heart, wherever, for fifteen minutes he walks around the table and tells me "I'm not going to take the catheter out of your leg, it could break enough cholesterol loose to cause a heart attack." So I went to St. Joseph's hospital in an ambulance with a fiber optic tube camera in my thigh and woke up in intensive care.

The point of all this uninteresting detail is this. No family history of heart problems. No identifiable physical symptoms, no reason for the first time in memory to do what my wife suggested immediately. All the above due to principles learned in recovery. "Take the cotton out of your ears and put it your mouth. Do what is suggested without knowing or caring why." So far I'm not dead.

Wait another four years. The Atlanta curse, ALLERGY, hits. Our beautiful area full of trees and color also has downsides. Back to the family doctor. Referral to an ENT Specialist. The tightness in my throat needs to be surgically examined and biopsied. Off to the races with the second surgery since my tonsils at 5 years old. Diagnosis – Laryngeal Cancer, stage four. The Canadian trained ENT specialist tells me to bring him my Humana Insurance Directory and my wife's BC/BS and he will find me a treatment team covered by both policies.

The type of cancer I've developed is due more to alcohol abuse than smoking, (although 44 years of smoking didn't help).

There is now a Radiation Oncologist, a Hematology Oncologist and the ENT who put the 'team' together for us.

Two months of radiation therapy, a nine-hour operation to rebuild my throat by the ENT, a quickie operation to make a voice prostheses possible, and it's all over. If five years goes by with no return, it's a cure.

Again, the point of this is we have since learned that the primary oncologist and the ENT who put together the team are both considered top men in their fields by their peers in Georgia. My radiation oncologist was fantastic and has left the region since.

God doing for me what I most certainly could not do for myself.

SO FAR I'M NOT DEAD..... ?

Skip ahead seven years. Annual CAT scan... Lung Cancer, stage four again. Treatment: Chemotherapy from February to September. Lung cancer under control, no growth, 50 percent reduction in lungs no other organs involved. Go on an oral pill that inhibits growth of cancer cells and can extend end game one to three years.

Skip ahead five months. Fine motor skills deteriorating due to neuropathy; results in brain CAT scan. Spots of cancer there; eighty percent probability of cure with radiation; another 3500 Rads in 18 shots. Results due April 8, 2008. STILL NOT DEAD?

At this point there really might be a reason I'm still alive. Without a loving God and many, many people's prayers, I would have been dead long ago. Without RVI and AA.... ditto.

So maybe my story is why I'm still here. The topic of this newsletter due in April, my AA 17th year, April 6th birthday reminded me that I'm easier to read than talk to.

The life my wife and I are living right now today is the very best part of our 37 years together. We have an extended family living from San Diego to Palm Desert, CA, to Las Vegas to Aspen, CO. They have all been here this last year. Our daughter and her fairly new husband most of all. Being with them in July '08 for the birth of our grandchild is my current wish for prayers from any one that hears / feels a 'ting' reading this.

I've been going to Sam's Thursday evening after care meeting since the day I left treatment, April 6, 1991. I've heard and even retained some of the wisdom shared in this group.

"Whatever is going on in your head is for entertainment purposes only."

"What other people think of me is none of my business."

"Whatever happens....good....bad....indifferent, this too will change."

"When I bring a problem, emotion, etc., to the group, if someone doesn't make me mad I've wasted my time." My anger is all the answer I need.

This group of ever changing people, some in weeks or months, others in long time attendance, has

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been one of the cornerstones of my sobriety. Opening up in a meeting and letting people know you is to me putting credit in an emotional bank account. When I bring a problem the response is instant and causes serious consideration on my part. Because I have let people, strangers know me a little. Some even a lot.

There was a time a year or so ago when hearing the same questions weekly and hearing myself saying the same thing I'd said before got real stale and my participation was sporadic and inattentive when I was there.

What has occurred in my life recently has caused a different mind-set. There are many ways to do 12 Step work. One of the things that I get a kick out of is doing service and 12 Step work at RVI is the "EASIER, SOFTER WAY" Cottage meetings, alumni services, temporary sponsors, are all here, in a safe environment, with people who for the most part are interested in recovery.

My new goal is to find ways to encourage the newcomer to recovery. This is a very difficult time for these folks. It's a roller coaster of highs and lows. Juggling time, meetings, family, work. Keeping our internal focus on our number one priority – don't use – while trying not to short change other areas of our lives any more than necessary. And for the young people, I'm seeing more and more of them blow my mind with their commitment at an age where no one could have reached me. I knew it all.

My hope is that by this message and whatever in the future, I might encourage someone to keep going long enough to experience the miracle.

ASPIRE 2 INSPIRE BA U EXPIRE

The Cocoon

Submitted by: Linda Black

I found a cocoon.
While wandering in the woods.
I wasn't looking for a cocoon
But when I saw it, I knew I needed one.

I was fragile.
I wanted safety, warmth - protection.
I longed for stability and permanence.
The cocoon was perfect.
The outside was smooth and soft, like felt
The color, golden and creamy.
The shape, gentle, yet solid.

How in the scheme of things had this one survived?
As a soggy egg it was unlikely to have lived.
A praying mantis could have had a fine meal.
What was its life as a caterpillar like?

The casting off of all those outgrown skins; was that
painful?
As it moved towards death it spun the delicate threads
That held its fragile life together
The threads that became this marvelous, protective
device.
So beautiful, so solid and serene.

The cocoon was attached close to the trunk
Of an old tree with expansive spreading limbs.
Each time I came into the woods
It was always there.
I counted on it
It comforted me.

I wanted to take it in my hand and keep it with me.
To survive, it needed to stay attached to the tree.
So I left it there.

The attachment kept it from getting lost
The wind didn't blow it away.
The rains didn't cover it with leaves and soil
It didn't get caught up in the tumultuous seasons of the
woods.
It was secure. It held its mysteries close.

I kept returning to the cocoon.
I spread a blanket on the ground beneath the limb on
which it hung.
I rested, read, watched the sun track across the sky
Felt the power of the wind, the forest, the earth.
Listened to God and felt my soul stir.
Such a treasure to have a cocoon.

Early this spring, the cocoon began to stir
It rattled; it swung back and forth; then was still.
It scared me.
Relentlessly it struggled.

It seemed angry to be stuck there on that limb.
Was it dying or suffocating? Maybe exploding.
I touched it; it struggled more. Stay back.
I stayed nearby but didn't touch.

Cocoons are temporary homes – I knew that,
Something inside has to get out.
I wasn't sure I wanted this one to change.
It was a comfort the way it was.
Nature's timing is not to be denied – so on it went rattling
and swinging.

Strange furry jointed limbs protruded.
Folded, soggy, layers clung limply to its form.
Seemingly with great pain, it pulled out of the cocoon
It hauled its shapeless, soggy mass up onto the limb

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And hung there on that massive tree.
Helpless, naked, wet, weak.

I reached out to it – timeless instinct screamed don't
So wide eyed I watched. It rained.
Against the pouring rain, I held out a leafy branch;
Protected it a bit from the wind and water.
The soggy mass unfolded
Velvet wings, magnificent
Warm colors, intense, colors of richness
He gently fluttered their tender forms – like velvet drapery
by an open window
The warm breeze dried, strengthened them .
His magnificent mysteries now so lightly held. His breath
came easy.

My heart filled my chest with awe and love.
He rested.
The night was gentle.
He released the giant limb and drifted tenderly onto my
shoulder.

God and Spirituality *Submitted by: Rick E.*

Faith in organized religion is disappointing for some people, but faith in God never will be disappointing. Why such a problem in understanding the difference?

When I hear that question being asked by a fellow brother or sister attending a meeting, it is usually followed by an explanation of the differences against organized religion. A religion that was forced upon them as a younger child and a religion that was all "fear based." It's premise is the "loss of heaven" when it should teach the gain of life. This usually leads to a belief that this is one of the many reasons for using alcohol or drugs. It's then followed by blaming God for the pain they are now receiving. So, we are taught that we are going to hell for committing sin; we are taught that all other religions are bad and if we do not get up and go to services we will endure the eternal loss of paradise.

This has reminded me of sitting in church as a teenager. Suffering in the pew on a lackluster Sunday morning after a lively Saturday night was nothing short of penance. It was as if the priest knew intimately of my sins, sown just hours before, for he bore down on me and my pounding head.

All I wanted to do was get outside and breathe deeply and pocket the offering my mother trusted me to place in the collection. Even better would have been the opportunity to have stayed in bed. But that was not an option at my house. On Sunday morning, as long as I lived under my father's house, I would be in church.

See in those days my parents were deeply committed to their local parish church. My mother sang in the choir, so did I, and attended prayer meetings and bible study. My father was active in the men's club. The Church was the "Hub" of the entire community on our side of town. As a result our family was in church on a regular basis, not just Sunday morning, but all holy days and every morning, every day when I attended catholic school. We did them all. I often tell people that I grew up with a ruthless drug problem. I was "drug" to church every time the doors were opened. Was this a bad thing? Well in my sick thinking, I used to think so.

Now, not at all. This exposure formed my character and grounded me in ways I will never be able to access fully. It birthed and incubated a faith that has enabled me to realize that the real meaning of the location of a church is "between my ears". My church is wherever I want it to be and wherever I am. That organized religion only matters to me, for God/Higher Power is always there in me, not only located in a church, but in my mind and in my body. My body is a tabernacle of God! It's my belief that God does not recognize traditions, colors and names being given to him by different man-made denominations. He is God.

Does this mean that all my experiences were profitable? No, I witnessed a litany of religious failures: Moral "indiscretions" of those in leadership. And these do not account for my experiences in adulthood, experiences that if recounted, would blister this page. How can I persevere in the belief of God/Higher power when there are so many reasons to leave it all in the rearview mirror?

Good question. Truth be told I have regained most of my faith in my organized religion. This means I have gained faith in the God in which my parents sincerely believed: the God I shall try to follow. The faith I now attempt to keep is not a faith in people, pastors, church leaders, buildings or a particular denomination. It is a faith in my higher power (whom I call Jesus Christ) that transcends all of these.

Strangely enough, as my faith grows I gain a greater trust in this God/Higher power. For in the failures of organized religion he still lurks about. He dances and plays in these broken places, doing what he always does, inviting us to himself in spite of the many obstacles.

When I stand up in the morning and look out over the trees, birds, and sunshine, I know once again that I am the house that embodies God. He is there in me.

Religion is not the answer to our troubles. Creeds, religious conviction, and Sunday rituals (not counting Fr. Noel) have little power in and of themselves. No, I point myself to God/Higher Power who once said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Let me teach you, and you will find rest for your soul."

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Do I Believe

Submitted by: Sean Cleary

Sometimes it's not a bad thing being a procrastinator. By submitting this article late, the "Twenty-Four Hours a Day" book has been talking about turning my drink problem over to a Higher Power. What I'm really asking is, "Do I believe that the grace of God can do for me what I could never do for myself?" At first I didn't think so, but I started to give it a shot anyway. ("A kick, lick and a whack," as Paul M. likes to say down at Triangle.)

All I wanted to do was to be free from alcohol. If it meant cleaning ash trays and taking out the trash, then I was willing to do it. It didn't make sense to me but I did it anyway. When I was finished doing those tasks, I still wanted to drink. So how was that working? My sponsor would tell me to be patient and that it worked for him. Thus, I continued to take out the trash and clean the ash trays.

The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous talks about a psychic change or a spiritual awakening. Transformation. Now there's a word. Webster says it's a "change in form, appearance, nature or character." He also goes on to say "a wig or a hairpiece for a woman" but I guess that would be for a different newsletter. Anyway, I know I have changed. I'm not the same person that crawled into these doors – wet, crying, ashamed of myself and hopeless. Oh yeah, and at the same time I was still craving another drink. The Big Book calls this "pitiful, incomprehensible demoralization."

What does it mean to turn my drink problem over to God? How do I do that? And then move on one day at a time? As if it has all been taken away?

My sponsor was kind and gentle in his southern way. He'd say "My wife is fixin' to make us something to eat. Why don't you come on over to the house?" I didn't know it at the time but that was one of the many ways I started to get sober. My first intuition was to politely decline the offer and go home so I could be by myself. Instead, I ended up doing something different. I took a chance. I took a little step outside of my comfort zone. I sat down with my sponsor's family (had me a grit or two) and I wasn't playing "Tug-o-War" inside my head. That was God doing for me what I could not do for myself.

Gradually, I started to trust Alcoholics Anonymous and some of the people in it. I was also becoming aware that there was a Higher Power somewhere who was actually taking care of me through all of this.

By working with a sponsor who took me through the steps, things started to change and I was seeing things differently. I was reacting to situations differently. I was starting to think of other people and prayed that their troubles would go away. There were times that I would smile by myself, alone, knowing that I was going to be all

right. I was headed in the right direction and for the first time in my life, I felt peace and joy instead of anguish and despair.

It's been a while now since that scary day up there in the Access Center. I don't ever want to forget it because it keeps me grateful. *Extremely grateful!* My Higher Power has bestowed upon me a very precious gift of sobriety. I don't know why but I know I have it today. My prayer each morning is to ask God, "How can I be of service to you?" Then I leave the house, with an awareness of my Creator and trust that He will show me the way each day. And He has. I am truly blessed and grateful!

Recovery II

Submitted by: David M.

At Ridgeview, I learned what it means to be sober. Upon coming out, it became incumbent upon me to learn how to *live* sober. "Third Step" gave me that opportunity.

At that time, I didn't know how to treat myself or other people I lived with on a day-to-day basis. For 37 years I had just always done what, to me, seemed "natural." As it turns out, what I had been doing had been far from natural. Now, I began to learn to consider the consequences of the things I did.

Leaving my shoes and dirty laundry on the living room floor no longer seemed like a good idea. When I cooked (well – melted) food in the kitchen, leaving the dirty dishes on the counter, on the stove, and in the sink didn't seem like a good idea either. When I did laundry, I could no longer, in good conscience, leave stuff in the dryer for days; using it as a virtual dresser. Living with others whom I could not take for granted forced me to examine my habits and to think about how I had, in the past, taken those I love for granted.

But I hadn't really done any of this.

This process extended to my professional life. Instead of finding excuses for doing as little work as possible, I started taking a realistic view of my responsibilities, and becoming willing to do whatever work was called for. While in the past I was the world's worst about paperwork, I became diligent about it. I became almost anal about being on time instead of always being the one everyone else waited for. Instead of being a "jobsite recluse," communication became my middle name. . Suddenly, I was a real **employee**; I was **dependable**, I was **conscientious**. All this resulted in a promotion, and a raise, two things I had never had in my life.

Yet none of this felt like *my* doing.

My wife and I had originally agreed that I would not move home for at least a year after my entering treatment. At least that's what **she** agreed. Now I had

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entered treatment on the 2nd of January, but one Saturday early in the next July, she called me while I was talking to my sponsor, and she asked me to talk to him about moving back home. I asked her when she wanted me to move home. She replied, "I think I'm ready now, Baby." I was dumbfounded, because I had been emotionally pacing myself for a New Year's return home.

Another leap of fortune that it seemed I'd had nothing to do with.

As time passes, and I continue to try to do the next right thing, good things continue to happen in my life. Conversely, when I am less than diligent about using my recovery tools, the good things seem not to happen so often. The less effort I put forth, the fewer results I see.

God has done, and does for me, things I cannot do for myself. But the results I get, no matter how small or great, are directly proportional to the level of effort I put forth.

God Doing for Us

Submitted by : Tom S.

The first sign of God doing for me what I could not do for myself was the removal of the obsession to take a drink. God knows I tried everything myself just as it says in the book Alcoholics Anonymous. Nothing worked until we worked the 12 Steps and I came to believe that no human power could have relieved our alcoholism. Applying the same energy to smoking tobacco gave the same result. Any event that has happened in my life in recovery would probably have happened if I was not in recovery. The difference is the way I go through each event. Knowing that the Creator (or a designated representative thereof) is always near has been a gift of recovery I had not anticipated but have come to rely on each and every day. Mitakuye Oyasin - We are all related.

I can't even begin to cover

**"The Way God Does For Me
What I Can't Do For Myself"**

Submitted by: Rene' H. (11-1-96)

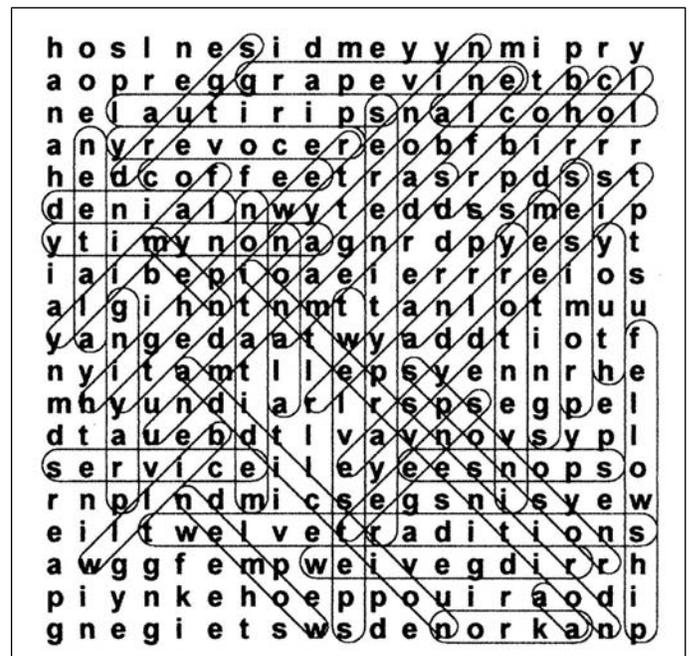
In my first few months at Ridgeview, I was so confused. Then I happen to read the poem called "Footprints" and my "whole attitude and outlook upon life changed and I was amazed before I was half way through." I to saw only one set of footprints, but I really understood whose they were, and they were not mine.

Most of the good things that have happened over these past 11 years have occurred when Rene' "JUST GOT OUT OF THE WAY." When I start to try to control the outcome, that is when "everything heads south."

There are so many things that have happened when God wanted them to happen, not as quickly as I may have wanted but THEY HAPPENED WHEN THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN. Bank accounts were one of my first big issues. My wife had the good sense to take me "off" the account during my last six months of being out there. When I had 30 days at Ridgeview, I thought I had earned being back on the account. God had a different agenda and time frame. I could not understand where those signature cards where. Forty days went by, then fifty days went by and no cards. It took just short of sixty days for those cards to appear. My wife said she would have brought them sooner if I had asked, but God wanted me to practice a little humility before I got my way (really His way).

The next major issue was with my son. He was very angry with me and when my wife and he brought my car to Ridgeview for me to use, it was a Sunday, but he would not have lunch with us that day. He was too angry. He was eighteen at the time he is turning thirty this year and has come to understand that I am not a bad person, I was just a "sick" person trying to get well. When we talk on the phone, which is usually weekly, he ends our calls with "I LOVE YOU, DAD". If that is not "God Doing For Me What I Could Not Do For Myself," I don't know what is.

ANSWERS TO WORD SEARCH



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Remember hitting your bottom? Do you remember that moment when you first began to feel some hope? Looking back, can you remember those angels who appeared at that precise moment when you needed help the most? I can.

I can also remember the abject fear of, "How am I going to pay for this?" No insurance, no real savings, no trust fund, no golden benefactor. Scared, having hit my bottom, finally able to ask for help. I was in a safe place. The rest would just have to take care of itself.

Treatment costs money, real money. Programs, therapies, prescriptions, food, housing, and all the while life continues to go on outside without us. As active members of the Ridgeview Alumni Association our fund raising goal is an endowment fund that will one day be able to help financially that person currently in treatment. Whether it's more time in treatment, another couple of days in a halfway house, medications, daycare so the patient can make it to the program that week, the needs can be overwhelming at times. We all know how powerful a helping hand at that critical moment can make or break a spirit.

Our goal for the Endowment Fund has to be set high if we are to be able to generate any kind of meaningful income. To date we have raised \$46,000 towards our first \$500,000. Every single dollar raised goes into an asset management account over which the Alumni Steering Committee has sole control.

When the day comes, and it will, that we are in a financial position to begin offering grants to patients, a review committee will be established. This group will be comprised of active Steering Committee members who have demonstrated a record of service, and a representative from the hospital. The committee will review the requests and make grants based on need, the patient's participation in their own recovery and the patient's treatment team's input.

Obviously we are a ways down the road from making any grants. The next several years are about increasing awareness of our project, raising and investing the donations that come our way. Today, you can make a difference in the life of that person who is still out there.

Won't you make a commitment to be someone's angel, just for today? We have.

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

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