

VOLUME XXXVI

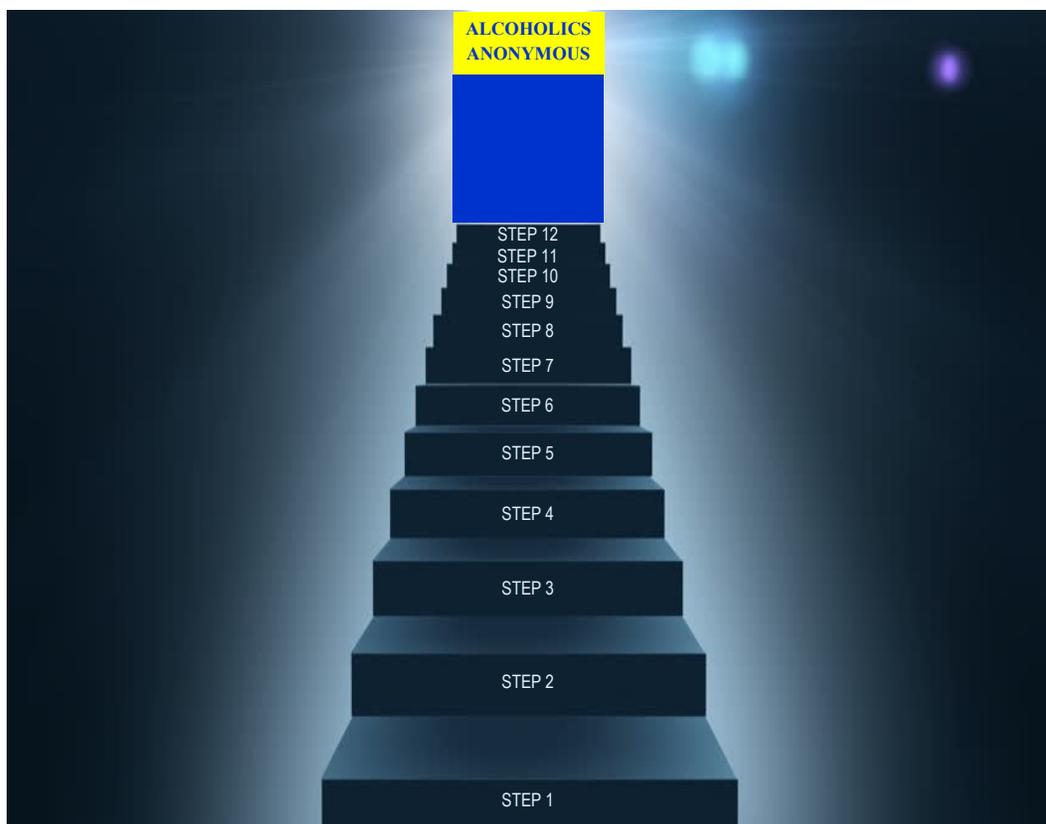
# THE VIEW

NEWSLETTER OF THE RIDGEVIEW ALUMNI ASSOCIATION STEERING COMMITTEE

## THE ELEVATOR IS OUT-USE THE STEPS

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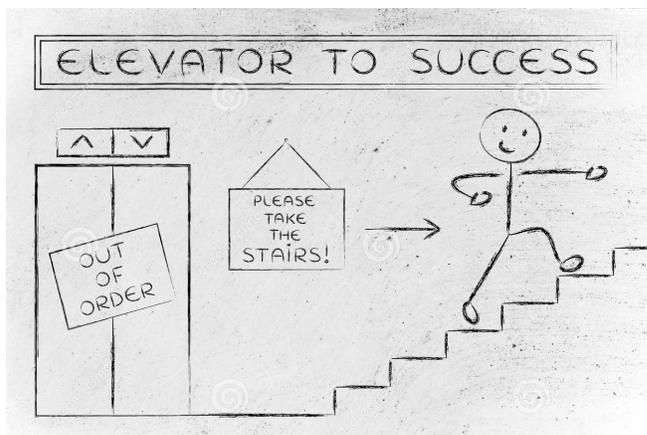
THE  
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 ALUMNI  
 ASSOCIATION  
 3995 SOUTH  
 COBB DRIVE  
 SMYRNA GA  
 30080



## UPCOMING EVENTS

EVENT	TIME	DATE	LOCATION
1st Friday Speaker Meetings	7:45pm	TBD	Day Hospital
Fall Festival—TBD		TBD	

DO TO THE CURRENT COVID-19 SITUATION; ALL EVENTS ARE CURRENTLY ON HOLD. AS SOON AS WE KNOW MORE, WILL LET YOU KNOW. KEEP COMING BACK!



This issue, as well as archival copies, are available on our website at [www.ridgeviewalumni.com](http://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 notified by e-mail when a new Newsletter is placed on the site, E-mail us at [sysadmin@ridgeviewalumni.com](mailto:sysadmin@ridgeviewalumni.com) or contact us thru the Website at [sysadmin@ridgeviewalumni.com](mailto:sysadmin@ridgeviewalumni.com). Please put "newsletter" in the subject line.

**Thank you to 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 Elaine B. at [ehb216@yahoo.com](mailto:ehb216@yahoo.com) or Dawn L. @ [dawnliistro@gmail.com](mailto:dawnliistro@gmail.com) using "Newsletter" in the subject line.

Elaine Burroughs, *Communications Chair, Proofreader*  
 Ray Williams, *Proofreader*  
 Paul S. Liistro, Jr., *Alumni Website*

Dawn Liistro, *Editor, Design & Layout*  
 Elaine Burroughs, *Steering Committee Minutes*  
 Janet Ticconi, *Bulletin Boards*

# THE STEPS REALLY LIFT

SUBMITTED BY: RAY W.

“Elevator’s out of order; take the Steps,” the sign reads, much to my disappointment. After all, I now have Twelve floors to climb . . . that is, to *try* to climb again. But when I “*honestly*” think about it, the elevator has always gone out of order eventually (at least for me). How many times, I ask myself, will those steely-strong cables break while I’m making my way upward, and I then find myself, yet again, *hitting bottom*. And then I have to return so as to try the Steps again.

Yep, the elevator somewhat represents my early approaches to the AA program, what we call “the easier, softer way.” I thought myself smart enough to reduce much of the “pain” of the program, and the “elevator” (*my way for AA*) became the symbol of my efforts. And the severed elevator cables became the symbol of my repeated failures. My defeat.

Then there is that rather well-known fact that when a tall building starts having smoke billow out its windows, about the first thing done is direct everyone to the Steps, and then out the first-floor door into an atmosphere of air that can be breathed, an atmosphere of gratitude for the Steps that won for me the battle against a deadly fire, against my alcoholism, an “ism” that is often deadly, deadly as a building being consumed by a fire.

Once I began to realize this, I turned my attention to the Steps, especially the First: “*We admitted we*

*were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.*” I had been trying, I see now, to “manage” my life *with* alcohol, including my depression and fears. But the first Step began to speak to me loudly: “*We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.*” How could my life, I asked myself, be manageable while I’m being hurled downward in a broken elevator or am running out of oxygen in that small compartment that’s stuck between floors and is about to crash as its cables break. A nightmare! Yes, my life was once an on-and-off nightmare.

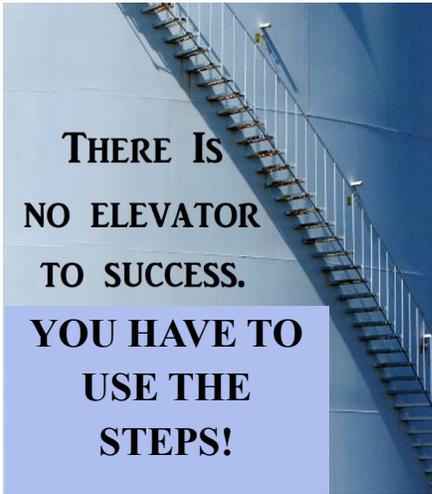
How pleasant is the sunrise on a morning after a nightmare, when the alcoholic in recovery realizes that he or she is safe, having been given another day, another chance, to put the Steps into practice, or of beginning the AA way with Step One, the “100% Step”, which for me at that point was not hard to believe at all. It was just a bit hard to do. But it’s done, and I’ve recognized my powerlessness over alcohol and the foolishness of my attempts to find the right “elevator,” either by my own “strength” or my own “knowledge.” Working the Steps with the help of so many other sober alcoholics, which leads me out of the hell below (alcoholism) and grants me a vision from above of the ever-increasing

light and freedom that come with working the Steps. But not, I began to see, from “joy-riding” in an elevator, which only takes one up and down, whereas the Steps take one *up*, to a higher, freer, happier level that infuses this life with such rich

Yep, the elevator somewhat represents my early approaches to the AA program, what we call “the easier, softer way.”

meaning and takes us in this life toward our goal: “Abandon yourself to god as you understand God. Admit your faults to Him and to your fellows. Clear away the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the Fellowship of the Spirit, and you will surely

meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny. May God bless you and keep you – until then.”  
– *Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 164



## I AM A MIRACLE

SUBMITTED BY: JONATHAN F.

On August 17th, 2017, at 6:40 a.m., I walked into Lithia Springs High School (my workplace at the time) and took a .38 handgun from my backpack, loaded it with a single bullet, put the muzzle in my mouth, and pulled the trigger. That should have been the end of my story; a story of a lifetime of suicidal ideation, hopeless depression, and darkness. But it was just the beginning of this story.

My first thought was that I was still having thoughts. That shouldn't have been; I was supposed to be gone. I thought, "Hey, I might get to see my daughter graduate high school. I might make it to our 25th anniversary. Heck, I get to see the Last Jedi!"

Then, I started to feel this presence surround me. I knew that my Higher Power, who I identify as God, wasn't through with me yet. I decided to get help. I wandered out of my office, through my classroom, and to our resident Health Occupations teacher's classroom to wait on her. She arrived at 7:15, and started triage. She called out to another teacher who had arrived to call 911, and then called the office manager to keep the kids out of the building.

I was then life-flighted to Grady Memorial Hospital, where I went into surgery to stop the bleeding. After surgery I was placed in the ICU, where I stayed for a couple of days before being transferred to their general medical ward. I received a few visitors there, one named Kathy, who said, "Just think of the testimony you'll

have." And I did. A lot. From there, I went to 13A.

13A is the psych ward at Grady, and that was where my mental treatment really started. Meds, meetings and more medical treatment, mostly for my out-of-control blood sugars, were the majority of my day. During off times, I thought more about what Kathy had said. I determined on that ward that when I got out, I was going to use my tragedy for something good.

My attorney had different ideas. I wasn't supposed to talk to anyone about my experiences due to the legal issues I was facing. I was also oblivious to the media coverage and public opinion about my case. I mean, I discharged a weapon on school grounds, that's a felony that could carry quite a hefty sentence. So, it'd be a while before I shared anything with anyone.

After Grady, I went to the Ridgeview Institute. There, I went through their 6-week program, met a lot of fine people, and got a lot of help. The main thing I learned in my time there was to live in the moment. Dwelling on the past is depression, dwelling on the future is anxiety, staying in the now is the healthiest way to be. I also got piece of enlightenment from my case manager, Liz. She told me about the apostle Paul, who after his transformation took 3 years to start preaching the gospel. I didn't feel so bad about waiting to get my story out there quickly anymore.

Since Ridgeview, I've spent a lot of time putting myself back together,

physically as well as maintaining my mental health. I've had sinus surgery so I can breathe again, I've had a partial made so I have less of a speech issue. I'm attending, and even leading, weekly Emotions Anonymous meetings. I'm a member of the Ridgeview Alumni association. Through the alumni, I volunteer at the Ridgeview access center helping patients there for an assessment to feel less anxiety and fear of the first steps to recovery.

One theme through all of my story has been that it is a miracle I'm still alive. I heard it from the doctors at Grady, from my dentist, from my psychiatrist and therapists, from my ENT, from friends and family, and from everyone at Ridgeview. And now, I want to share my story with anyone it may help. The main message I want people to take from my story is: Get help. I didn't, and so at Grady I had to breathe through my mouth. At Ridgeview, I could barely eat (which is a shame, because the food's good!), and I still have no sense of smell.

Getting help takes courage, but you can do it! That's something we try to impart on patients through the volunteer program, and it's very true. Admitting you aren't in control, whether it's a substance or your emotions like me, is the first step, and the hardest. But seek help.



Miracle

## THE ROAD TO NOWHERE

SUBMITTED BY: DOT T.

The road to nowhere is crowded  
with people from every land  
And it always seems to remind me of  
a murky pool of quicksand  
The farther down the road you go,  
the more you start to sink  
You lose your sense of direction; you  
may even forget to think  
The people going down this  
road have no reason to use their  
mind  
Cause the crowd on the road to no-  
where will surely keep them in line  
And if they try to turn around and go  
back the other way  
The crowd on the road to nowhere  
will try to convince them to stay  
But I've found a secret tunnel  
that will take you out of that crowd  
It leads to the "road to somewhere"

and there you can feel very proud  
Now, the road to somewhere is lonely  
cause there are very few people  
there  
But all of the people on this road are  
really going somewhere  
They may not know where they  
are going, but they are sure of what  
they'll find  
They know that the road to some-  
where will give them peace of mind  
They've found the secret of happi-  
ness, you can tell by the look on their  
face  
They got off the road to nowhere,  
now they are going someplace  
If you should find yourself on  
this road, the road that's going no-  
where  
Stop! Take a look around, you'll only

find losers there  
People with good intentions but never  
carrying them through  
People who make excuses for all the  
wrong things they do  
People who live an entire life-  
time full of fear and doubt  
People who will never know what hap-  
piness is all about  
So if you want to be a winner and you  
need to find peace of mind  
Get off the road to nowhere and leave  
that crowd behind



## A WALK UP THE MOUNTAINS

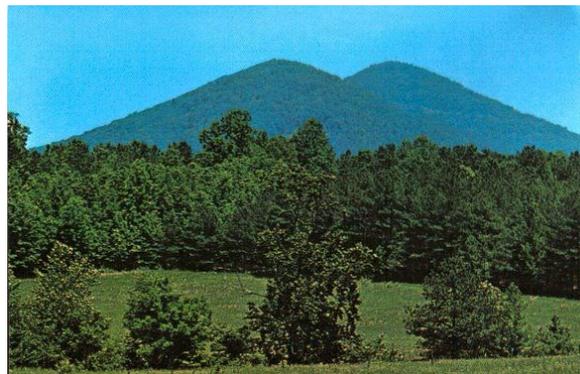
SUBMITTED BY: TOM S.

One morning in early recovery, my sponsor, Chuck, and I walked up Little Kennesaw and Big Kennesaw mountains for no particular reason; we just walked. It was memorable for a couple of reasons. First, the temperature change caused morning dew to cling to the hundreds of spider webs strung throughout the trees and bushes. The morning sun refracted through the droplets of water giving colors that no one knows the names of. Second, the path was rough going with rocks, holes, and tree branches, but Chuck was in the lead and pointed out the hazards ahead so I would not have to learn about them by "experiencing" them.

So, it is with the Twelve Steps of recovery. Sponsors are there to help us through the Steps. Because they have already been there, they know the path. If I had to take the Steps by myself, I would not have taken them in the order suggested, and I would have made many errors and learned

the hard way how to begin living my new life.

I have since gone through the Steps several times with people I have sponsored and am grateful for the experience I had with Chuck that day on the mountain.



## MY SEARCH FOR SANITY: LIVING THE MIRACLE

SUBMITTED BY: ELAINE B.

One of the first things that 12-step recovery groups mention is that we needed a Higher Power (or HP, for short) in order to maintain our sanity and sobriety.

While I definitely drank more than usual to alleviate painful feelings—and was well on my way to becoming an alcoholic if I hadn't entered Ridgeview—I didn't find the sobriety part of the program as difficult as the sanity part.

I have ongoing depression and anxiety, which means I may appear normal to the outside world, but I'm really walking around with squirrels on steroids in my brain. Those determined critters spawn self-doubt, worry, critical thoughts, poor choices and more. And they don't keep banker's hours, either. Those relentless self-judgments persist 24/7.

Ridgeview provided the help I needed; the aftercare programs and alumni organization continues to provide the connections I need to remain healthy.

But going back to Step 2...Came to believe a HP could restore us to sanity...

That's more challenging. Not because I grew up without belief. On the contrary, I grew up in a very religious setting. One that, many years later, I learned an official term for: *Cult*.

I'll never forget the day when I

watched a documentary about The People's Temple and the cult leader Jim Jones. The story—over 900 people moving to the jungles of Guyana and eventually committing suicide—is horrifying. However, what frightened me the most was the vast number of similarities between my religious upbringing and the way Jim Jones ran things.

Fast forward to me leaving Ridgeview and people telling me that I needed to get a Higher Power, that miracles can happen once I have a relationship with my HP.

I agreed with them. I wanted to do whatever it took, and I was open to miracles. But alas, there's often a gap between the desire for something and

I have ongoing depression and anxiety, which means I may appear normal to the outside world, but I'm really walking around with squirrels on steroids in my brain.

knowing how to make it happen. My history with religion was trapped in memories of manipulation, power, and abuse. I needed another way to live, or my hope for sanity would be lost.

Fortunately, I have an incredible therapist, someone who helped me navigate the murky road of early recovery. Even more, he helped me understand what "the God of

my understanding" can mean for me.

That, in itself, is a miracle. With my past, it's a miracle I can believe in anything.

Life still throws the occasional curveball, but now I have tools and a great support system. My relationship

with my HP gets stronger each day. My connection to others is strengthening, too. I continue to correspond with a few survivors of Jim Jones' cult; they remain receptive to my questions, and they understand where I am coming from.

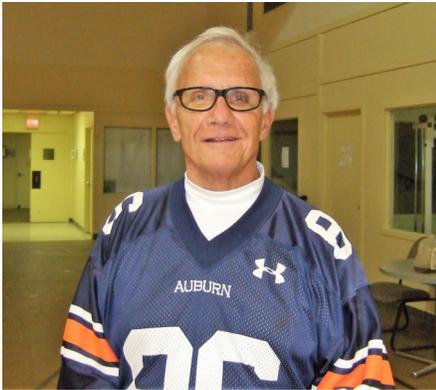
All these things are miracles in themselves, but as a collective whole? My HP has poured so many wonderful blessings into my life, and I am grateful beyond measure.

We all have our survival stories, but let us not forget that our survival is also a miracle. And as we share and open our hearts to others, that living miracle continues.



THURSDAYS WITH SAM

SUBMITTED BY: EDDIE C.



PART II—Sam’s Story

Catching up with Sam, seven years after the last interview took place, revealed a man settling in nicely to a new phase of his life. The comfort, ease, and gratitude he felt about his long-term sobriety in 2013 has not changed a bit. One of the things that has changed is his employment status. Sam has transitioned into retirement and left his role as Alumni/Continuing Care Coordinator at Ridgeview Institute. Sam acknowledges, “After thirty plus years, I knew I needed to put a date on my exit plan.”

Sam states that he picked September of 2018 as the right time because he was about to turn 80 years old. He said, “I knew what to do. I wanted to spend more time with my best friend...my wife Sharlot.” “I was ambivalent about leaving, but I knew it was the right thing, and I knew I was leaving it in good hands.” He makes it clear that he wasn’t thrilled about the passage of time, but knows he was blessed to have had a job he was passionate about and loved for 33 years. “Sharlot had already

retired some years earlier, and she had patiently waited for when I could be here with her full-time.” Sam strongly emphasizes the sacrifices Sharlot made over the years as he spent a majority of his time devoted to helping others and building relationships with those struggling with addiction and other issues.

His career farewell really hit home for him during the big retirement party the Alumni and Ridgeview staff gave him with 150 people in attendance. Sam’s voice cracks as he shares, “that was an emotional night...to see all those people and hear all those kind words.” Little does Sam seem to realize that we could have filled up Mercedes Benz stadium if we had had more time to get in touch with those he has impacted over the years. Photos, stories, tears, laughter, and love filled the night. A small tribute to such a big man.

Sam says he was surprised how quickly he acclimated to his new life of leisure. “It was the first time in my life I didn’t have to get up and go to work.” But he states that “Sharlot and I get up early every morning and enjoy the day.” He sheepishly states, “Sharlot does mostly everything, and I take care of the pool.” Sam loves being “home” and recognizes that although both of them have experienced living in

larger houses in the past, they wouldn’t trade their lovely abode for anything. He half-jokingly concedes that Sally, their prized Golden Retriever, runs the place.

He passed the phone to Sharlot, and she joyfully spoke about how well Sam was doing. “His health is great, and he is not on any medications!” She acknowledges that she was resigned to be in the background all the years he was devoted to his job. She says, “I don’t regret a minute of it because I knew it made him happy.” They both have been challenged by the restrictions of the Covid-19 crisis, and they look forward to going back to restaurants again and hopefully a vacation to the beach at some point soon.

There is now a special spot in the Serenity Garden at Ridgeview dedicated to Sam. At the ribbon-cutting ceremony for “Sam’s Corner,” you could hear the humility in his voice as he acknowledged his sincere appreciation for the Ridgeview Alumni, ending with “I love y’all.”

On behalf of the Alumni and our families, the feeling’s mutual, Sam. As the phone call concludes, Sam wraps up the conversation with a parting gift to those who wonder how he’s doing. “I was looking for something my whole life. Now I’m content. I never really felt this way.” Spoken like a man who is aware of his legacy and truly at peace. Job well done.

... September of 2018 as the right time because he was about to turn 80 years old. He said, “I knew what to do. I wanted to spend more time with my best friend...my wife Sharlot.”

## STEP THREE

SUBMITTED BY: VICTOR E.

When I first worked Step Three, I did so poorly. This was not done on purpose. In my mind, I was working to the best of my ability. However, because of my academic background, I tend to intellectualize and overcomplicate things.

My first major mistake was my becoming obsessed with the part of the Step that states “as we understood Him.” This is either underlined or written in italics, so I assumed it was the of the utmost importance. One of my degrees is in philosophy, so naturally I took it upon myself to rigorously attempt to comprehensively understand my Higher Power including attributes, my relationship with this Higher Power, characteristics of how it’s manifested, and the very nature of its existence. Upon telling my sponsor that I was seeking to understand my Higher Power, he simply replied: “Good luck; let me know how that works for you.”

Needless to say, I did not come to understand my Higher Power. By its very definition, it is something greater than myself, so why on earth would I think I can understand it? This scholarly quest for knowledge ultimately took me further away from my Higher Power. While I was busy grinding out explanations and approaching spirituality like a scholar, I was missing out on valuable experiences. I was not open to spiritual experiences and the world outside myself, because I was busy overthinking.

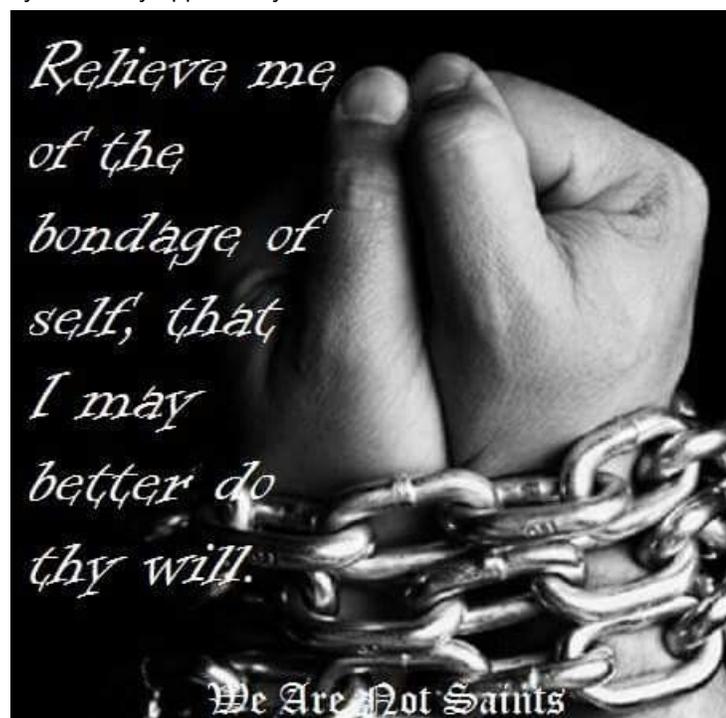
The second mistake I made was

taking my will back. I became caught up in (again intellectualizing) the balance between surrender and responsibility. I had given up my life by doing all the recovery-related endeavors I was supposed to, but surrendering my will was a vague idea. What is my will? Don’t I need to use that? Taking my will back started off with simple thoughts like “God didn’t put my pants on, I did” or “I got this.” Slowly but surely, I began to take my will and my life back, thinking that I could take control of my recovery and my life. I was wrong.

Today, I search for spiritual experiences wherever, whenever, and however they may come. I stay spiritually accessible through prayer, meditation, fellowship, and service work. My relationship with my Higher Power remains open and lively because I seek out any and every opportunity to connect with

something outside of myself. It’s easy for me to see how life is beautiful, exciting, and unique – spiritual experiences are all around me. Nature, relationships with others, beauty, love, altruism, and the arts all provide a spiritual connection with my Higher Power(s).

Today, I recognize that although I have surrendered my will and my life to a power greater than myself, I also have the responsibility to do the next right thing. I also have a responsibility to take care of myself and my needs. I can’t change the past. I can’t control the future. But I can choose to live in the present moment and act responsibly. I have *faith* that if my actions are well-intentioned and responsible, my Higher Power will take care of the rest. I trust that things will work out in the end. Life will be okay.



# THE SERENITY GARDEN

SUBMITTED BY: SEAN C.

This is a little love story involving an ugly plot of land and a brand new Ridgeview alumnus with only 20 days of sobriety. We grew up together, both starting out as very unbecoming and transforming into two beautiful creations. Twenty years later, we continue to prosper and grow. There are many others whose lives have paralleled the enrichment and cultivation witnessed alongside the Serenity Garden. However, as is often said, I will just talk about my experience. I'll come back to my story a little later.

The idea of a garden blossomed from a tiny mustard seed, so to speak. Sometime in the summer or fall of 1998, two of our alumni, Tom S. and Gerard O., were walking around campus looking for a place to meditate and work on the Steps. Since they couldn't find anywhere to sit that particular day, they decided to bring up the idea to the Steering Committee to see if there would be any interest in designating a nice, quiet place where people could just sit and relax. In the following weeks, a contest was initiated to see who could come up with the best idea for a recreational area somewhere on the property.

In the fall of 1998, all the entries were submitted, and one of the alumni committee members, John T,

emerged the winner. John's concept included circular paths, arbors, a trellis or two, a swing, and benches. He also drew up sketches, schematics and blueprints. Because John submitted the best idea, he was elected as head of the Special Projects committee, specifically in charge of the proposed garden project.



From the onset, it was agreed upon by the Ridgeview Alumni Steering Committee that the new enterprise that we were embarking upon would be a gift to the Institute in gratitude for our sobriety and the new lease on life

we had been given. We did not want any money, only a place on the property where we could build. Since the creation of the Serenity Garden was only a few years after the 1996 Summer Olympics, the idea of selling bricks to help fund our endeavor was the first step we undertook to make money. We still sell bricks today (hint, hint). Later on, as our group became more proficient at gardening, we sold our services to folks who were willing to give a donation in exchange for a



little "yard work."

A lot of preparation and preliminary work began as we rolled into 1999 to make sure that this project would be done correctly and would be something that the alumni could be proud of. One of the first questions was where was the plot of land on which we would build? At the time, Jack G. was Ridgeview's CEO. John T.'s first blueprint had the garden being built near Jack's office so that the administrative staff could look out and see the gift that was given to the institute. Jack denied our first choice of a location. He thought it would be too close to the administration building.

The second choice was where the garden is today. However, it wasn't very appealing. The area had so much brush, thorns, litter, debris, etc., that it was impossible to see the boulders and stones that were covered up.

No one could see what was underneath all the rubble. Since our first choice was denied, John had to redraw the plans, blueprints and schematics. He had to rescale everything. In order to do this, he actually crawled underneath all the refuse and discovered the aforementioned boulders, stones and open areas for paths

ways. Amidst all the muck, there was a lot of potential.

## THE SERENITY GARDEN (CONT.)

SUBMITTED BY: SEAN C.

Brick sales were going well, and the excitement was building. The area in the parking lot between the Day Hospital and the Access Center was approved. It was on a Saturday morning in September of 1999 that we broke ground and began clearing out the junk pile. There were empty bottles, used drug paraphernalia, piles of trash along with plywood, plaster and old building materials that workers had dumped there over the years. There were too many Burger King bags as well as empty cups from the nearby QuikTrip to count.



Several alumni who owned pickup trucks (Beric Y. had a 1960 Ford that he used) came by and hauled the junk to the dump.

As a new alumnus with very awkward social skills, this was a good way to “get out of my shell” and learn to interact with people. Sam A., the aftercare coordinator, had me line up all the empty bottles along the parking lot so we could count them. We counted a total of 41. Of course, we had only cleaned out a small section. Sam identified one of the bottles as containing homemade hooch!

I learned a lot in those early days. Mostly I remember the laugh-

ter. The laughter is still there every time we have a “work party.” We had loads of fun building the Serenity Garden. Danny S. taught me that when someone walks by and you’re just leaning on a rake, wipe your forehead so it looks like you’ve been doing something. Since I’m from the

North, Perry M. pointed out to me that a shovel can also be used for other things besides snow. Who knew?

Many of the alumni that were there on day one still participate in the Alumni Association today. Mary Jean M. was there to mend our bruises,

scrapes and cuts when she wasn’t clearing, raking or planting. Our very own Eddie C. had the most important job: he brought the coffee and donuts. Stan D. and Bill M. helped build the trellises. Byrd III

hung the birdhouses (pun intended) and almost killed himself putting up the chimes. Paul L. was always there with his smiling face helping out in whatever capacity was needed.

After a couple of months, work-

ing every Saturday and a lot of Sundays, the garden area started to take shape. We built three trellises with benches, installed a cheap swing (which didn’t last very long), planted flowers and made pathways. John T. ordered blue New Hampshire crushed stone to cover the footpaths. The bricks arrived and were installed at the entranceway. We even had a stone that we found engraved with the Serenity Prayer.

Before the sprinkler system was installed, the garden had to be watered by hand. There was a single hose hooked up to a water main in the middle of the garden, which volunteers used to manually water the garden several times a day. There was a “Water Schedule” that the alumni signed up for. One morning, several employees were coming to work and noticed that the bottom of South Cobb Drive was flooding with rivers of water running down the driveway. Apparently, John T. fell asleep during his tour of duty.

Because I threw John under the bus with that story, I’ll tell on myself.



One Saturday while we were working and planting, John handed me a chainsaw and told me to cut down a group of trees but to leave the dogwoods where they were. Hey, I’m

from Boston. I don’t know what a dogwood tree is. Well, after being in the

## THE SERENITY GARDEN (CONT.)

woods for about 15 minutes or so, I had cut down two dogwoods before I asked for help! Only a few people know this (until now), but because of my lack of tree identification, the entrance to the garden was originally intended to be about nine feet to the right.

In Phase II the following year, the garden expanded to include the water feature. The four chairs at the top of the waterfall came after that. In Phase III, the deck in front of the parking lot was built along with another area to install bricks. As you walk from the Access Center to the Day Hospital, we expanded a "12 Steps" area at the top of the stairs to the right. That space was also an unmanageable mess of thorns, brush and debris.



Over the years, we have had dedications presented. Most recently, the Alumni Association honored Sam A. not only for his devotion to Ridgeview Institute but mostly for his love of all the patients who have come through this facility. It was because of Sam's commitment to continued aftercare that the Ridgeview Alumni Association was created and continues today.

Another steadfast alumna, Cindy H. had a dedication to honor her memory. If you walk by the deck,

you'll notice a broken spade which is the shovel that Cindy broke while working in the garden one Saturday morning.

The gift of the Serenity Garden to Ridgeview Institute was a token of gratitude and love. It was accomplished with a lot of sweat, planning, determination as well as laughter. On Sunday, May 21, 2000, just before the start of the Spring Fling festivities, a dedication ceremony was held and a plaque presented to Mr. Robert Fink, the founder of Ridgeview Institute. Because of its beauty, the garden is featured in a lot of brochures and literature published by Ridgeview.

After a few years, another alumnus, Jeff W., took over from John T. Jeff was responsible for a lot of the expansion as well as different varieties of flowers and plants. Today, we are blessed to have Mark A. in charge with new innovations that have been implemented during his tenure. The Christmas decorations

this past year were Mark's design and were widely complimented.



The Serenity Garden continues to be a work of love. For this alcoholic, I look at the Serenity Garden and think about all the people that have had a hand in it. Each person

makes me smile inside. I've pondered about how special this plot of land is in my life. In the beginning, it was a place to come to so that I could pass the idle hours away while I was trying to get sober. It gave me something to do. Today, it is a place I come to visit, where I can't help but feel grateful. I feel gratitude to Ridgeview Institute and the staff, to my sobriety and to the many friends I've met along my road to happy destiny.

The Serenity Garden continues to be a huge part of my life as it is with many others. There is still a need to cultivate and plant new flowers. We continue to have work parties. As we've said since its inception, "Come join us, and let's go play in the dirt."



## AN ADDICT FELL IN A HOLE (AND COULDN'T GET OUT)

A businessman went by and the addict called out for help. The businessman threw him some money and told him to buy himself a ladder. But the addict could not buy a ladder in this hole he was in.

A doctor walked by. The addict said, "Help! I can't get out!" The doctor gave him some drugs and said, "Take this. It will relieve the pain." The addict said thanks, but when the pills ran out, he was still in the hole. A well-known psychiatrist rode by and heard the addict's cries for help. He stopped and asked, "How did you get there? Were you born there? Did your parents put you there? Tell me

about yourself, it will alleviate your sense of loneliness." So the addict talked with him for an hour, then the psychiatrist had to leave, but he said he'd be back next week. The addict thanked him, but he was still in the hole. A priest came by. The addict called for help. The priest gave him a Bible and said, "I'll say a prayer for you." He got down on his knees and prayed for the addict, then he left. The addict was very grateful, he read the

Bible, but he was still stuck in the hole.

A recovering addict happened to be passing by. The addict cried out, "Hey,



help me. I'm stuck in this hole!" Right away the recovering addict jumped down in the hole with him. The addict said, "What are you doing? Now we're both stuck here!!" But the recovering addict said, "Calm down. It's okay. I've been here before. I know how to get out."

## STEPS 2, 3 & 11... REVISTED

SUBMITTED BY: ELAINE B.

As I mentioned in another article I wrote for *The View*, I grew up in a cult-like church filled with manipulation, power, and abuse. Because of this, I figured I could easily skip over Steps 2 and 3, because despite the pain of the past, I'd grown accustomed to turning my life over. Since I was an infant, I was told what, whom, and how I should worship – and anyone who didn't step in line would meet with a horrible life and early death.

Step 1, knowing my life was unmanageable, came easy. I entered Ridgeview at the low point. When I finished treatment and began my recovery, I tried to skip over Steps 2 and 3, but my Higher Power wasn't going to let me fast forward.

What I love about Step 3, and Step 11, is the freedom to choose: "...God as we understood Him." As we understood Him. That phrase took me aback. I'd never had a choice before, and now I did. Grant-

ed, this realization made for some tough spiritual work to practice. I learned to let go of the traumatic memories and figure out, based on my faith and experience, what my Higher Power looked like and how that force would work in my life.

As my therapist loves to remind me, the 12 Steps are not a "one and done" item. There will be times in our lives when we will need to revisit them, when our Higher Power wants us to learn something new about the Steps that we didn't grasp the first time, or second or third time. . . .

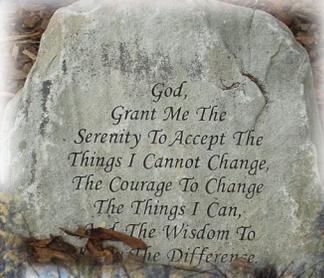
Enter the Coronavirus, how we are suddenly restricted to online recovery meetings and sheltering in place. When the pandemic began, my anxiety was off the charts. Somehow, in the frenzied situation, I completely forgot about Step 3. I didn't want to give up control anymore. I wanted control, and I needed to take it back no matter what.

Anyone in recovery will tell you that my attitude wasn't the best! Nevertheless, my Higher Power led me back to Step 3, combined with Step 11. It became easier to live day by day again, even in the pandemic chaos.

As I sat out on the patio one day, I could hear the birds singing in the trees overhead. The wind blew the rustling leaves, and my sage plant that I'd neglected all winter (and I could've sworn was going to die) was now bursting with life. The plants, the birds, they don't know there's a pandemic. They continue to live their lives, and things work out okay.

Somehow, amidst this pandemic, seeing those simple things and remembering the Steps has helped bring me a peace that things will be all right. I don't have control over the pandemic or when all this will end, but I do have a newfound peace.

SAM'S SERENITY GARDEN DEDICATION



# THINGS I REMEMBER ABOUT THE SERENITY GARDEN

SUBMITTED BY: DONNA M.

Members of our Alumni Steering committee asked Mr. Fink if they could make a garden at Ridgeview as part of their service and thanks. John T. was a landscape specialist and was involved in the design. I remember Tom S. was also a big part of it. The site between the main building and the day hospital was chosen, and the alumni went to work. As employees started to notice it taking shape, it was clear it was not just any garden! People began to donate various items – a bench, a swing, a birdhouse, chimes to add to the beauty that was developing in front of us. The entire garden was all donation and love – love, time, hard physical work and dedication by our alumni. At that time, the Olympics were fresh in our minds, and the alumni also had a brick campaign so as to plant memories, memorials, thanks, etc. The bricks created the entrance.

Spring Fling 2000 was the day

we were going to dedicate the garden with a ribbon cutting. The Mayor of Smyrna was invited, along with many others, as well as alumni, families and staff. The parking lot was full. It was cloudy. Sam A. was stressing about the weather (something he did all the time for his big picnic event). John T. got up and shared a story/poem with the group in front of him . . . a story of salvation from his disease; he spoke of people coming to Ridgeview in the depths of despair, their life at its very bottom, and yet



they found hope and strength and eventually recovery, fellowship, support and a new life. Just like the plants in the garden, seeds were planted in everyone's life to grow. The poem was beautiful. Everyone around was moved to tears. While John spoke, the sun came out in all its glory. When he finished the poem, the sunshine turned to an overcast day, but it did not rain until long after the Spring Fling was over. The spirit in the garden is felt; God is in that gar-

den, and every time I enter that garden, I also feel it to this day.

Season after season, year after year, the alumni keep adding and enhancing the garden. They not only keep the plants growing and thriving, they prune and care for it with love. At holiday time, they put up lights. They add more bricks. They added the koi pond, the sitting area



above, the gazebo, the fountain; it keeps growing. Every time I walk through the garden, I read the bricks. Twenty years, and somehow, I always find one I missed. I remember some of the names of staff whom patients thanked. I remember the names of some

who lost their lives to the disease of addiction or mental illness. I read about gratitude, celebration, slogans and memorials. I personally have put in bricks in memory of each of my parents, thankfulness for each of my children, and in memory for many nurses over the years who have lost their lives, yet touched mine.



*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 half-way 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 \$111,000 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**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**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, includes spaces) Cost \$30.00

(Line 1) \_\_\_\_\_

(Line 2) \_\_\_\_\_

\* 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

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

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We thank you for taking the time to update us.

Love & Service,  
Communications Committee

