

VOLUMN XXV

THE VIEW

NEWSLETTER OF THE RIDGEVIEW ALUMNI ASSOCIATION STEERING COMMITTEE

RECOVERY TRAVELS

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THE ORIGIN OF ELLIE

THE
RIDGEVIEW
ALUMNI
ASSOCIATION
3995 SOUTH
COBB DRIVE
SMYRNA GA
30080

Ellie represents the idea that "it is easier to teach an elephant to dance than it is to teach an addict not to use."



ANNOUNCEMENTS

THE SPIRITUAL HOUR

Come join fellow Alumnus Warren Taylor as he hosts the weekly **Spiritual Hour** each Sunday between 10–11 am in the Day Hospital Auditorium. During this time, Warren shares a topic which relates and strengthens the spiritual aspect of Recovery. The Hour begins with singing and music, where the music is often times provided by patients currently being treated on the RVI campus, and those patients who have been successfully discharged. Warren has been an active Alumnus since completing treatment in 2002. In addition, he holds the Recovery certification, *Certified Addiction Counselor 1 (CAC1)*, is a licensed Minister, and a member of the *Academy of Parish Clergy (APC)*.

This issue, as well as 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 notified by e-mail 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 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 Warren T., warrenbtaylor@bellsouth.net, or Marcus W., invinoveritas34@yahoo.com using "Newsletter" in the subject line.

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FROM CATEPILLER TO BUTTERFLY

SUBMITTED BY: MICHELLE L.

Recovery is a special thing to me. I have had my ups and downs, but I believe that there is always a rainbow and sunshine after the storm, that also comes with it a sense of serenity and peacefulness.

My life is like a blooming butterfly,
Now every day, makes me want to live, not die.
I used to ask myself, why should I even try?
I found the answer by praying to up high.
The greatest thing recovery brought me is my child,
It helped me to get away from being wild.
Motherhood has transformed my attitude from crazy to mild.
My problems no longer become life wrenching compiled.
My journey to recovery has been one of struggle but strength,
Sobriety has brought me many gifts that are endless in length.
Every day I love to wake up being sober,

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FEAR OF SHARING OUR EXPERIENCE

SUBMITTED BY: TOM S.

Fear of writing an article is what keeps most of us from writing an article.

We all have so much to share from our own experience no matter how long we have been trying to change ourselves for the better. Sometimes we can share how NOT to do something by telling how we took control back and things did not work out quite the way we wanted.

I have one of those. A young man that worked for me got arrested riding in a car with an unlicensed driver because he had written some bad checks. At 2:00am his girlfriend called me crying, asking me to do something. I polished the armor and road to the police station and bailed him out within an hour, figuring that he could pay me back the bail money each payday. He quit the following week. I'm out a lot of money. My sponsor suggested that in the future I call him BEFORE I make decisions like that. I love the program and know that all of the suggestions therein are only to help me become a better person; that simple.

NO PLACE LIKE HOME (GROUP)

SUBMITTED BY: TERRI L'H.

The thought of going on vacation while in early (or late) recovery can sometimes be a little scary. I had driven to Florida for a few long weekends and gone to the mountains here and there, but I hadn't gotten on an airplane and flown far away from home during recovery. Where would I go while I was away if I was having a bad day and needed to talk about my problems? Who would listen AND understand? Who would care?

If you are anything like me, then you know how important your home group can be. Everyone knows your name and they worry about you when they haven't seen you in a while. They are your family and I was about to get on a plane and leave my family! So I knew I had to have a game plan in place before I left for vacation. I learned early on through my aftercare group of the importance of researching meetings and getting phone numbers before venturing out to new places and I took this task very

seriously. I went out on the internet and found a meeting for every day I was to be in Provincetown and I had my list of numbers ready on my cell phone. Of course, my sponsor is always on speed dial. Still, I felt nervous. I would have to figure out how to get there and I knew I wouldn't know the people at these meetings and they wouldn't know me.



When I arrived in Provincetown, I was pleasantly surprised. I actually wound up walking past the cutest recovery store named Recovering Hearts on my way to the bed and breakfast I reserved. I frequented this store daily. Also, I hadn't realized that my favorite meeting spot turned out to only be a quick 5 minute bike ride away from where I was staying. I truly enjoyed the crisp cool air as I rode my bike over to the local church for the 7:00 am AA meeting. The people at this meeting were so different than what I was used to and I was absolutely enthralled. There were the usual great stories of hope and solution but there was one big difference. This town was full of

transient people who come to Provincetown to work each year and then leave to live other places during the winter. This town practically shuts down once the first snow falls and this wonderful AA group drops from a huge group of recovering alcoholics and addicts down to about five or six people who call Provincetown home year-round. I happened to be visiting during the time when a lot of the transients were getting ready to leave for the winter. There was a sadness expressed but the gratitude within this very special group was remarkable.

I felt so very blessed to have been a part of this wonderful goodbye between these two sections of the same home group. Most of the transients promised to be back the following year, phone numbers were being transferred and hugs were given. There were even a few tears but the feeling of gratitude showered us all. I now have even more respect for my respective home group knowing that I won't have to say goodbye to my friends each year. Although I truly enjoyed my stay I was also glad to come home. Traveling is great but there is truly no place like home (group).

WOMEN'S SERVICES ALUMNAE ASSOCIATION
CANDLELIGHT VIGIL & FUNDRAISER

SUBMITTED BY: ALEX Y.

On Thursday, February 23, Ridgeview's Women's Services Alumnae Association held its eighth annual candlelight vigil, recognizing National Eating Disorder Awareness Week. While the candlelight vigil has been a staple of the WSAA's yearly projects, this year we sponsored our very first silent art auction with proceeds going toward art supplies for the Women's Unit and future WSAA events. One of our alumnae volunteered to organize the silent art auction for her school's senior project, and the success and participation of the night exceeded all expectations. We rose over \$800 in donations and plan to keep the creative spirit alive in vigils to come.

The evening opened with a time for guests to peruse donated artwork, place bids, and enjoy refreshments donated by the Atlanta Bread Company. Not only did the auction consist of pieces donated from local artists around the community, much of the work on display was created by previous and current pa-

tients from RV's Women's Unit. The artwork ranged from paintings to collages to photographs, and bidders simply signed their name with the price of their bid on sheets underneath the art of their choice. After a majority of the bidding, we all settled down in the auditorium of the Day

For those of us who have struggled and continue to struggle with eating disorders, we understand shame,

Hospital to start the ceremony. The vigil was kicked off with a song performed by Laurie Albert-Walker before diving into the stories of five very different individuals and their unique experiences with eating disorders. Among the speakers, we heard stories of strength and hope from alumnae who have struggled with eating disorders and are now living a life in recovery, and we were fortunate to hear stories from a mother and father's perspective as well. The night concluded with the actual candle-lighting ceremony while Laurie Albert-Walker led us in the closing song.

Of course, in addition to fundraising, a main goal of the candlelight vigil was to shed light on eating disorders by spreading awareness and education,

but the vigil provided much more. For those of us who have struggled and continue to struggle with eating disorders, we understand shame, and therefore, we understand secrets. Both play a huge role in our disorders as they thrive off one another—just like any other addiction. With this in mind, it is safe to conclude that it is rare for those of us actively struggling to step out of our bedrooms, bathrooms, or wherever we've been hiding and publicly gather with people that share our pain. I cannot begin to express how I felt as a woman in early recovery when I turned around during the candlelighting ceremony and saw as many flickering candles—glimmers of hope—as I did. I felt empowered, supported, and understood—three very foreign feelings when I am sick in my disorder. I can only imagine what the experience was like for someone silently suffering in that auditorium, someone who has yet to personally feel the hope that is in recovery, to be completely surrounded with love and fellowship. I believe such a turn-out speaks volumes over any amount of money raised, making the evening that much more successful, and it could not have been accomplished without all of the generous contributions and joint effort from our alumnae, the RV staff, and the community.

JOURNEY TO SERENITY

SUBMITTED BY: DON W.

I am in awe when I consider the blessings God has given me during my brief journey in sobriety. And most amazing of all is the only thing I had to do was quit fighting, disarm and surrender.

For many years I believed the only way to achieve success was to dig, fight or scratch for it. I would attempt to remove any obstacles by whatever means necessary, including lying, cheat-

ing and stealing. I was totally focused on material successes. I struggled for an education. I worked hard for financial success. I would go to any length to achieve my goals. In the end, all these things that had seemed so important to me became meaningless, because alcohol had robbed me of my soul.

During most of my career, I dreamed of the time I could retire and

enjoy the autumn years of life, having the time and financial resources to travel, golf, and fish. In less than two years after retirement however; I no longer had the energy nor the interest in fulfilling my dream. By then, my disease had progressed to a point where it consumed my life and left no room for fulfilling my vision.

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RECOVERY TRAVELS “THROUGH TIME”

SUBMITTED BY: EDDIE C.

In this amazing age of evolving technology, how awesome is the fact that recovery from alcohol and drugs has stood the test of time. We live in an “I” world of iPhones, iPods, and iPads. However, it’s the “we” part of twelve step recovery that impresses me the most. I pray that NEVER changes.

Whether it’s meetings, sponsorship, twelve step calls, or just two addicts talking, the connection that’s personal and human has stood the test of time!

Sure you can catch a meeting online or read the Big Book on your phone, but the simple solution Bill

W. and Dr. Bob discovered all those years ago is the fact that face to face, desper-

ate drunk to desperate drunk, the person who is open minded and willing can be relieved of their deadly malady. I can’t text you a hug and that knowing smile that lets you know I’ve been there. I can’t

If Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob were to magically appear in today’s world there would be countless points of amazement and bewilderment for them to witness.

tweet you the compassion and empathy my eyes can show you.

Watching a newcomer enter the rooms shaking and distraught, only to keep coming back because they sensed a glimmer of hope.....well, there’s no “app” for that!

I continue to evolve on this journey of progress (not perfection), and it is witnessing the progress of

others that keeps me forever thankful the steps and the basic program outlined

in the Big Book has not been altered through the decades. Instead it has flourished and expanded to the point where there are dozens upon dozens of addictions using the twelve step format.

If Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob were to magically appear in today’s world there would be countless points of amazement and bewilderment for them to witness. In this strange new world of the future there would be one place and environment that would seem very familiar and comfortable.....an AA meeting! They surely would wonder where all the cigarette smoke was, but they would love to hear that the language of the heart was still spoken and the solution found in the twelve steps was alive and well.

It may be an “I” world, but I truly thank God it’s still a “WE” program.

JOURNEY CON’T.

I came to realize that my entire life, a life I had considered normal, had been total chaos with one crisis after the other. I envied those people such as my wife, who could put their trust in a higher power and who had high values and strong moral convictions. They seemed to have the serenity and calmness during times of stress and adversity that I could only wish for. To be able to completely trust that He will provide for us, as long as we do His will, was foreign to me. I felt I was hopelessly blocked from the spirit.

It was only when I could no longer take the pain that I became willing to give it up and circumvent my pride and ego enough to ask for help. The moment I did that, a miracle happened.

I will never forget the words of a counselor who said to me, “You never have to drink again if you don’t want too.” That was my first ray of hope.

What has happened since that day has been unbelievable. I was immediately blessed with a great sponsor, who wasted no time getting me into the steps and into service work. My first year was pretty foggy in my mind, but I was given a good enough foundation to begin building upon. Each year of my journey becomes richer. I have acquired so many great friends through RVAA and the many meeting rooms I have visited. My life has been transformed into an honorable, productive and respectable state of being. I learned that sobriety



encompasses more than abstinence. It includes becoming a more mature, principled spiritual being as well. This is accomplished by behavioral changes as the result of living the twelve steps.

Although there have been many trials and tribulations along my journey, I have been blessed with the courage, serenity and peace to meet them head on. One of the greatest lessons you have taught me is that changes in the thought process follow actions rather than the reverse of that. I will be forever grateful to all who have helped pave the way to a relationship with my higher power, and especially to Ridgeview and all my RVAA friends. I look forward to continuing to trudge with my sober friends down the road of happy destiny.

“BACK TO THE FUTURE” WITH THE RIDGEVIEW ALUMNI

SUBMITTED BY: TERRI L'H.

When you think of the Ridgeview Alumni Association, you think of Sam Anders. So I asked Sam how it all began. He told me that what we now know as the alumni had its small beginnings about 25 years ago when several past patients came to him and told him that they wanted to find a way to give back. So this small group decided to bring a one hour step study into what were then just two inpatient cottages, once per week on Sundays. As time went by, more people were attracted to this tiny little group and they started to hold events like the New Year's Eve dance. Then someone came up with the idea of an endowment fund and it slowly evolved from there. He said the expectations of the group back then were very simple. They wanted to give patients that had gone through treatment some ownership and something to do. And they were motivated by the 12 steps to help other alcoholics.

Then I got to thinking that it would be great if I could find one of those first founding members of that small illustrious group. I wasn't able to do that, but I got pretty close when I interviewed Tom S. He told me that the alumni were already in effect when he came to treatment in February of 1990. There were just 6 or 7 active members at that time. "The main thing they were doing was meeting before Sam's aftercare and they had some t-shirts that they had made up with a logo on them to try and sell to try and make money." So this was the first money making project that had ever been done. Tom reported that they had cases of t-shirts. "They had *very* *alcoholically* purchased tons of t-shirts and were

wondering what to do with them." Eventually they were tie-dyed and sold.

Tom wanted to join the small group but didn't know what it took. He told me that one of the members came to him as he was waiting for his Aftercare meeting and asked what he was doing. They soon invited him in. This all happened around April or May of 1990. Although Tom told me that none of those original 6 or 7 members were still with our group today, several of them are still active within AA. "I'm the last of the old-timers. It was very small but it was a lot of fun." Tom remembers the purpose of the group back then being "able to give back and collectively show how you could still have fun sober."

Being a part of this wonderful group myself, I have often thought about how I could possibly explain what the Ridgeview Alumni is to those outside of our circle, both those groups inside and outside of Ridgeview Institute. Just what would be important for others to know about our group? I decided to ask this question to others as well.

When I posed these questions to Ridgeview Institute's founder, Mr. Robert Fink, he felt that people should know how valuable the alumni association is to Ridgeview and its subsequent success. He feels Ridgeview gets a lot of credit for the success but yet a lot of that success pertains to the alumni. "For people going through treatment, if they don't learn about the support from the alumni, they're not going to make it. It's only when they get involved with the alumni that they see what the support can do for them. I think that's why they are so successful."

"I'm the last of the old-timers. It was very small but it was a lot of fun."

When Paul Hackman, CEO of Ridgeview Institute was asked, he called the alumni the heart and blood of Ridgeview. He feels that Ridgeview provides a place and a structure through which an individual can get into recovery whether it is for addiction or psychiatric illness. "If our job is to provide a place in which they are able to, if they choose to, learn how to manage their disease and how to move into a very deep lasting and a very strong recovery in either illness. The alumni are a kind of manifestation of that."

It appears that the alumni are the example of recovery that others see outside of Ridgeview. We see this with addiction patients because that is where it began but we are also starting to see it with psychiatric patients as well. As I spoke with Paul he began to explain what others see even in me. He said, "I knew you before recovery, I'm not judging here, I know you after recovery and just looking at you, your light sparkles! Not that it didn't before but there's a new clarity to it. That's what recovery does to people!"

Director of Nursing, Kathleen Wenning felt others should know that the alumni are just a huge family. She feels it's just another aspect of Ridgeview that people don't know about. "They're unseen, doing stuff!" The alumni as a support group does help those in recovery; but Kathleen told me many stories of how this group helps those outside of recovery as well. She felt it was important for people to know that alumni members assisted her personally the past couple of years after her husband passed away. We talked about her experiences attending Spring Fling and Thanksgiving Gratitude Dinner. She also expressed her appreciation for Sam and being invited to attend alumni functions as

“BACK TO THE FUTURE” WITH THE RIDGEVIEW ALUMNI (CON’T)

a staff member. “Sam’s presence on the unit is awesome. He is a very kind and gentle person and I am blessed that I do get to go to a lot of the alumni functions. They’ve kind of invited me in and I really like that acceptance. There is no wall between anyone. You’ve got everything from 1950’s hippie types all the way through CEOs. They’re just great people! They’re just so warm and welcoming wherever you go.”

Tom S. wanted others to know that he feels the alumni is an even tighter fellowship than AA has ever produced. “It’s a larger group that can trust each other to do things together. It’s the fellowship that is the key thing. And it’s a bit of pride being a part of such a group. Hundreds and hundreds of people have come and gone and it continues to grow. The multitude that is there now is nice to see.” Tom also remembers a time when Sam was struggling a bit when the economy crashed and people were being laid off from Ridgeview. Sam wasn’t sure if he would be able to stay in his current position and when he discussed his worries with Tom, he replied, “don’t you remember telling me that if I’m supposed to have this job, there is no human power to keep me from it and if I’m not supposed to have this job there is no way I can keep it?” Sam responded with “you are right and thank you.” But this is what we do for each other!

Sam wanted those outside and inside Ridgeview to know that the alumni is “the most unselfish, selfless group of people that I’ve ever known in my life and the beauty of

Ridgeview to a large part are these people that so unselfishly give their time and resources to Ridgeview. Every time they do something from sponsor a patient to pull a weed out of the garden, its gratitude. It’s an act and to me gratitude is an action taken and that’s what these people

are so good at.” He also believes that we are the biggest referral source Ridgeview has. Sam’s passion has always been working with the patients, so this means an awful lot!

I also spent some time talking to others regarding the contributions the alumni make to Ridgeview Institute. Members of the alumni know some of what we contribute but there are also things

that we do that can’t necessarily be seen, or can they?

Mr. Fink said some of the contributions were hard to pin down. He said we can see the work done in the Serenity Garden and the fountain which shows an expression of appreciation but there is also the volunteer work and members sitting in the lobby greeting people. He spoke of the programs that are put on by the alumni in different cottages, but what sometimes can’t be seen, is the support that is provided by the alumni. “One of the main reasons for the success of our patients is the alumni.”

One of our main contributions is what Paul Hackman refers to as “recovery in action or spirituality in action.” When talking about the

physical things we can see like the Serenity Garden, the deck, and the Fountain, Paul thought it was important to remember that they could have had a construction crew build these things and it still would have looked nice but that it wouldn’t have had the same feel. “When you sit in it, it kind of has that spiritual resonance to it. That’s recovery! And it’s a result of people’s service that got those things to happen, however it did. People either donated money or time or somebody gave something or somebody had an idea. But the fact is it comes out of recovery into reality and you see it happening there. It’s the same thing you see with people in recovery. They just shine! They have something about them. I think its love actually but it’s more than that, but that’s what you’re feeling. A kind of caring for life and it’s very healthy. So when you have an alumni association, it is why Ridgeview exists. It’s an action. To me it’s essential. It’s just a great thing!” Paul also recognized Sam as our leader, being an example of recovery as he lives it. We talked about the dinners and the parties which give people an opportunity to celebrate in recovery without any alcohol or drugs or trying to hide from reality. Paul

feels the importance is “just being together and learning how to do life in a very grateful way. That’s why I think alumni are important.”

Other actions Sam reminded me of were how the alumni feed the homeless more than a half dozen times a year and

how the alumni go down to Scottish Rite to bring Christmas to over 400 children who are too sick to go home for Christmas; and a sponsor list is provided for patients gradu-

...the alumni is an even tighter fellowship than AA has ever produced. It’s a larger group that can trust each other to do things together. It’s the fellowship that is the key thing.

Sam believes the main focus is “what can we do for Ridgeview and that’s the universal theme.”

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ating from Ridgeview. Although the alumni do go to several retreats a year that are just for them, Sam believes the main focus is “what can we do for Ridgeview and that’s the universal theme.”

A very important contribution that Tom discussed with me is that the alumni recommend people to go to Ridgeview. “We recommend friends, relatives, and enemies. If somebody is having a problem, instead of saying you could go over to Peachford or Anchor, we tell them we love Ridgeview.” Tom also spoke of how the alumni staying sober made them living examples of what sobriety can be and that we are showing how Ridgeview’s introduction of helping us get into recovery is a way that we can give back by being ambassadors of Ridgeview. He also reiterated what others had said regarding projects like the Serenity Garden which show that “physically doing things makes Ridgeview more attractive to potential patients.”

I was also curious to know how our alumni compare to other recovery centers and hospitals. Are we just average in comparison? We have heard that we have over a 90% success rate when we work the program and maintain an active status in the alumni, but having never been a part of any other facility, I had to take this question to others as well.

Our founder, Mr. Fink, doesn’t think any facility has the alumni we have. “They might have an official alumni but I don’t think they are invested in the recovery of the patients. Again, I emphasize it’s their contribution and pas-

sion that is one of the key elements that results in the success of the patients.”

Comparing is a difficult thing to do because recovery is recovery. Paul expressed that some of the free standing centers like Ridgeview, Betty Ford, and Hazelden have a more pronounced alumni while some of the smaller hospital programs without as much structure don’t. He has had some knowledge of other treatment programs including a treatment program in Cincinnati, Ohio that he expressed had a great alumni but “having said that, the alumni that we have at Ridgeview is a very successful, very active, very involved alumni. So I would rate us up in the “A” category in terms of how the alumni work here and what they do for Ridgeview and this campus.”

Mr. Fink, doesn’t think any facility has the alumni we have. “They might have an official alumni but I don’t think they are invested in the recovery of the patients.”

But one thing we have that they don’t have is Sam! Paul agreed that “it’s been a great gift to have him as the head of the alumni and we meet regularly, but we talk more on a spiritual level actually.” There won’t be another Sam and I think everyone knows that. “It could be 10 or 20 years but the alumni need to be very strong to walk through that transition.”

Another example of how well other treatment centers think we are doing is the fact that they have called our alumni leader, Sam, to ask him what they can do to have an alumni association like ours and his answer has been “you’re out of luck. I don’t

No one says you have to do this. It’s a collective conscious that comes together...

think there is a comparison to other treatment centers. There are treatment centers that have a lot more money and a lot more names on their list and our newsletter goes out to some 4000 - 4500 people twice a year but I don’t think anybody has as many active alumni that meet weekly as Ridgeview.”

When I posed this question to Tom, he said he had heard of other people trying to make alumni groups at other places but they would disintegrate. “There is something special about our group. No one says you have to do this. It’s a collective conscious that comes together that gets us to do these things. It’s almost exactly the way AA is supposed to function. There is no rhyme or reason to it. It just works because each person in there is willing to do a little bit to help keep the alumni going.”

So where do we go from here and what do we do next? Well, Paul would love to see Sam live until he’s 150 and be here forever, but we know that isn’t possible. “The day is going to come when Sam won’t do this anymore so the alumnus needs to be aware that change is coming. The alumni, as I’ve said, is an essential part of Ridgeview so I think it needs to continue to be as vibrant, as strong, as powerful as it has been going forward. Mr. Fink has now created our annual Recovery Sunday for all of us to celebrate recovery month and spirituality which also gives us a chance to join together Ridgeview and the alumni. Tom would like to see more participation at the events we sponsor. “I would like to see more people and more active participation as a group.” Kathleen wants to see us have our own clubhouse

BACK TO CON'T.

right here on campus and Tom thinks we should break in the next person for many years before Sam considers retirement.

So what should we take from all of this and where does our future lead? We have a wonderful opportunity to be a part of a wonderful group of people that teach each other and newcomers not only how to stay sober but how to live happy productive lives. Well, Sam wants us to continue to dream and bring those dreams to reality like we've done for

the last 25 years. He would like for us to expand our circle to encompass even more psychiatric track patients and all those in recovery. When trying to explain how he feels about the alumni, he quoted "Words are like little toy wagons crushed up with the burden of meaning. When you try to verbalize your feelings, you are limited." However we know we make a difference. He knows that we touch lives in a way that not even some of the employees of Ridgeview know we do and without the support of Mr. Fink and Mr. Hackman, our suc-

cesses would not be what they are today. We are able to do more. We need to remember that although Ridgeview supports us with their resources, what means even more is the support we get from their presence. There are still many staff members directly associated with patient care that don't know who we are and they have a golden opportunity to come and see what their work has accomplished at our events where there will be several hundred alumni. So let's help spread the word.

IT IS A PROGRESSIVE DISEASE AFTERALL

SUBMITTED BY: LUANNE MC.

"When you think things are bad, when you feel sour and blue, when you start to get mad...you should do what I do! Just tell yourself, Duckie, you're really quite lucky! Some people are much more...oh, ever so much more...oh, muchly much-much more unlucky than you!
~ Dr Seuss, "Did I Ever Tell You How Lucky You Are?"

I have always loved the whimsical rhyming and bantering between characters in Dr. Seuss books. "Sam I Am", "The Cat in the Hat" and "Thing 1" and "Thing 2" made perfect sense in my make believe world. There were many flawed beliefs in my adolescence that made me think that drinking and drugging were okay or at least somewhat normal.

1. Many of my friends were doing it.
2. It was just a rite of passage. This is how to get to grown up stage.
3. I was one of the good and smart kids so it couldn't be very wrong.



Never mind that my first bouts of drunkenness were much worse than anyone else. Believing that it was more important that my parents think I was drunk rather than high from pot was another screwy thought I would have as I once again stumbled into my home from a night of partying with friends. I was doomed to remain childlike, foolish, and completely out of control when I used alcohol.

High school became college and the parties became bigger and better and the freedom from supervision only increased the problem of how the night ended. Unfortunately, graduation and a real job did not lessen my need to enjoy happy hour and a few drinks at lunch to get over the previous night's escapades! I worked with a young crowd and days revolved around where to meet after work. Being one of those who could not control my drinking, I was on the sinking ship and way too blind and insane to see it or jump off in time to save myself.

Years of drinking led to health problems that should have killed me and to family issues that should have given me great pause. Every time I got knocked down I would slowly get back up with a firm resolve to get better and to act better. But I never wanted to admit the obvious. Alcohol and my body were at war!!! I was losing mentally, physically and emotionally to a demon that wanted to kill me!

I was slowly becoming estranged from my family and friends. They knew I had a problem and I thought they were the problem. And then One day I felt myself truly slipping into darkness where I could see no end...no other side. I just knew I had to act quickly to grab onto the ledge that was almost out of reach! I fell to my knees and called out to God. My family brought me to Ridgeview and here my new life would begin.....a Miracle had taken place.

Peace, serenity, grace, humility, integrity, honesty, willingness, acceptance and a desire to live life on life's terms are the gifts God has given to me the past two years. The riches of the world cannot compare! Today I have a

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“GLUM ABOUT RECOVERY?”
LIGHTEN UP & REMEMBER TO LAUGH

SUBMITTED BY: DAVID F.

I don't know about you, but early recovery has been a grind. I was exhausted and defeated on every level of my being, and that is what I now realize gave me willing to admit my personal powerlessness. I stared at the floor and my feet a lot and avoided eye contact with most people - except those in my small group at Ridgeview.

At Ridgeview, I began to relate to people in that group - some more than others - but everyone shared some story or detail, no matter how small, that resonated with me. I began to share little by little. Each act of sharing required faith and trust, but I was willing to at least try something new. That was inside the confines of Ridgeview, but I had to go to meetings out in the "world." Just because a few folks were like me, didn't mean I could relate to other people.

I hit those meetings, and the cliché posse was out in full force - banging me over the head with one saying



after another. But as much as I hate to admit it, those words slowly began to make more sense, much to the dismay of my inner contrarian and critic. I have a sneaking suspicion their meaning will continue to grow with me. I heard that alcoholics are not a glum lot. Yeah, right.

People, just like me, were talking about life and death struggles, divorce, lost freedom, lost families and more. Worse yet, they talked about losing themselves and their hope. Not much there to laugh at, and I certainly

didn't see much reaction other than heads nodding. This was serious, grim and bleak. If I had stopped there, I would have missed the miracle, as they say.

More often than not, I began to find hope in the stories of others who preceded me in recovery in AA meetings. I found a shared experience with people as I continued to look for similarities instead of the differences my disease wanted me to see. I joined a home group,

and hope was there. I was told by a wise man, named Percy, that "I never had to drink again - even if I wanted to."

Hope was followed by gradual degrees of acceptance, and I began to hear the humor in certain stories. As my head cleared up, I was struck by the alcoholism in my thinking - past and present. Armed with understanding and acceptance, I was able to catch those thoughts and begin laughing at the twisted logic running rampant in my head. Once I began working the steps like a possessed person and God removed the merciless obsession to drink from me, I rediscovered a laughter that erupted from the sheer realization that these other guys were as sick as I was. I could point at my new friends and laugh because I knew I was pointing into a mirror. They could do the same. We don't always let loose at our 10:00 p.m. meeting, but there is hell of a lot more joy in our joking and laughter than I ever found in a bottle.

What an incredible bond to share when we are living in the solution to a life and death condition.

NO MATTER WHERE YOU GO, THERE WE ARE

SUBMITTED BY: DOUG F.

I've been lucky in my life and have had the ability to travel a great deal both for my job and for pleasure. I have seen 48 states (missed South Dakota and Hawaii) and 11 countries. Before recovery those trips were often interlaced with pills and booze and sadly there are trips that I do not have many memories of. Since my recovery almost 4 years ago I have the joy of discovering some of those old places again but this time there is a new twist. Not only am I clean and sober on these excursions but I know a little secret that has made each trip better.

Want to know what?

We are everywhere. By we I mean folks in recovery. I have yet to travel somewhere where some sort of recovery meeting was not within reach. The first time I experienced this was on a cruise ship where upon looking at the itinerary I noted a little known meeting called Friends of Bill. Was Bill the Captain? No, at least not the ships Captain anyway. You see, each ship hosts an AA meeting during the



voyage so someone like me who needs a little 12 step recovery has meetings while cruising along the ocean to go to. There is a travel tip here also, now we can meet like minded folks in which you have something in common with. Folks that we can hang out with, take some shore excursions with, and share the joys of living a sober life while traveling. I've made a couple of very

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59 DAYS IN MARCH... "MY WAY"

SUBMITTED BY: BOB S.

My name is Bob, and I am an alcoholic. This is the end to my former horrible life:

After 22 years in the Service, the Air Force decided I had a serious drinking problem and offered me treatment prior to discharge. I entered rehab only to prevent my son from cutting all ties, and I "graduated" so I could walk my only daughter down the aisle two days after discharge. Needless to say, I was drunk one day after the wedding and began a troubled career in the civilian market. Over the next three years, I lost my only two jobs due to absenteeism (related to being drunk or recovering) before landing my dream job in the Atlanta area. Over the next two years, I exhausted all second chances and used up all my thin excuses and my precious job was on very thin ice. I had to do something to save my job.

I decided to seek treatment at the Ridgeview Institute, my way, on my terms. After a fairly uncomfortable 7-day detox, I wanted to go home against doctor's advice, but we worked out a compromise. I agreed to the less-intensive, 3-hour night program, which enabled me to keep working. After two weeks of treatment, I went on a one-week binge and was discharged from the program and ended back up in detox. However, this time, it was much worse. I had not eaten or bathed in 5 days, and I was severely dehydrated. After cleaning up for another 7 days, I requested another shot at the night program with the best of intentions. I was refused and reluctantly decided to enter the full-time day treatment, which put my job on hold. I still commuted from home because there was no way I was going to check into a halfway house (which was highly recommended) when I



had a perfectly good home in the area. After three weeks, at Christmas, I went on a 10-day hard liquor binge, which almost killed me. I tried my best to sober up on 7 January 2012, but could no longer keep down water, beer or anything else, much less food. I was weak, could not dial a phone and dementia set in.

As a last resort, two days later and violently shaking, I made my way to my neighbor's home even though it was Monday and he shouldn't have been there. He had taken the day off of work to do something, which fell through leaving him idle. As he took me to Ridgeview, I kept apologizing and he kept saying, "I understand Bob" as I spilled my story. I found this quite irritating until he confided in me he had over 20 years in recovery himself! He understood!

Ridgeview assessed my condition and I was immediately deferred to the hospital to treat me for violent alcohol withdrawal to include the beginnings of another seizure. I spent the next three days hooked up to a heart monitor and numerous IV bags. Next to me, an elderly man lay dying in his bed as they prepped him for removal of his infected eyes the next day. The room was over 80 degrees to keep him warm, and I lay filthy and sweating as the tremors set in. Sleep was impossible and nausea dominated my thoughts.

I was done. I quit. I gave up. You can say I turned the corner or just plain old surrendered. I prayed and asked for nothing more than direction.

Almost instantly, simple things started to come my way. Clean clothes were delivered from a friend, and Ridgeview agreed to accept me for treatment... again. However, this time there was no

compromise and it was not going to be "My way". I talked with numerous staff members at Ridgeview and agreed to do whatever was suggested, no exceptions. The more I listened, the more they rallied around me to help. I was done running the show.

Once discharged from the hospital, I checked into the halfway house for a firm footing while completing treatment. Now, I have all but abandoned my home as I reside in a three-quarters way home.

Tonight, 59 days sober in March, at the age of 46, I enjoy the longest period of continuous sobriety in my adult life. My health is improving, I have a good sponsor who I call daily, I attend meetings daily, I am working the 12 steps, I do volunteer work, read recovery literature, and most of all, pray multiple times daily. This very simple program has started to work a miracle on me, and I am only at the beginning!

I realize I am very young in sobriety, but feel I am off to a good start. None of this would have been possible without the compassion, support and wisdom of Ridgeview Institute and the countless number of people I have met in treatment and the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous. I just may owe my life to these people and this program.

CATEPILLER CON'T.

I now no longer have to look over my shoulder.

Thank you, to GOD for the gift of life and peace,

I now want to grab life by the horns and seize.

I now have a new lease on life, and I am free.

Thank you for my beautiful daughter Livvy. (Olivia)

RECOVERY AND REALITY

SUBMITTED BY: MARIA E.

Recover: to get back something lost

Reality: the state of the world as it really is, rather than as you might want it to be

Recovery seemed so easy during the time I lived in the recovery residence. My unhealthy addictions were substituted with the healthy addiction of learning and applying new skills to my life. I was on a Ridgeview “high” and thought I had gained control over my addictions. For once, I felt powerful instead of powerless. But then, after only a few days spent back in the “real world”, I realized how little power over the disease I actually had.

I was following all the “rules” to recovery . . . or so I thought. Suddenly, I found myself in an unhealthy situation, as I had been so many times before. The hardest thing about it was that this place would be to anyone else, a healthy place. Realizing that being in my childhood home can immediately trigger my addiction, is very hard to accept. I had spoken of this fact during treatment, thinking I could overcome the temptations. Now I know the true power that addiction has over me.

I say this happened suddenly, but the reality was that my behaviors had begun to change a few days earlier. Not only had I stopped calling my sponsor, but more importantly I missed a couple

days of my morning devotion time with God. I had completely let my guard down and was again taking the power of addiction for granted. The skills I depended on so strongly to keep me on the path to recovery were all but gone. I knew to pay close attention to these signs, but I ignored them instead.

My obsessive thoughts of using again quickly consumed me. The old pattern of blaming crept back in and helped me excuse my behavior. I lost the ability to correctly process my thoughts and behaviors or to make healthy choices.

My obsessive thoughts of using again quickly consumed me.

In fact, on that day, I didn’t even attempt to process thoughts or to simply remove myself from the situation. I was so lost in my own head. That night I went to an AA meeting and spoke of what I had just been through. At that

meeting, I received support and wisdom to help me get back the things I’d lost: a growing relationship with God, confidence in myself, and the ability to call on others for help.

NO MATTER CON’T.

good friends over the years at these meetings and have kept in touch with most.

What about on land?

Well, my experiences on land are near the same. You have to do a little more work to find a meeting, but trust me they are out there. I have gone to meetings in London, Aruba, Cozumel, Amsterdam (yeah of all places), and many other spots around the globe. I have met great people and in those friendships learned a lot more about the local area I was in. Facts and tips about local culture I would have never known had I not attended a meeting and met these folks.



The Cozumel Mexico AA Club House

Sometimes, as this true story in this paragraph will illustrate, your higher power takes things into his own hands while you are traveling. I have a timeshare and was using one of my weeks in Cozumel, Mexico two years ago. I did not look up any meetings before going as I would “get to it” once there. After checking in and grabbing dinner, we went back to the villa to relax. There was a knock on the door, and one of the staff was there attempting to deliver my “all inclusive” allotment of booze which I forgot to cancel. On his cart were many full bottles of every sort of beverage you can imagine. I held up my hands and said no thank you, I don’t drink. He looked a bit surprised by this and asked if I was sure. I insisted that I no longer drink and asked him to please carry them away. He then asked me if he could ask me a personal question. I said of course. He asked if I was a friend of Bill’s? I smiled knowing that only another friend of Bill would be able to ask such a question and understand my insistence of not having liquor in the room. He told me he was also a friend of Bill’s and asked if I wanted to take in a meeting with him at their club house. I said yes and went the next night.

He took me to my first meeting there and introduced me to everyone. It

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THEY ARE WAITING

SUBMITTED BY: ANONYMOUS

They are everywhere.

From the largest cities to the smallest towns, they are there.

No matter where I travel, they're waiting for me. Even though they don't know I'm coming to see them, they're expecting me.

They've never met me, but they already know me better than most people. They've never seen my face, yet they know what I look like.

Although I can't hear them, I sense a joyful noise in the air. They can't read my thoughts, yet they pretty much know what I'm thinking.

They are not relatives, not members of my blood family, yet they are my brothers and sisters.

They love me. They expect nothing in return. I love them, too.

They are kind to me. They want what's best for me. They seek to nurture me, and they desire that I grow with them. They are patient with me. They make no demands.

When I finally see them, I'm home again. They are people I've never seen, yet it seems to be a family reunion. I am not a stranger in their presence. I've known them for a long time.

There is laughter. There is peace. There is serenity.

Although my feet are firmly planted on terra firma, I feel levitated when I'm with them. There is nowhere else on earth that I feel this.

They live in the Fourth Dimension of Existence. They invite me to live with them. I humbly accept. Together we trudge the happy road of destiny, hand-in-hand-in-hand.

They are waiting for me. The Rooms are there. The only action required on my part is to walk in.

We are everywhere.

TRAVELS IN SOBRIETY

SUBMITTED BY: SEAN C.

I have always taken comfort in the phrase from the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous which states: "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path." This reminds me that my disease is permanent and will be with me whether I'm in Hall County or on a cruise ship in the Caribbean. If I ever forget that I'm an alcoholic, I'll be doomed, damned and done! My task each day is to follow the path of recovery.

"Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path."

My very first "drunk" was on Tuesday, March 4, 1980. I don't know why I remember that, I just do. I don't remember my first pizza but I remember the first time I got knee-walking, room spinning, puke all over, stinking drunk. It was in Daytona Beach and I was 23 years old. My two buddies and I were trying to pick up girls during spring break. The booze worked! From that day forward, alcohol became the number one focus in my life.

From that wonderful beginning, Daytona denoted "party place." In 1985, my (now ex) wife and I spent our honeymoon there. We purchased a time share unit on the beach so we could drink and drink some more. When we divorced in 1992, we split the home in Massachusetts 50/50. She got the inside and I got the outside. However, I was awarded the time share "party" unit.

In 1996, I got sober in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous; for the first time. Relying only on Steps one, two and three, I went back out drinking after 18 months. It was October 27, 1997 and I was once again at my time share unit in Florida. There was no thought of drinking

that day. I even went to a meeting in Port Orange that morning. As the dark clouds rolled in and the rain started to pelt on the ground, the thought occurred to me that the ABC Liquor store sells vodka. Drinking will alleviate the boredom. No defense, no resolve. Without a foundation, which I can only get through the Steps, I was a sitting duck. What was just a thought that I would have a few drinks to kill the afternoon turned out to be a self-imposed prison sentence. All of a sudden I was trapped and couldn't stop drinking.

By 1998, I had moved from Boston to Atlanta. My "grand plan" was that I would find meetings in Georgia and get sober again. The associates in my new office wouldn't know I had a drinking problem. It didn't take them long, to figure it out. Through the grace of God I ended up at Ridgeview Institute and thus Alcoholics Anonymous. I didn't know if I was ready or not but I must have been because I was willing to do whatever the counselors at Ridgeview and the old-timers in A.A. told me to do.

For the first two years of my recovery, I didn't dare to travel. I even rented out that time share unit to some friends back home. My first sober trip, however, was back to Daytona Beach and that condo unit on the beach.

This time, however, I was an active member of A.A. and was very involved with the alumni at Ridgeview Institute. Upon my arrival in Florida, I went immediately to the New Dawn

Group in Port Orange and made them my home group. They are still my Florida home group to this day. I also went to the Easy Does It Club in Ormond Beach for the 3:30 afternoon meeting and the 10:00 candlelight meeting. In my possession was a list of phone numbers from Ridgeview and Easy 1,2,3 which is my home group in Duluth, GA.

Since those auspicious beginnings, I have been to my time share unit every year. The New Dawn Group is alive and well and I am greeted with hugs and handshakes whenever I show up. A friend of mine from Atlanta's Triangle Club was at the New Dawn meeting during "bike week" a few years ago when I walked in. What a wonderful surprise! These people at New Dawn even remember my name and I know theirs! It's tough to get up for a 7:30 morning meeting while I'm on vacation but it starts my day off in the right direction. Thankfully, New Dawn is located across the street from a Dunkin' Donuts coffee shop!

My travels since becoming a member of Alcoholics Anonymous have been many. I've been to Europe, toured Costa Rica, travelled to Canada and Mexico, have driven cross-country twice and have been on several cruises. I've even

gone back to Boston to stay with family and never found it necessary to drink. My sister however, thinks it's a good idea that I stay in Georgia, since I never had long-term sobriety until

I moved to the peach state.

In my collection of "sobriety things", I have meeting list schedules



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 with-out 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 \$60,000. 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) 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.

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TRAVELS CON'T.

from Buffalo, NY to Sunnyvale, CA and a whole lot of locations in between. I have "Friends of Bill" meeting schedules from the cruises I've been on. On some of the cruises, the meetings are well attended but on others there may be only one or two. While I'm on vacation, if I plan to be at a meeting that day, then I feel obligated to stay sober. It's funny how that works.

The language of the heart is universal. It's spoken at every A.A. meeting I have ever attended. I can't afford to be disconnected from Alcoholics Anonymous. It is my lifeline to recovery. As long as I stay on the path which is outlined in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, I won't fail. Recovery has given me the opportunity to travel anywhere in the world and I don't have to drink. Through God's grace and A.A. I have received a

freedom that makes me feel so humble and grateful.

NO MATTER CON'T.

was an English-speaking meeting and was quite fun. I went about 3 to 4 times during my trip there and have kept in touch with the guys at the clubhouse ever since during my return trips. On cruise ships days they even host a meeting near the port on the beach. How cool is that!

In all my travels since my recovery whether I've been in Europe, North America, the Caribbean, or somewhere on the sea, I have always been able to find like-minded people such as myself. Folks like us who just want to share the joy of recovery and often can give you some great travel tips and advice. It takes just a small effort to find them but the rewards are great when you do.

IT IS A CON'T.

choice and I choose not to drink. I am alive and healthy and a little wiser than yesterday. I have spirituality and a strength that surpasses my understanding. I know I am a miracle in oh so many ways.

Lucky? Absolutely. Grateful for the gifts of AA and the opportunity to give back? Every single day!

