

Voices of Hope

ALUMNI RECOVERY STORIES

VOLUME 1



SHARED BY VALLEY HOPE ALUMNI

Produced by Valley Hope Association

Edited by Ashley Barcum

Cover & Back Designed by Ashley Barcum and Camielle Lonergan

Additional Support from Ryan Culver, Dana Kerney, Steve Knuth, Camielle Lonergan and Megan O'Connor

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Voices *of* Hope

Volume 1

Recovery Stories Anthology

From Valley Hope Alumni



JOURNEYS

FOREWARD

CHAPTER ONE

JOHN M / THE MIRACLE OF RECOVERY

CHAPTER TWO

RACQUEL G. / TAKING BACK
YOUR POWER IN SERVICE

CHAPTER THREE

DAVID R. / SOLVING THE GOD PROBLEM

CHAPTER FOUR

ERVIN L. / ALCOHOL WAS MY
LIVELIHOOD, THEN IT BROKE ME

CHAPTER FIVE

SUSAN C. / YOU ARE PRICELESS.
SO IS YOUR RECOVERY.

CHAPTER SIX

TARA G. / HEALING FROM
PAIN MANAGEMENT

CHAPTER SEVEN

MIKE & JOAN S. / FOR BETTER OR WORSE

CHAPTER EIGHT

CHARLES F. / MEETING THE GOAL

CHAPTER NINE

CHAD F. / HEALTHY HIGH LIFE

EPILOGUE

FORWARD



Addiction is a journey that touches not just the individual, but also families, friends, and communities. It is a battle fought in silence by many, yet its victories are often celebrated quietly. This book, however, seeks to do something remarkable: to bring those victories to light, to honor the resilience of the human spirit, and to remind us all that recovery is not only possible but also profoundly transformative.

As you turn these pages, you will encounter stories that are as diverse as the people who lived them. Each narrative is unique, shaped by personal struggles, moments of clarity, and the unwavering determination to reclaim a life once overshadowed by addiction. But while the specifics may differ, the heart of these stories beats with a shared truth: recovery is a testament to hope, courage, and the power of connection.

In reading these accounts, you will walk alongside individuals who faced the darkness of addiction and chose to rise above it. You'll witness their struggles, their triumphs, and the moments that defined their journeys. You'll see how love, support, and the strength found in vulnerability can lead to healing—not just for those in recovery, but for everyone around them.

This book is more than a collection of stories; it is a celebration of the human capacity for change and a reminder that even in the face of overwhelming challenges, there is a way forward. It is a tribute to the bravery of those who have walked this path and a source of inspiration for those who may still be searching for their way out.

Whether you are in recovery yourself, supporting a loved one, or simply seeking a deeper understanding of addiction and its impact, this book will touch your heart and leave you with a profound sense of hope. The voices within these pages are proof that no matter how difficult the journey, a new and better chapter is always possible.

To everyone who shared their story here: thank you for your courage and your honesty. Your words will undoubtedly inspire others to believe in the possibility of change and the power of recovery.



JOHN M.
MY MIRACLE OF
RECOVERY



"I was 27 years old when I got sober. Today at age 75, I honestly believe that my life over the last 48 years has been a miracle..."

Part One: “I did a lot of stupid things...”

Born in 1945, I grew up in Nebraska with my older sister and my mother. My mother divorced my father shortly after I was born and so I never met my father.

Growing up, I was constantly chastised for making wrong decisions and I came to believe everything I did was wrong, creating a low self-esteem issue. This eventually led to behavior that caused some minor problems with the local police — just stupid stuff like joy riding, MIPs (minor in possession). The large number of incidents landed me on probation as a juvenile for three years.

I started drinking when I was 15 years old. When I got my driver's license the following year, I could drive right across the border to Kansas and get alcohol. I would bring cases of beer back so my friends and could drink during the week. One night when I came home drunk, I fell down the stairs to our basement because I was so messed up and my mother kicked me out of the house.

So, kicked out of my family home just before my senior year of high school, my probation officer determined that it would be okay for me to get my own apartment as a senior in high school. I supported myself by pumping gas at a gas station for \$2 an hour.

Having my own place allowed me to drink at will and naturally everyone would show up at my place to party.

My claim to fame was that I graduated high school, even though I barely went to school. Between getting kicked out of school and out of my house, somehow, I made it through graduation and attended the University of Nebraska. Well, that didn't last very long ... I went one semester but by the second semester, I quit going to class. All I did was drink and party and run around. I got arrested again for a MIP, except by then I was over 18 so I was legally an adult. The judge recommended that I join the U.S. Marine Corps.

Believe it or not, I actually did very well in the Marines. I advanced in rank quickly and I ended up as a hawk missile guidance control electronics instructor, teaching guidance system electronics at a school during Vietnam. Because I was an instructor, I didn't have to go to Vietnam and I could drink all day long... beer was only a nickel, it was crazy.

I got out of the marines in 1968, and I was probably back home in Nebraska just three months before my family even knew I was home. Why? Because I was running with the same people I partied with before I went into the marines. There were four of us that pretty much got in trouble together starting from kindergarten all the way through high school and beyond. My friends and I ended up moving into a typical party apartment, and of course the drinking continued.

The four of us that ran around together – one died of alcoholism, one died waiting for a liver transplant and one died from a brain aneurysm. So, why am I the only one still alive?

Meanwhile, I had a range of menial jobs — trimming trees, mowing grass, making cardboard boxes — and every one of my jobs was influenced by my drinking. I wasn't successful at any of them.

It got to the point where I had so much weight on your shoulders, so much guilt, anger, resentment after a while I couldn't even think straight or make decisions. When you reach that point, you just do stupid things. And I did a lot of stupid things.

Two of my old roommates and myself used to go pheasant hunting a lot. We would leave at 6 a.m., with a case of beer and a case of shotgun shells. There were 500 shells in a case and your limit was three pheasants, so naturally something else is going to get shot up and it isn't the pheasants.

One evening, in a town near Lincoln and we were in my car, I was driving and we end up there around noon and we had already burned down an abandoned house – burned it down, lit it on fire – and then we stayed in this place until it closed.

When we left, we literally shot up this whole town and the next day when I went out to my car, the whole interior of the car was covered with empty shotgun shells.

There's been things that I have done in my adult life criminally, morally, every aspect that could have significant consequences, but I just never got caught. When I was 16, 17 years old I couldn't drive down the street without getting stopped.

They say there are three things that can happen to you as an alcoholic – you sober up, you get locked up or you get covered up.

Ultimately, I met a girl, got married. Looking back, I think the real reason we got married was that she could drink right along next to me, her parents were practicing alcoholics and so drinking became the norm anywhere we went. Of course the marriage didn't last. We were married, separated, married and separated. I lived in my green Ford Pinto for a couple of days after we got divorced. My car was just a little piece of junk and I lived in that thing for two days with two black labs and everything I owned. My two dogs were the only things I wanted in the divorce.

I went to treatment a year after we divorced. My other options were to go to jail, live under a bridge or die.

Part Two: “Go pack your toys and get to Norton...”

One night, I was trying to decide whether to kill myself, quit drinking or pick up the telephone and call someone. I had tried to stay sober for 11 days, went to a few AA meetings, but started drinking again.

And fortunately, I picked up the phone and I called a guy I met at a meeting. Although I looked up to him, he didn't know me from a load of hay, so when I called him he said just get your butt over here. So, I went to his house at 3 a.m. on a Sunday morning.

When I got there, the coffee pot was on and he and his wife (she was also in recovery) were sitting at the kitchen table and we sat and talked and talked. And he said, "you need treatment, you can't do what you want to do on your own, you need help." Then he called a phone number he knew by heart — the number to Valley Hope.

After he hung up the phone, he said "they are waiting for you, John, in Norton, Kansas at Valley Hope. It's an inpatient treatment center. Go pack your toys and get to Norton."

The funny thing about that, the thing I remember most, is that I asked, "where the heck is Norton, Kansas?" I had never heard of it. He said, "You'll find it."

And so I found Norton, Kansas, and I found Valley Hope.

Just like most of us that go through treatment, I spent the first week not wanting to be an alcoholic, not wanting to be there.

The toughest part about rolling into treatment is that you are there a week before you understand what's going on. You don't know much about group, you aren't used to that; you've never spoken to a counselor or chaplain and tried to verbalize what your higher power is, especially if you don't have one.

Once I woke up and could see straight, had a couple of good meals, I looked at the 12 steps. I eliminated number four and rewrote number eight, and I was done by noon the first day. I just wanted more from me and out of me, but I didn't want to be there, and I kept telling myself I am not an alcoholic, and I don't understand this whole deal.

So, not wanting to be an alcoholic, I resisted that title or that definition, label whatever you want to call it. I could be an asshole, I could be a bad husband, a poor employee, but I just didn't want to be an alcoholic and at that time I wasn't even sure what an alcoholic was.

One day I asked Doc Leipold, the legendary program director at Valley Hope, for his definition of an alcoholic. You must picture Doc, he was just a big guy with this aura around him wherever he went, and when he walked into a room, he had this huge presence. Doc was bigger than life, a no mess around guy, he told it like it was. He was a highly intellectual guy. He could describe a bowl of soup and by the time he was done you would want a bowl of soup.

That morning, Doc shared with me his definition of an alcoholic:

"If you have difficulties in any element or aspect of your life and they are caused by your drinking and, once you become aware they are caused by your drinking and you continue to drink, you are probably an alcoholic."

It was the most descriptive definition of an alcoholic I had ever heard.

He also said an alcoholic is a human being. Doc's thought behind that was that alcoholism can affect anyone; nobody is immune. It doesn't make a difference who you are, and that continues to be one of the Valley Hope mantras – that everybody that walks in there is a human being and deserves to be treated the same way, with respect and compassion.

Doc's definition opened the door for me to admit I was an alcoholic.

My treatment at Valley Hope covered all aspects of my life – my physical health, my mental health, my spiritual health. There was no real corner or crevice that someone didn't crawl in to talk about what was going on, why I was thinking the way I was. What resonated most with me during my time at Valley Hope, involved exploring my life, realizing how shitty it was because of alcohol, and understanding that I need to quit drinking.

"It's been an indescribable journey from the day I got sober; the path that my life has followed – you can't make it up."

John M.

My Miracle of Recovery

One of the people who really helped me uncover all of that was Kay, my counselor at Valley Hope of Norton. She went on to become program director at Valley Hope of O'Neill in Nebraska. She is retired now but we are still close. To this day, every time go up to O'Neill, I visit her and her husband.

In fact, it's been 48 years since I left treatment at Valley Hope, and I still get a text from Kay at least once a week.

With the help of Kay, Doc and others at Valley Hope, my eyes were opened to the principles of living – honesty, integrity, spirituality.

I used to suffer from depression, anxiety, all of those. And now I believe in following God's will, to get out of the way, and if you do the right thing for the right reasons, good things will happen.

It's been an indescribable journey from the day I got sober; the path that my life has followed – you can't make it up.

Part Three: "That never should have happened..."

After I left treatment, I served as a municipal court probation officer. They had an alcohol division, so if you were arrested for anything alcohol related and you were assigned probation, we did education and diagnostics and usually we referred them to Valley Hope for treatment.

As luck would have it, I ended up working as the head of security for a bank with six security guards under me. No college degree, no banking experience — I didn't know what I was doing half the time, but I started going to continuing education classes at the bank and within three years I became vice president of the bank and probably had 150 people that worked for me.

That was a God thing, that should have never happened. A guy comes into be the security guy and ends up head of bank operations at 32 years old.

While I was at the bank, I did a lecture tour, providing continuing education for bank employees and that's where I met my wife, Karen, 42 years ago.

I can't begin to describe the difference in relationships from my first marriage – understanding what love is truly all about, what taking care of each other and giving 110 percent feels like.

Eventually, I left the bank to run a company called Networks. We provided electronic banking transaction processing, so if you used a debit card it was run through our company. It was unique geographically through Nebraska and one of the premier computer operations in the industry.

I stayed with Networks until I turned 60 years old, then bought 68 acres of undeveloped pastureland in a high residential area. I developed the land into a shopping center with a Walgreens, a bank, a convenience store, a custard shop, 30 offices – dental, medical, etc. — restaurants and retail. Eventually, I built a couple of other developments in Lincoln, Nebraska.

For someone who didn't know anything about developing, the whole thing turned out well. Today, going to work for me is going to the mailbox to collect checks.

How does a dumbass that barely graduated high school end up the VP of a bank when he can't even balance his own checkbook or end up CEO of a technology company when you can't even run a laptop? How do you buy 68 acres and turn it into one of the best developments in Lincoln, Nebraska? I don't know, it's a gift from God.

Part Four: "You get the good ... but you leave before you get the GREAT..."

Today I am celebrating 48 years in recovery and many people assume, "Well, you've been around that long, you ought to have it made by now, you must all have the answers."

I guarantee you, that is a MYTH.

My recovery has been challenged many times – there are friends, family, coworkers that would love to see me go drink. I would bet in 48 years I have known at least 12 people who have committed suicide, due to their addiction.

Suicide was one of my ways out as well – I contemplated that the day I picked up the telephone and ended up in Norton at Valley Hope.

That's why consider my sobriety as a gift. I have seen a lot of people die, a lot come and go, in and out of recovery. I have witnessed so many people stay sober for two or three years, watch as their lives get back to normal, and then they start drinking again.

Too many people complete treatment, then they start AA and do all the stuff, and life gets better, and you get the good ... but you leave before you get the GREAT.

And the great happens when you keep going back to AA, because sobriety is progressive just like alcoholism. But if you start drinking again, you start from scratch with your sobriety when and if you quit drinking again.

So, my advice to people in recovery is to stick with AA meetings – meetings, meetings, meetings.

Stay as connected as you can to your outpatient or follow up program, build your sober community. The worst thing for an alcoholic or addict is to have too much time on your hands.

There's always time to get up and go to a meeting – before work, lunchtime, after work – go to two or three if you can. Because one of the things that happens often is that you will see someone at a meeting, and then you won't, you won't, you won't. And then suddenly, six months, a year later they show back up.

So how does that happen? They quit going to meetings, reading the books, quit doing evening meditation, lost contact with a higher power, no sponsor ... and the farther you get away from all those elements, the closer you get to drinking and the other lifestyle you used to have. Even if you don't drink, the personality characteristics – the negative ones – the selfishness, lying, undependability – all those things come back, the old you without the smell of alcohol and ultimately it will lead to you going out and getting drunk or getting high.

The one thing I tell people that I sponsor or meet with that are new to recovery, is to go to a lot of meetings and listen. I am very, very serious about going to a lot of meetings and listening. Because there a lot of people there that get into it and there are people that don't. Find the person at AA that has what you want, listen to that individual and if you need a sponsor, you ask that person to be your sponsor. You want to find a sponsor that you are comfortable with, someone that is there to make a difference in their life.

Stick with winners – find out who's got what you want, who is doing it right, who is at your meetings week, after week, after week, after week – someone who goes to multiple meetings a week.

Working the 12 steps launched me into AA and solidified that I was an alcoholic and I only needed to change everything to maintain sobriety.

Most people will say the first step is the most important: to realize that your life is unmanageable and your using had a lot to do with it. But once you get past that, it's a little clearer. Today, I use the 10th step as a maintenance step. I can lie down, put my head on a pillow at night, review my day and say, "okay what did you screw up today dummy?"

There are 12 principles in AA: acceptance, hope, faith, courage, honesty, willingness, humility, responsibility, love, discipline, awareness/growth, and service.

If you have ever been to a Valley Hope or AA meeting, before every meeting we read something called "How It Works," and talk about practicing these 12 principles in all our affairs. That is how you get from point A to point B, how you stay sober. My goal in life is to be happy and I want to be as happy as I can be in every element in my life. So, if I want more happiness, what do I have to do? When I talk about what I want, if there is another inch of happiness out there, I want it. I am a firm believer in practicing these principles in all my affairs to help me achieve that happiness.

Most of my friends are from AA. These are people I talk to everyday. If I need something or they need something, we know all we have to do is pick up the phone and we will be there for each other. We just take care of each other. We care about each other's happiness.

In 2020 over the Christmas holiday, I was diagnosed with a brain tumor and a lung tumor. They are malignant melanomas, skin cancer that can travel to any part of the body.

The tumor on my brain is inoperable but my treatment plan includes radiation and chemotherapy infusions.

When I was diagnosed with cancer, my first instinct was to be scared. My second instinct was to remember that I have a higher power that's going to look out for me. God has a plan that I have no control over, and I learned that in AA. That's helped take the sting out of my diagnosis.

There are days when I ask God for a little hint about the road ahead, but I know it's going to be what it's going to be.

I didn't learn that at a bar or liquor store or shooting up towns – I learned that at Valley Hope and in AA.

My sobriety means just about everything to me. Everything I am everything I will be, in every element of my life, I owe to my sobriety. And I wish I could take credit for it, because I can't; it was a joint project.

There was a time when I didn't have \$10 to my name. Today, I've got a great wife and marriage with Karen, I have enjoyed multiple successful careers, and we do not have to worry about money.

And for me to drink again today, I would have to ask myself what part of my life am I willing to give up and – financial security? Nope. Living in a nice house? No. My wife, Karen? Definitely not.

I don't want to start all over again.

I am very grateful that God had a way of looking out for me. I could not have written a script of my life and had it come out any better.

It's been a hell of a ride.



John M. and his beloved wife Karen live in Lincoln, Nebraska, with their two golden retrievers. John serves on the Valley Hope Association and Foundation Boards of Directors and generously supports the Foundation and Valley Hope Alumni. He is an active advocate for the Valley Hope mission and the patients served by the organization.

2

Racquel G. ///
Taking Back Your
Power in Service



*"Today, I'm still a hustler. But, I do it in a
productive way that benefits humanity..."*

Part One: “No one shares...”

When I got sober, people told me some of who I am is in my DNA, which made me feel powerless. The whole idea of powerlessness crippled me.

But when I learned this is a maladaptive behavior to traumas that my family had and I adopted, I became powerful. That realization came seven or eight years in sobriety.

I grew up in Aurora, Colorado, graduated from an alternative high school. Trauma entered my life when I was nine, then again at sixteen, and compounded itself. At nine, it showed up in inappropriate touching from a female. I acted out with other kids in the neighborhood.

Maladaptive behavior to the assault.

Both of my parents worked and we lived in a really eclectic neighborhood. Mom was from the South of France, Dad was Black, raised in segregated South Texas.

Dad always had a cocktail in his hand. When he tried a career in real estate, it didn't go well, and he drank more. My mom worked more to compensate. My family became estranged. During my developmental years. Dad was physically present but not very emotional. My mother does not have the language for trauma either. No one “shares.”

As a teenager, I did okay in high school. I was popular, elected class president, played soccer.

Then my friends were murdered in a mass shooting at a local pizza parlor.

The night of the murders is the first time I remember going into my dad's liquor cabinet.

Then I was raped at the age of sixteen.

Naturally, my grades dropped. I was diagnosed as bipolar.

Instead of treating my trauma, I was given lithium. I started to not care.

I lost my soccer career, forfeited my class presidency.



Everyone around me who possessed an “emotion” drank. No talk of feelings.

When I turned nineteen, I got married. The night of my wedding, I blacked out. I met my husband while partying. I put myself in horrible situations because I was often intoxicated.

Part Two: “Better houses, better booze and same misery...”

After we were married, we setup in a fancy house on a golf course (never played golf) and I tried to do the suburban wife life.

But my rich house didn't look like everyone else's. Inside mine was a horrible cocaine habit with eight balls running out the door and hard liquor chasers.

Then, after my third kid, I had back and brain surgery. Titanium plate in my head. They prescribed opiates.

Naturally I added opioids to my horrible cocaine and liquor addictions.

My husband's business was going up in flames.

We filed for divorce.

I ran away.

I left Denver for a small town after being kicked out of every bar, house in foreclosure. But in small towns without liquor stores, the bars become the thing.

Women were drinking Ketel One in the afternoon. Better houses, better booze and same misery.

I was a very crafty mom. When I was hung over, we would do things like family campouts. Lay blankets in the living room and watch Harry Potter marathons all day. I didn't want to be a “stay in bed mom.”

Somehow, I would make it somewhat of a game. I didn't want my stuff to be their story. I would use a balance of substances to either bring me up or help me sleep.

By the grace of God, no one needed me in the middle of the night. I would have been worthless.

A year before I quit drinking, I tried to get sober. My mom said she would pay for rehab, but my husband said I couldn't go because I had to stay home and take care of the kids. He was the breadwinner.

Now, he has a totally different view.

I met this wonderful woman, who had a meth addiction but kicked it. One night, her and I were drinking. She made it to my house, and I had laid out an opioid that is stronger than fentanyl.

After I split it, it killed her within thirty minutes.

She stopped breathing and I called 9-1-1. I tried to save her with mouth to mouth and the paramedics didn't have Narcan.

She left behind two children. I thought I was done with drugs.

I wasn't.

I don't remember a lot of that night but must have scared the paramedics because I said I was going to "kill myself and trade places with her." They checked me in a psych ward for five days. They gave me medication to curb my alcohol cravings. I was so desperate that I agreed, but they didn't tell me it would send me into an immediate opioid detox. I tried to kill myself because I didn't know what was happening to my body. I tried to take my skin off, and it was the most horrific experience of my life.

I promised I would never drink again, and I really wanted to get out, so they let me out for the funeral. But at the funeral, I saw her kids and mom walk in.

I drank that night and stayed drunk. I don't remember Thanksgiving, Christmas with my kids. I could not live with myself.

The following year, in January, I had a bad binger. I drove a friend home sixty miles away and then could not stop shaking. I was in a minivan with my kids. I asked her for a shot to stop drinking. She gave me two shots. I told my friend, "I can't drive home now." Then she gave me two Adderall. I was about to drive my three kids all the way.

Something told me we would not make it. My mom was about seven miles away, so I drove there. She had cancer and was recovering from a double mastectomy.

My dad answered the door. I said, "I need to go to rehab."

Part Three: "My body finally stopped screaming..."

Valley Hope had an opening and I was able to stay for twenty-one days between insurance and a scholarship to keep me there. Otherwise, it would have been day treatment, which was not going to work for me. I was a stay-at-home mom drinker.

My husband was so upset that I went to rehab because he lost his drinking partner. He called me selfish. But I had to call him and tell him to go through the entire house and remove all the liquor—vodka bottles in the laundry baskets, towels, bread cabinet. He was in shock. There was so much vodka everywhere.

"We are far more powerful
than we are powerless.
That is the trajectory of my
recovery story."

Racquel G.

Taking Back Your Power in Service

There was also my opiate addiction.

If you have pain disorders, everything is answered with pills. I had six back surgeries and brain surgery. My body craved the pills. It was screaming for them.

You don't have power to quit opiate addiction without help. When you receive medically-monitored detox, and get the proper treatment for the addiction, slowly, the body stops screaming.

And eight years ago at Valley Hope, my body finally stopped screaming.

My husband had to make a choice to embrace my recovery and decided to stay. He stayed and he chose sobriety for himself.

We've been married for twenty-six years.

Part Four: "We are far more powerful than we are powerless..."

Today, I'm still a hustler. But, I do it in a productive way that benefits humanity.

After treatment, I earned a degree in addiction counseling and became a peer recovery coach. I love service work. Volunteering. Working with others helps keep me sober.

I built an organization, Hard Beauty, with a mission to create a workforce that coaches others through recovery. Today I have 34 employees and, I advise the attorney general in

Today, my kids call and ask me questions on how to better their lives. They know how to ask for help and lean into support.

I could have been died. Remembering this keeps me humble.

We are far more powerful than we are powerless. That is the trajectory of my recovery story.



Racquel G. is an expert Interventionist, recovery coach, expert trainer, presenter and entrepreneur. She founded HardBeauty in 2019 with the mission of empowering people to rise and thrive beyond their circumstances through a trauma-informed healing-centered approach. Racquel lives in Colorado with her husband, her four children and her three bonus kids.

3

David R. ///
Solving the
God Problem



"I was finally going to listen to something other than myself. He took me on a hell of a journey the next five days..."

Part One: “I was a good at schmoozing...”

I grew up on a turkey farm in Oklahoma. After high school, I attended Oklahoma State University and graduated with a degree in insurance and finance.

It was 1967, the height of the Vietnam War. Because I volunteered for advanced ROTC and failed the physical because of flat feet, I got a deferment.

That was the luckiest thing that ever happened to me.

I'd had trouble with my feet all my life. I got in the investment banking business, selling securities in Oklahoma.

It turned out to be something I was very good at doing.

I was a good at schmoozing, sitting around and drinking with these bankers.

I really believed the answer to all my insecurities was alcohol.

I progressed within the company and wound up being a department manager.

The alcohol use just got worse and worse.

In 1970, I got married. I met my wife on a blind date. I proposed to her on our third date. After ninety days, we got married. We had three kids.

It's a lifetime when you're married to a person like me.

Part Two: "We went bankrupt..."

I needed alcohol to cope with all the pressure of success and excess.

I became my company's midnight caller.

A lot of times, I wouldn't remember the call to bosses.

One morning, there was a surprise when I walked into work.

In the mid-1970s, had a side business of home building as a financial partner. We were successful, taking advantage of mortgage rates. We started building a bunch of spec houses. Then, the Federal Reserve raised the discount rate 2 percent in one day. By this time, I was in a partnership in a securities company, and we were the largest municipal operation west of the Mississippi River before the West Coast.

Managing the inner portions of the U.S., we were a big deal.

We went bankrupt the day the rates went up.

Construction loans also increased by a large percentage.

I went to a banker friend and asked for "a character loan."

He bailed me out.

At that time, I was drinking a minimum of a fifth of scotch a day.

I went on a trip with my banker buddy to New York City. I got drunk on the plane, and we went to dinner. He asked me to come up to his room to talk.

After he closed the door, he looked at me and said, "There are a few things I want you to know: One: David, you're a fucking drunk. Two: I'm never going to get repaid on the loans unless you sober up. Three: I have an appointment for you to go into treatment when we get back."

I begged and pleaded with him. We talked all night long.

I promised to go to Valley Hope, they would have a place for me.

He said, "If you don't show up to treatment, all your loans are due the next day."

Part Three: "Then, everything came crashing down ..."

I showed up at Valley Hope on May 1, 1983. My sobriety date.

Valley Hope gave me twenty-eight days without getting plastered every night. It allowed me to see a lot of the destruction I had caused.

I didn't come out of there with a burning desire to stay sober, but I knew my friend would be on me if I didn't pay the loans off.

I got into an AA group, and I truly felt completely accepted. For three years, I stayed sober. But, I still had a lot of spirituality issues.

So, I sort of floated through sobriety. I went to a lot of meetings because I enjoyed the people I met, but I didn't want to do anything beyond. I still had the desire to drink.

When I finally got the loans paid off, I had to find another reason to stay sober.

Then, everything came crashing down.

I knew I would drink or not drink. My biggest problem was a God problem.

A priest in AA suggested that I try a Jesuit spirituality center that worked with alcoholics. I made an appointment for a five-day director retreat. Belligerent, I rode my motorcycle there, pulled in and found out that at a director retreat is silent other than talking to your spiritual director. My spiritual director was a seventy-five-year-old, retired CPA, Jesuit priest.

I became convinced I couldn't trust God. I was in an emotional fraught, chain smoking.

I told the priest I had to leave. He said, "Why do you feel that way?" I exploded with all these pent-up emotions, fear, anxiety.

He listened and said, "David, you shouldn't leave. You're at the beginning."

I had absolutely hit rock bottom. I was finally going to listen to something other than myself.

He took me on a hell of a journey over the next five days.

Part Four: “You have to get involved ...”

My marriage wasn't very good when I was drinking, and it got worse when I quit.

I was determined the only way I could stay sober was to get a divorce. One gentleman in our program had been married five times, and I figured he would understand.

He said I was the problem for thirteen years and needed to give her as many years as sobriety. We counted that down over time. Thirteen years went by quickly.

I tell that story at AA when people are talking about problems with spouses. I know a number of marriages have been saved. It has had a resounding effect.

We just celebrated our 54th anniversary.

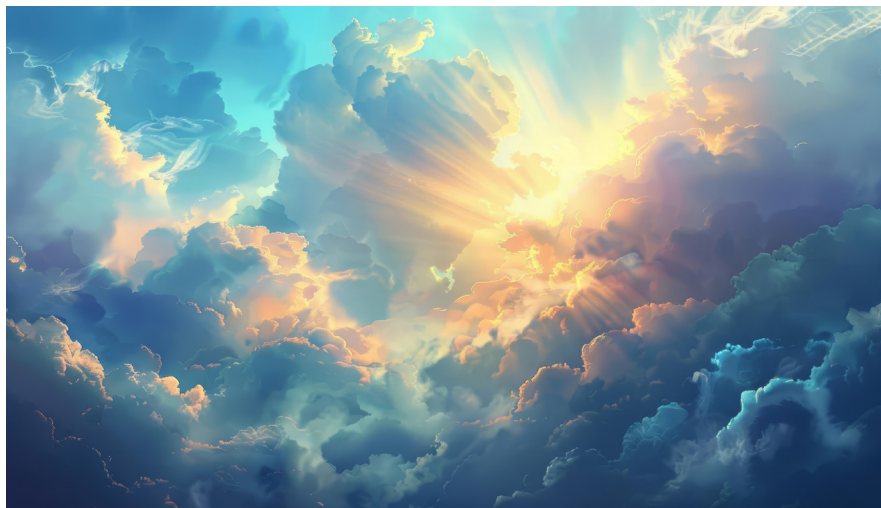
You have to get involved or you won't have the tools to stay sober.

At Valley Hope, I turned over my life to a God I didn't understand and didn't trust.

That's where I sustained the willingness to do what the group requested and stay sober. You rapidly learn who is honest and who isn't. It's led me down some interesting roads, different types of spirituality.

It was the first time I had ever been exposed to people actually talking about their emotions and things directing their life. It was the first time I knew there were a lot of people like me. I became interested in having a relationship in sobriety with these people, and that carried over in greater depth in other settings.

I always tell people, “Don't leave before the miracle happens.”



David. R. has been sober for more than 41 years; he and his wife have been married nearly 55 years.

4

ERVIN L. ///

Alcohol Was My
Livelihood, Then It
Broke Me



"I couldn't imagine my life without alcohol. It was the way I made a living and took care of my family. I marketed alcohol, sold alcohol, and I am addicted to alcohol..."

Part One: “Son, you shouldn’t drink...”

I was raised by three women: my great-grandmother, grandmother and my mom. My father was not in the home. My mom was a young mom. The other two were always working, so I pretty much grew up with my great-grandmother, who was a woman of great faith.

She taught Sunday school, Bible study. I grew up around faith in God, a Black Southern Baptist, praying about everything.

My fondest memory of my great-grandmother is as a child, waking up in the middle of the night, and hearing her full conversation with God about our future, about me going to college.

She also warned me about problems in life—namely, to stay away from alcohol.

My first encounter with drinking was when I was 11 or 12. We knew where the adults kept the liquor, so we “borrowed” some.

At a Black family reunion, they love the lord, but they also drink. Everyone else had a couple of sips, but I kept on drinking. I threw up and they had to put me to bed.

Grandma said, “Son, you shouldn’t drink.”

Part Two: “My closet was full of sin and shame...”

But I did drink. Growing up, I played football — my teammates and I drank before games. My grandmother insisted, “You’re going to college.” I thought, no, unless we have a money tree, I’m joining the Marines. Then, I earned a scholarship to play football at Brigham Young University. Off to BYU I went and earned a Bachelor of Science.

After graduation, I started my career in brand marketing. I spent 25 years in corporate America, primarily in beer, wine, spirits—probably not a good idea for someone who liked to drink at a very young age. And with an entrepreneurial spirit, I bought a liquor store. Then, I bought more liquor stores and ran them until I ran myself into the ground.

When you have time, resources and no spirituality, you pick up habits.

I was reckless in my pursuit of wealth and pleasure. When you combine all this, you find yourself in a dark place with no hope. I didn’t look at myself in the mirror because I didn’t like who I had become. I had destroyed so many relationships. My closet was full of sin and shame. I didn’t know how to get out of the pit. I was incapable of doing it by myself.

I couldn’t imagine my life without alcohol. It was the way I made a living and took care of my family. I marketed alcohol, sold alcohol, and I am addicted to alcohol. I was paid to research ways to entice people to drink more alcohol.

As my disease grew, my health deteriorated — heart issues, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, bad liver function, esophagus issues. I was going to the ER once a week. I would drink a 12-pack, then throw up. My body was just rejecting all normal function. Then alcohol didn’t stay either. I didn’t want to eat.

I was at a point where I had no more hope. I said to the Lord, “I’m done here—I wish you could just give me back.” But the reply was, “Get up!”

I got up and was renewed with energy. I told my wife, “I’m going into recovery.”

After 48 hours of crying, talking to multiple people, trying to find out what to do with her drunk husband—even though we have insurance, resources, and we go to a big church, no one knew of a good treatment center or place to send me. That experience led my wife and I to later build a recovery ministry, one that is thriving today.

Eventually, my wife found Valley Hope through an online search. She called and spoke with Bob, who heard me in the background and said, “Is that your husband?” Knowing I had to go to treatment, I had been drinking all I could for two days and was belligerent.

Still, Bob said, “Can you get him over here? If you can’t, we’ll figure out how to get him here.”

Part Three: “You Missed the Checkout...”

It took three days to detox me. I wanted to leave, and I would say every day, “I want to go home.” My counselor, Barb, would reply, “You missed the checkout.” I heard this for seven days straight and then thought, maybe I should apply myself!

I had been blaming my dad, how I was raised. A fellow patient, who was also a Black man said, “You need to take accountability for yourself.”

He was right. He became my best friend. We got out about a week apart.

Valley Hope not only got me sober; it also led me back to God. I realize why God gave me the counselor I had—he knew I would take counseling and listen to a Black woman because she reminded me of my grandmother. I respected her. Barb was a pastor.

Everyone at Valley Hope cares.

One of the most painful parts of my treatment was realizing no one told me they loved me for six months prior to treatment. The first person who said the words during that time was Barb.

I won't forget it. That gave me hope. I came to Valley Hope with no hope, and they gave me empathy and education, which revived my hope. Their love and caring fed my soul and helped me apply myself. And - they appointed me mayor of the facility.

Part Four: "Still, I stayed sober..."

When I left Valley Hope, I was 31 days sober and still owned liquor stores.

I went back to working 60 hours a week. The companies I worked with spent hundreds of millions of dollars to figure out ways to make people drink more of the products we were selling. Still, I stayed sober.

I kept those stores for five years. I had boundaries. I had a guy who was a taster. I told everyone I was in recovery and not to offer me drinks. I said, "If I ask you for a drink, call my wife and check me back into Valley Hope." I had to end some relationships. I remember being in the gym a year out, thinking, this Christian sober life sucks!

As I prayed someone said, "Hey man, are you praying?" He was a pastor at the church I attend. From there, for two years, every morning, I read the Bible, and we would fellowship and work out. God met my needs. He gave me a needed friend.

"If I veer off, if my behavior and attitude are off, I examine what I'm missing—whether it's mediation, focus, my prayers, my body routines."

Ervin L.

Alcohol Was My Livelihood, Then It Broke Me

I was on the liquor store board, and no one thought I would be able to stay sober. But I did. I was going to sell the stores and buy dry cleaners instead, but my wife said, “You don’t even like to do your own laundry!”

Then, God directed me to Psalms 46:10: “Be still and know that I’m God.”

So, I began to focus on building a recovery ministry: being the voice of addiction, removing the stigma, teaching people it is a disease, and being the conduit to the help available out there.

The first step is humbling— to come to the realization that you cannot do it yourself. It is not within yourself to get sober. You’re going to need help. I knew I needed to stop drinking. What’s the optics of that though? Practically through people and supernaturally through God. People say, “Surrender.” I say, “Humble yourself to be able to surrender.”

I was in seminary and telling my professor some things I did while drinking and he said, “I could never do that.”

I said, “You can’t say that until you’re in that position. You don’t know what you will do. Show empathy and love.” He apologized to me when he thought about it. As long as you keep drinking, there is a chance you will cross that threshold.

When I stopped drinking, I changed my diet and started working out six days a week. All my numbers were normal a year later. I’m seven and a half years sober. Healing is daily. I have my rhythm of living that I don’t get out of. I fight for that every day. If I veer off, if my behavior and attitude are off, I examine what I’m missing—whether it’s meditation, focus, my prayers, my body routines.

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Today, I have devoted my life to shining a light for those who struggle with the darkness of addiction and depression. My recovery is fueled by my “spiritual sobriety kit,” which includes physical exercise, prayer, and writing about the truth from God’s Word.

Ervin L. is a marketing executive and the owner of a successful chain of retail liquor stores. After overcoming his battle with alcoholism, he founded Hampton Ministries, which aims to help those who suffer from addiction. He is now proudly working as a spiritual coach and consultant for Fortune 500 executives, leaders, and pastors. He and his wife are currently residing in their home in Dallas, Texas.

5

Susan C. ///
You Are Priceless.
So Is Your Recovery.



*"People say, "You don't look like an addict."
What are we supposed to look like? I look exactly
like an alcoholic..."*

Part One: “I was like a duck to water ...”

My dad was a professor at University of Kansas. Mom was a homemaker and one of the most amazing people. I would come home, and she would make a sandwich, read, tuck us in. She was our world.

It was a beautiful childhood.

Then Mom got sick. That’s when everything changed.

My grandmother said if I “prayed hard enough,” Mom would get better. All these things reinforced I had to be a perfect, good girl—but Mom still died when I was ten. She was in and out of the hospital with cancer treatment, which was pretty archaic.

They left me in the dark, saying if I prayed, she would get better.

She didn’t and she was just gone. Trauma was now my thing.

I didn’t want to go to school, but I was supposed to act like things were normal.

Minimizing it made a huge impact on me. Shoving everything down.

A classmate asked, “What’s it like to have your mother die?” I just burst into tears.

My dad remarried and she was everything Mom was not—cold, narcissistic.

I always loved my drinks. Always drank more than friends. Always stayed out when they were ready to go home. There were red flags in my behavior. I was primed.

I started drinking when I was sixteen. Had a great group of friends.

That sense of anxiety and uncertainty quieted down, so I thought it was “me” coming out. It was like a duck to water. This makes me, me, but better. We are designed to protect ourselves.

I know addiction is a disease. My brain is wired differently. It flips a switch and I want to keep drinking until I black out or pass out.

Part Two: “I thought I was so unbelievably clever...”

I was a functional alcoholic for many years, holding it together. My ex worked sometimes, but a lot of our marriage, he was unemployed, watching Netflix on the couch.

He had a severe bingeing problem. Alcohol, porn, cocaine, gambling. He was pushing everything off on me. I had amazing friends, and close to my sister. He had created such a gulf between me and my loved ones. He was chipping away at my self-esteem. I was on eggshells every day, doubting myself. I was so broken down by him but didn’t know it.

I found an AA meeting close to where we lived a year before I got help. I was “kind of” honest. Wonderful people with open arms. Meanwhile, I was continuing to drink more and more. The home became more toxic. Three months before I removed him from the house, I was drinking all the time. I hid booze around the house. He would find it and post on social media, call my family.

He started to become physical, clocking in at 6’5” and almost 300 pounds. I knew I was in trouble. I had the sheriff remove him. Then though I thought this would be done with the divorce. He began cyberstalking me, ran up close to \$100,000 in debt. When one thing would be resolved, three more things would come up.

I defaulted to my safe zone, numbing it, blocking it out. The last several weeks, I was drinking 24/7.

This led to a DUI. I was taught, nothing's a big deal, go forward. I knew by drinking 24/7, something was strategically fucked up, but then the voice would go, you're fine.

My sister was so tenacious, she knew I was in deep trouble. She found out about the DUI. She called me out, talked to my parents.

I was in treatment, a second detox. I was so sick. I couldn't stop shaking. My sister called and said, "Dad's paying for you to stay."

All I could think was, how can I get around this to keep drinking? I can't stop. They can't take that from me. That was the prevalent thought in my mind. I told her I would go.

Then, everything changed.

That moment was the shift. My higher power, who I thought had given up on me, was keeping me around. My sister forced my hand. I would not have gone, no question. I would be dead. I was having so many health issues. I was going to get on the highway. I was so drunk, I could have killed someone. I had acute pancreatitis. I was vomiting blood every day before I went to treatment. I had torn my stomach doing such severe damage with straight vodka most of the time.

I was a beer and wine girl, but vodka was cheap and clear. I could put it in water bottles. I thought I was so unbelievably clever. An old drunk's trick! Until you're slurring and stumbling. When you drink heavily, your breath becomes sweet. You get rid of that sugar alcohol through your breath and perspiration. I got a DUI and I had a pizza in the oven and almost burned my house down, but I'm fine! I need another drink please!

It took a long time to take away the power from alcohol. I did have a brief relapse.

A day came six or seven months into my sobriety, I realized mid-morning that I didn't think about drinking yet. I literally broke down. I didn't think about drinking until I had been up for a couple of hours. I realized I was starting to heal and believed I could get through this with continued diligence and attending to my recovery every day.

Part Three: "You're in treatment, girl..."

A few days into treatment at Valley Hope, I was "happy Susan." I'm fine, I'm fine!

I joined a women's therapy group, and this one gal literally hated my guts—she would shoot daggers. Everyone likes me, my whole life, and now I understand. Part of it was my perfect image. The leader asked her to share, and she looked straight at me and said, "She's pissing me off. Walking around like everything's fine. You're in treatment, girl." She lit into me. I sat and stared, and then, I started to cry.

That was my changing point. That young woman had the guts to talk about her addiction. Everything's not shiny and pretty. Everything then kind of fell into place—I didn't have to fake it anymore.

Valley Hope included a mixture of classroom learning. I'm a big WHY person. They explained the why. I didn't learn it all first day, first week. A multitude of counselors, guest speakers, would break down the science of addiction and what happens to our bodies. Why we can't say no. They would break down what alcohol does to us.

In combination, we're attending one on one therapy, group therapy, delving into behaviors. Ultimately for most people, it's a coping mechanism, a numbing process. It begins with, "I'm more social and engaged with alcohol," but then it's a test, a friend who's upset with me, bad workday—bottle of wine.

With drinking, we are numbing the emotions and shutting down the responses to stressors.

What the recovery process entails is learning how to emote, how to identify emotions. This is stressing me out, so I need to breathe, process, cry, express. Now I cry every single day. I love it!

During treatment I benefitted from the well-rounded approach: It's not your fault. It's not that we actively make these decisions. We're not bad people.

We followed the steps of AA, but also were supported by people's stories who had been successful at recovery for a year, five years, ten.

Today, I refer to myself as a "drunk" because it keeps me grounded and aware. It's not a pretty word. That's the dirty guy in the alley with the brown paper bag.

Taking the power of addiction away is like learning to walk again. Just from the numbers of people I've known, unaddressed trauma is such a common factor in people who end up developing full-blown addiction. It allows you to escape and that feels good. Our brains as addicts are wired differently. That becomes reinforced in a different way. It's faster, easier to seek out that reward, peace. Learning how to live without addictive substances is basically restructuring everything you know. Some are so deeply involved; it's intertwined like their eye color. You can't separate it, so it's having to go minute by minute. All I could think about was drinking. Then I started to have to do the hard work.

We all think, no one is like me! But we are all the same. At Valley Hope, the people I worked with affirmed to me someone else has experienced this. Knowing these people who are so bright and inspirational were where I was at that moment, here they are talking, teaching, motivating. Having the counselors and staff be alcoholics is one of the things that led me to think this might work for me. They walked the walk.

"It's been an indescribable journey from the day I got sober; the path that my life has followed – you can't make it up."

Susan C.

You Are Priceless. So Is Your Recovery.

I have had an amazing support system almost from day one, and that's not common. I'm incredibly fortunate and blessed to have had that, and to continue to have it. The foundation for my recovery I received at Valley Hope has been life-changing and absolutely lifesaving. I couldn't fully surrender to my alcoholism initially. It took quite some time, but the staff and counselors at Valley Hope stressed the importance of continuing to try. Once I was able to understand and accept that I was, indeed, an alcoholic, I was able to start putting what I was learning into practice.

I'm still learning. I'm still working to better myself in every area of my life.



Part Four: “A life more beautiful, more fulfilling, more amazing than I ever could have imagined...”

I’ve been in recovery for nine years. People say, “You don’t look like an addict.”

What are we supposed to look like? I look exactly like an alcoholic.

Sobriety has introduced me to my authentic self. I realized several years ago not only did I not want to drink, but more importantly, I didn’t need to. I no longer need that social lubrication, that liquid courage, that numbing. It’s taken a lot of time, and I’m still learning, but it’s immense in how freeing it is to not need it anymore.

Sobriety has improved my life in every way: in my relationships with my loved ones, in the work I do, in how I focus on gratitude in all I have and experience, and most importantly, in my relationship with myself and my Higher Power. It’s helped me find courage I didn’t know I had. It’s shown me a life I could have never imagined. It’s helped me know I don’t need to be afraid, because I can face anything. I’m not alone.

My sobriety is the most important thing in my life. Because of it, I have a life more beautiful, more fulfilling, more amazing than I ever could have imagined. Without it, I have nothing: maybe I wouldn’t lose everything right away, but I would eventually. I know where that road will lead sooner or later.

I have relationships that are authentic and genuine. I’m present with the people I love. I don’t second-guess myself as much, and I’m quicker to say what’s on my mind, especially if it’s something good, but also if it’s a tough conversation. I understand the impermanence of this life, and how precious each moment is, and each person in my orbit.

I let them know that. Every single day.

Remember you are not alone in this, though it feels like no one could ever have experienced what you're experiencing. The isolation and desperation of full-blown addiction are crippling, both mentally and physically. Reach out to people in recovery. Listen to them. Learn from them. Realize each of us has our own past and our own story, and most have been grueling and ugly. Believe if we did it, you can too.

Know you are worth it.



Susan C. is a writer, speaker, podcaster, and recovery advocate. She is the author of The Optimistic Drunk and host of The Optimistic Drunk podcast.

6

TARA G. ///
HEALING FROM PAIN
MANAGEMENT



*"I was nervous going, but everyone is there
with a common purpose: healing..."*

Part One: “I have blocks of time I don’t remember...”

I didn’t really want to be on opioids, but my pain level was so high from back surgery. One day, I was at work doing something and the next, fell down the stairs and reinjured my back. Within a week, I had blown my back out because of a walking boot.

If you’ve been in a walking boot, it makes your balance off and you walk Frankensteinish. Your shoes aren’t level. That finished me off. Extreme pain. Couldn’t sit. I had to work from home lying in bed and fighting with insurance to get a surgery we compromised on.

They did a microdiscectomy after four months instead of a fusion, which the surgeon wanted to do. I think because I didn’t get surgery right away, this contributed to my body’s need for more pain medication. I was on Percocet that whole time. Then liquid hydrocodone, which is the only thing that worked ultimately.

I have blocks of time I don’t remember. I started drinking when I was sixteen. Had a great group of friends.

That sense of anxiety and uncertainty quieted down, so I thought it was “me” coming out. It was like a duck to water. This makes me, me, but better. We are designed to protect ourselves.

I know addiction is a disease. My brain is wired differently. It flips a switch and I want to keep drinking until I black out or pass out.

Part Two: “The bigger loss would have been my life...”

Around Thanksgiving of 2018, I thought, I need to start weening myself off.

Since I had already been through this before, this will be a piece of cake. My previous surgery, I had no trouble at all. They did prescribe Percocet then. I wasn't on it for nearly as long. Then trying to come off of it, I threw up so much. When I was throwing up for five days straight, my brain was asking for outside help. I could actually die going through withdrawal. I was in contact with my doctor the whole time. He and his nurse were cautious about how much of this medicine I was on, and I had been on the liquid before.

My doctor recommended me to receive medically monitored detoxification at Valley Hope.

My employer kept calling me to fully get back to work, so I told HR the truth: I have a chemical dependency and I need to detox somewhere safe or die. This helped my situation, plus my doctor wrote a letter that I was not getting better. I do not blame my doctor at all. He's still my primary care doctor today.

My family knew. My parents saw everything. My boyfriend at the time was supportive. I talked to my ten-year-old niece, who understood when I told her. She's very aware of this within her peer group.

Coworkers knew I was struggling. My supervisor, who was also a friend of twelve years, knew what I was fighting was not normal and she was a big help with HR's decision.

A bigger loss than my job, would have been my life.

Part Three: “You’re one of the lucky ones...”

When you arrive at treatment, they meet you where you are at – medically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually.

I was nervous going, but everyone is there with a common purpose: healing. You want free from your addiction.

What I realized during the detox process was that the drug kept telling my brain, “you need to take more now.” Once it was out of my body, I realized my pain level went from a 10+ to a 2, and that was hugely eye-opening. I wanted to understand why I went through that.

What is with opioids that makes your body desire and crave like this? A couple months later, I attended an opioid summit in Kansas. The speaker was talking about the effects on the brain, and I asked him why this happened to me. He said, it’s a weird abnormality; you’re one of the lucky ones. No explanation. I volunteered to be a part of his research in order to help others.

Treatment has to be the individual’s decision. Your family can beg and plead, but if you don’t want sobriety, it will not work. It’s day to day. For some people, it’s five minutes to five minutes, finding alternative things to do. The cravings for people are still there; it’s how you deal with it. I did not crave this crap. It screwed up my memory, changed my personality, made me overemotional, and in my line of work, you cannot be this emotional. My brain had to rewire. My body had to heal.

It’s worth it. By far, it will be the hardest thing you ever do. The point that you get to where you never need whatever you’re addicted to is worth it.

Part Four: “I constantly ask myself, what can we do?”

The county I work in has an opioid task force. This was a Bible belt-based community that thought if you struggled with addiction, you must be on Skid Row, so let natural selection run its course; They said this in front of me, so, I asked, “would you say the same thing about me?”

“No, Tara!”

“Well, you should, because THIS happened to ME.”

I use my recovery experience to open doors to help others feel comfortable talking about addiction.

In the community I grew up in, a well-respected dentist lost his son whose addiction started due to a prescription for sports injuries. His son and several teammates started using it, and two died before the age of twenty.

It is tragic stories like these – the loss of these young boys and so many others — that lead me to constantly ask myself, “what can we do?”

It’s not a socioeconomic issue. It can and does happen so easily to anybody. I’m living proof. I grew up on a farm in rural Kansas. I had a great childhood. Then, I had an injury that led to opioid addiction.

Today, I have maintained my sobriety from opiates for five years.

Having normalcy was what I wanted, and I still work to achieve that everyday.



Tara G. is Deputy Director of Emergency Management for a county in Kansas. She is also an advocate for recovery from opioid addiction.

7

Mike and Joan S. ///
For Better or Worse



"There is hope for a different life than the one you find yourself trapped in, but there is also hope for a relationship to be healed."

We're relatively public about our history and what our lives are like now. We are actively trying to carry the message and help others. In our first attempt to get sober, we were diagnosed with being "enmeshed" and we were told that we could not stay together as a couple and stay sober.

There is hope for a different life than the one you find yourself trapped in, but there is also hope for a relationship to be healed."

Part One: Joan's Story

"From there, it was a trainwreck..."

Back in my day, drinking alcohol was something your parents did. I didn't want to miss the rest of the party by being in the bathroom puking. Then, I found out with drugs, marijuana, I could party and be with the outcasts, the easiest group to join.

Later, in the 1970s, I wanted to be thin, and I wanted energy. We had three small kids, and we were both working. This was a common plight of women. Speed, black beauties, was all great for me and kept me moving. I could work fulltime and be a parent with energy.

Then at a party, I'd had a few drinks and smoked a few joints. Someone said, "Hey, you want to try this new drug that all the celebrities are doing? It keeps you thin." It was called cocaine. This was my language.

From there, it was a trainwreck.

Then I freebased, which was a less alarming way to frame using crack cocaine. I tried outpatient treatment to get off it. I knew it was bad when I told myself I didn't have to be up all night smoking this, but still chose to stay up crying all night and using.

One day, I told my daughter I would volunteer at her school to help make pumpkins. I had been up all night. I could always get the kids to school. I decided that the only way I would be clear enough that day was to walk all the way to her school in the Arizona heat. I was dripping with sweat when I arrived.

Constantly, I would think, this is crazy, I don't want to be this person!

Still, I didn't see the "problem." It took me forever to see the problem; I could not stop the cycle. I was filling up a spiritual void.

My sisters would say my father's entire family were alcoholics — I didn't know it until I was eighteen. My mother was doing pills, I didn't know it. My first marriage was very violent. Only God got me and my two children out alive.

My first rehab attempt used these as excuses for my addiction. They insisted that if I simply stayed away from cocaine, life would be great.

However, I kept smoking pot. Sooner or later, I would be smoking, drinking, and someone would hand me a bullet. I would snort and it would have me by stranglehold again.

Next, I tried treatment in Sedona with my husband Mike, who was also struggling with addiction. They wanted us to understand that we "had a beast inside of us and needed to battle it out of us." I thought that was hysterical.

We were there for two days. They told me and Mike we couldn't sit together or talk. We couldn't be a couple.

I handed Mike a note that I was escaping that night. After art class, I grabbed my bag, snuck out, and waited by the truck for Mike. When he finally met me, he said, "Why are you in a panic? I told them we're leaving. We're not in prison."

After the failed treatment attempt, I kept searching for solutions. I went to an addiction psychologist who put me on a drug. On the second week, he said, "I'm surprised you're not losing weight. Everyone loses weight on this." That triggered my mind that now I had access to another drug, and I could take four at one time for greater effect.

Soon, Mike came home from a rehab stint in Malibu, stayed clean a little bit, then relapsed. Then we tried treatment in Malibu together. The excuses for relapsing grew—my ex, my mother.

I had a list.

We went to jail at the same time. I was in there for fifteen days, but it seemed like a lifetime, laying in a bunk with 32 friends.

Jails, institutions and death. I didn't want to die.

When I was released, I entered treatment at Valley Hope the next day. There, I realized I had damaged more lives than my own.

My son wouldn't let me see the kids over the holidays. Employees, sisters, their friends. You don't realize how many people are devastated by a loved one's addiction.

At Valley Hope, Mike and I discovered the 12 steps I had to admit my addiction was not anyone else's fault. My list of excuses wasn't going to heal me.

Quickly, I got a sponsor, went to women's 12 step meetings. My husband and I attended weekly meetings together.

As we worked the program, life got better and better.

Today, in my recovery, I live a life that is truly phenomenal.

Part Two: Mike's Story

"Then I found cocaine..."

Joan had one source of cocaine and it was me.

I was eighteen when I met Joan. She was 21 with two children. We were working in the same place. She was coming to work with black eyes.

At some point, I asked her out—someone told me she was married, then someone told me she wasn't married so I asked her out again. We went out on our first date. Cutest, petite, 5'3" thing (I am 6'3") that could not quit talking on the date. I found her charming and fell in love with her.

Soon, I was a nineteen-year-old kid who believed he could conquer the world.

Joan gave me the opportunity to be that knight and shining armor. Her kids fell in love with me. She fell in love with me. I went to her ex—who used to hold a knife to her throat and scare the hell out of her—and beat him up. He never came back.

I built a business, Mike's Bikes. I felt like I was bulletproof. For the first six or seven years, we were making money and having a great life; I thought I was God's gift to fatherhood. No one had it together more than I did.

Then I found cocaine.

I was twenty-four or twenty-five years old. I had a cash register full of money, daily.

After I started using, the wonderful trips to the mountains with our kids soon dissipated.

I became the person hellbent on getting this drug every day. Joan would get the kids fed and I was stuck in a room doing cocaine. She was stuck in the middle of trying to be a good mom and dealing with this increasing addiction. I tried to vibrate my way through selling and fixing bikes after staying up all night.

We would shop for the right rehab. If they didn't let me bring my guitar, I was too good for it! If I had to sleep in a bunkbed, it wasn't good enough for me!

There came a point when there was no more business credit, no more cash, so I went to Arizona and set up a swimming pool business for a month. Joan soon followed.

There were binges. I couldn't make rent or the bills, but there was always a plan while I had coke. There were so many tricks to delay the bills.

You're always in distress financially, but you don't plan to not have a birthday gift for your son when you're father of the century, as my ego kept deluding me.

Everything had failed. It was devastating.

The feeling though is that drugs will help you get through. I would accomplish great things for months, then be at a weekend convention with industry people and take the opportunity to binge again. Binge, then work really hard to make up for it.

I would punch myself hard to bring pain to myself. I can remember lying in bed thinking of what I had just done and thought about jumping over the balcony to break my legs because I deserved the pain it would bring.

I had a lot of success in business, helped and coached a lot of people. But I kept bingeing and deluding myself. Over and over again. I recognized that if I didn't bring this poison home, I wouldn't be killing the woman I love. She did not do this when I was away.

Yet, I kept going into dangerous situations, sometimes five or six times a night, to buy “a little bit more.” The amount of delusional thinking is astonishing.

During these tragic times, Joan and I clung to each other, telling each other, “Love conquers all.”

And it did. Love for each other, love for our God, our spirituality.

We finally found recovery nineteen years ago.

Today, I have a strong spirituality in which every thought is centered on healing and helping.



Mike and Joan S. live in Arizona. Their journey to healing from addiction has already had generational impacts on their family: their oldest granddaughter is pursuing a doctorate in helping women in addiction, and, they have two grandchildren in social work.

8

CHARLES F. ///
MEETING THE
GOAL



"If I can make it so I can help one person out of the group, I will have met my goal..."

Part One: “Whenever I did it, I wanted more.”

I was a rough-tough athlete. After high school, I went to a state university in Western Kansas, played football — and was introduced to speed.

It was a lot of fun.

I got my degree and became a geologist. I would set wells in the countryside. I was doing well in the business, having discovered quite a bit of oil.

After doing speed for four years in college, I was given this white powder: cocaine.

Whenever I did it, I wanted more.

I couldn't get enough. I started a \$300-a-day habit.

In 1984, the oil crisis hit. The price went from \$36 barrel to \$8. That was severe for Western Kansas. We were on a ski trip, and I told my wife to pack up the bags, we need to go home. I knew there would be trouble, so I went into the bank who had been covering me, and they said you have ninety days to pay \$400,000. I had about \$2 million in producing oil, so you think I would be safe, but that went down to 10 cents on the barrel, which is what I had to sell it for.

I was unemployed now too.

I lost everything, which made my cocaine use go up higher.

My wife and I had three children, a nice house. She didn't worry about anything other than taking care of us. She was blissful about it all, and I didn't feel good about myself, as a person, as a father. I felt like I was ruining everything.

One night in 1987, I was out on a well sight, and with a bunch of coke, beer, valium — and a shotgun.

I planned to kill myself. I had the shotgun in my mouth.

I felt an angel telling me not to do this thing.

So, I confessed. I came home and told my wife what I had been doing. She was, of course, pissed off. She called my dad and told him to “come and get his asshole son.”

You see, for all those years, my addiction ... she didn't know.

I was able to hide it by being out of town so often.

My dad took me to Valley Hope.

Part Two: “What would be my fate?”

I had a couple of aunts who went to treatment.

One had success and the other died in her bathtub at home.

What would be my fate?

My wife stood by me, showed up for me during treatment. We are on the journey together. We've been married forty-seven years now.

Why did she not only stay but immerse herself in my treatment? She says: "I knew we were meant to be together no matter what and we would get through. I knew deep down he was a very good man."

Spurred on by her support, I went with a willing heart. My time had come. I had to do something with my life or die. They put me on medication. I couldn't take any more cocaine.

I didn't want to take anything. I was clean and free from all drugs within a week. I felt withdrawal, but it wasn't so bad.

I didn't know what living without cocaine would be. I thought it would be horrible.

It wasn't.

When I went to Valley Hope, I was happy to be at a place that would show me the correct way to live. And they did show me that. They were not judgmental.

After treatment, I attended AA meetings, spoke at schools. I started speaking about my life and doing things the right way.

We moved to Seattle, where I worked on international procurement, managing hundreds of millions of dollars, until I retired.

I traveled all over the world.

I never drank. I stayed sober.

Today, I remain engaged with Valley Hope and supporting current patients.

I'm trying to save lives.

If I can help one person, I will have met my goal.



Charles F. is retired and living soberly and happily with his wife of more than 45 years.

9

Chad F. ///
Healthy High Life



"When my chaplain said, 'I'm an alcoholic too.'? That changed everything for me...."

Part One: “I lived a charmed life ...”

I was born in 1968, raised in a small farming town in Iowa — the middle child of a mom who got pregnant at 16 and the grandson of alcoholics.

Despite that, I lived a charmed life in high school ... straight A's, quarterback of the football team, worked as a lifeguard at the pool, and played in the band.

Then, during the summer before my junior year of high school, I developed a taste for alcohol after a boozy night out with a buddy and a couple of girls we met at the pool.

Yes, I drank until I threw up that night, but still...

For the next year, I drank every weekend. In high school, we had a buyer for our beer. We would drive around and get drunk in the countryside. A couple of times, we couldn't find anyone to buy us beer. I would get agitated without the alcohol, even though I was still hanging out with friends and chasing girls. I would want to go home if there was no beer to drink.

I was drinking for the effect. I would not go to any dance or party that didn't have alcohol. I became dependent on the effect.

In high school, I got pulled over often. I was a star athlete, and the cops would just make us dump the beer. Never any consequences.

I graduated at the top of my class and went to the University of Iowa. The first weekend as a freshman, I got my first DUI. I ended up getting three more in college.

Part Two: “I would take whatever you gave me ...”

The lifestyle is exhausting because everything is centered on the alcohol. Good friends had Denver Bronco season tickets. I would turn down these tickets sometimes because these friends would watch how much I was drinking. I went out on a date with a girl who didn't drink, and that was our last date. If considered attending an event, the deciding factor was whether there would be alcohol available.

I didn't have time for people who didn't drink.

Of course, I was drinking and driving all the time. I could have killed a family. On the occasions that I happened to get arrested for drunk driving, thankfully it was before I could hurt anyone.

I spent 20 years in the restaurant industry and was constantly around alcohol. When someone didn't order alcohol with their meals, I thought something was wrong with them. Why would you not want a drink?

When I was 25, I got married my girlfriend of two months in Vegas when we were drunk. During the flight to Vegas, I took some of her Valium pills and drank a bottle of scotch. I could not stand, and I could not remember anything from that night.

Still, I liked the effect of drugs.

I tried everything. I would take whatever you gave me.

We both quit our jobs and decided to move to Vegas! One big party, right? A year later, we moved to Seattle for two years, then finally settled in Denver.

Later, in the backdrop of our marriage not doing well, I felt suicidal. I sat on the kitchen floor despondent, crying and depressed. I knew nothing about alcoholism as a disease.

They would take my happy drunk grandfather to a hospital in Sioux Falls to “dry out” for 30 days. That would last a couple of months, then he would be drunk again.

It didn’t dawn on me that I was an alcoholic.

After crumbling on the kitchen floor, I went to a therapist who asked, “Do you think your drinking has anything to do with your depression? Try not to drink for a while and see if that helps your condition.” Sounded reasonable.

For the first time, I tried to quit drinking.

A month later, my wife got pregnant and quit drinking. When our son was born, she wanted a celebratory martini.

I was not drinking, but I didn’t do anything toward recovery. Friends did support us during those months. I had this idea of designing a tasty nonalcoholic beer.

Nonalcoholic beer is for the nonalcoholic! I would order a few for the “taste” but needed to be drinking water instead.

When alcohol in any form hits an alcoholic’s bloodstream, you want more. Without a recovery program, it can only last so long.

I didn’t drink for two years, but I don’t consider myself sober at that time because as soon as I was going on a business trip to Mexico, there was talk about drinking with colleagues and I was ready.

I “deserved” a beer after not drinking.

Our regional manager always said to represent us well, not to embarrass our company.

Well, I closed the bar down with shots of tequila and four people I didn't know. I missed the next day of meetings after embarrassing coworkers all night and almost lost my job. After two and a half years of not drinking.

My bottom arrived in the fall of 2007. Living in Denver, three boys, age 6 and one-year-old twins. Major financial problems. Marriage issues.

So naturally, my ex-wife and I went out for a big binge. I made an off-hand comment about my family being better off if I were dead, they would get the life insurance.

She called my boss and told him that I was hanging from a rafter in the basement trying to kill myself. She said that she had to make it sound believable. She also called 9-1-1 and reported that I threatened to kill the entire family — shoot everybody and myself.

They took me away in an ambulance and put me on suicide watch.

A year later, at age 40, I wasn't with my kids. My little boys.

I moved to Phoenix to live with my sister, waited tables, partied with twenty-year-olds. I spent three months in county jail for not being able to pay child support.

The night before I went to Valley Hope, I was at a bar drinking and my plan was to drive my car into a brick wall and make it look like an accident so my kids would get my life insurance money. Apparently, I muttered this to the bartender. Suddenly, at midnight, I was surrounded by sheriff's deputies.

The bartender had called the authorities because I was speaking of self-harm. They were there for my welfare. I didn't want to call my sister or my mom, who had both dealt with my antics.

I had a moment of clarity. I told my sister that I needed help.

My mom called Valley Hope.

Part Three: “I have a purpose today that I never had ...”

I spent 28 days at Valley Hope. My big book was signed by a dozen people. Those people you meet toward your sobriety share rock bottom together. That experience “stopped the bleeding” for me.

I had a lot of shame. I didn’t realize I had a spiritual issue within my soul. I had a bad vision of myself. How come I can’t drink like other people? The only thing that gives me pleasure, peace, is alcohol?

When my chaplain said, “I’m an alcoholic too.” That changed everything for me.

It completely changed my spiritual path.

I’m so passionate about recovery. I’ve been a very active member of AA. I have served as a sponsor.

For the past decade, I have been a supervisor for a major airline. If someone is too drunk to get on an airplane, I’m the one they call to prevent them from getting on the plane. I was working in Phoenix and got called to a gate. They wouldn’t let this woman get on because she was drunk. She cried. I walked her out of security.

"She told me that tomorrow would have been her thirtieth day of sobriety. I showed her my coin to show understanding."

Chad F.

A Healthy High Life

She told me that tomorrow would have been her thirtieth day of sobriety.

I showed her my coin to show understanding.

We have a saying: "There was a God-sized hole in your soul."

You can tell when people are struggling, when people feel empty.

I have a purpose today that I never had: to help people on the path of recovery.



Chad F. lives in Phoenix and has built a career in the airline industry caring for passengers who may struggle with drugs and alcohol.

EPILOGUE



As we come to the end of this collection of recovery stories, it is clear that the journey through addiction and into recovery is one of transformation, courage, and hope. Each story shared in this book is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the profound capacity we all have for change.

Recovery is not a destination—it is a continuous process, a commitment to growth, and a celebration of life's possibilities. The individuals whose voices fill these pages remind us that even in the darkest moments, there is a spark of hope waiting to be ignited. Through their honesty and vulnerability, they've shown us that healing is not just about overcoming addiction—it's about rediscovering joy, connection, and purpose.

For those who are still in the depths of their struggle, let these stories serve as a beacon of possibility. Recovery is not easy, but it is always worth it. The challenges along the way may seem insurmountable at times, but as the individuals in this book have proven, the rewards—freedom, self-discovery, and a renewed sense of self—are immeasurable.

To the families, friends, and communities of those in recovery, these stories are a reminder of the power of love and support. Recovery is rarely a solo journey, and the role of a compassionate, understanding network cannot be overstated. Together, we can create environments where healing is nurtured, not judged; where hope flourishes, not fades.

Finally, to those who have shared their stories here: thank you. Your courage to speak your truth has the power to inspire others, to reduce the stigma of addiction, and to create a world where asking for help is seen as a strength, not a weakness. Your journeys are proof that recovery is possible, and your words will continue to echo in the hearts of readers long after they close this book.

As we part ways here, remember this: recovery is a deeply personal path, but it is also a shared experience that connects us all. Each step taken, each story told, and each life reclaimed is a victory that deserves to be celebrated. May this book stand as a reminder that no one is ever alone, and that there is always hope—even in the hardest moments.



Valley Hope has provided effective, compassionate care to people, families and communities impacted by drug and alcohol addiction since 1967.

A national leader in SUD treatment and recovery support, Valley Hope has 14 treatment centers across the United States, including full continuums of addiction care in Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Texas.

For Help 24/7:

**Call (833) 230-4673
Visit ValleyHope.org**

"What would be my fate?"

Step into the inspiring journeys of those who have walked the path of addiction and emerged stronger, braver, and full of hope. Voices of Hope is a heartfelt anthology that brings together the real-life stories of individuals who faced the challenges of addiction, embraced recovery, and reclaimed their lives.

Through raw honesty, courage, and triumph, these alumni of Valley Hope share their struggles, breakthroughs, and the lessons they've learned along the way. Each story is a testament to the strength of the human spirit and the power of community, connection, and healing.

From tales of hitting rock bottom to finding the spark of hope, Voices of Hope celebrates the resilience of those who have chosen recovery and illuminates the profound impact of transformation. Whether you're seeking inspiration, encouragement, or a deeper understanding of addiction and recovery, this collection will move and empower you.

These stories aren't just about overcoming addiction — they're about rediscovering life, love, and purpose. Voices of Hope reminds us that no matter how dark the road may seem, there is always a way forward.

Perfect for anyone touched by addiction, recovery, or the power of the human spirit.

