

Beyond Rock Bottom

Climbing Our Way Out Of Addiction

**Patty Smith
&
Grayson Smith**

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Dedicated to Alice and Don Nelson (parents and grandparents). You have always modeled a life of health and balance.

Always reminding us to make time for fun.

Thanks for supporting our dreams.

This mother-son story will shock, entertain, and enlighten you. It's our separate journey of recovery, our struggles, and our answers. We open our world. You'll see how we each overcame addiction and co-addiction. We trust you can relate to our story in some way.

Desperately trying to find relief from the pain of addiction, we knew little of each other's turmoil, only our own heartache. Trying to manage anxiety dominated our lives. We struggled. In our own way and in our own time, however, we found answers that led to freedom from compulsive thinking and living. Breaking addiction's hold makes for a rocky story. We present it here, raw and uncut, and you have a front row seat.

Grayson Smith

Grayson lives with his dog, Lady, in Salt Lake City where he works construction. He is attending school and will pursue a civil engineering degree from the University of Utah. He stays busy climbing, skiing, and is active in AA.

Patty Smith

Patty is married to Buddy Smith. They live in Columbia, South Carolina, where they raised three kids. Patty is involved in Al-Aon and other 12-step groups. She is a health coach, having received her training from IIN (Institute for Integrative Nutrition). She will be a first-time grandma this summer.

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Out of the lowest depths there is a path to the loftiest heights.

—Thomas Carlyle
Scottish Philosopher, 19th Century

Introduction

Our journey. The addict and the co-addict. He is my son and I am his mother. This is our separate journey to a world of health and freedom. We will each tell of our account of what it was like, what happened for us to want to change and what life is like now.

Grayson started drinking cough medicine at 14 years old and by the time he was 15 he was taking pills, drinking, and smoking pot. I was at my wits end trying to figure out what was wrong and how to fix it. His drug use increased rapidly and I'll never forget his phone call after what could have been a fatal car wreck.

We tried all kinds of things to help him: therapist, changing schools, self-help books, and stricter rules but things only got worse. I got worse, consumed by awful thoughts of "what ifs."

We sent him to rehab and then watched him move out West at 20. I began to let go of him as my attention shifted to the needs of our middle son, also battling addiction. Our family was falling apart and I learned I was powerless over addiction.

In my desperate search for answers I began to see what recovery for me would take. I walked back in on myself and took control of my life and, in time, began to heal. Grayson in his own journey and desperation eventually found recovery for himself. Be assured that writing this paragraph of sixty-six words, however, doesn't begin to convey the heartache, frustration, and struggle.

Our lives became unmanageable and at different points we surrendered to God and applied the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Today, we both enjoy the freedom that recovery brings. I live my life and recovery and he lives his life and recovery. Separately, we pursue physical, emotional and spiritual health. We do this one day at a time.

Taking Account Of Things (Grayson)

Ever since I can remember I didn't fit in. Something was missing inside me. It was not obvious so I never thought I should mention it to anyone. Or maybe it was because my family didn't talk about emotions or show a lot of affection towards each other. For whatever reason I was broken and it was up to me to fix it.

The first time I got drunk my problems were fixed. I could talk to girls and joke around with other guys. I was a better athlete and felt much more fit when I was drunk or high. My hair looked better. Drugs and alcohol were the solution to my problems. They put the color into my black and white world. I continued to search for better answers until I was a textbook heroin junky. I got really good at doing things I didn't want to do. Being dope sick was a normal part of my life.

At some point my greatest asset turned against me. I was in a lot of debt, I was sick; I smoked pot like other people smoke cigarettes. I drank all day. I was a nervous wreck. I had tried everything and nothing seemed to work. I had a solid 6 mg of Xanax dependency on top of countless other addictions. That one scared me the most. I knew withdrawals could kill me, especially combined with the alcohol withdrawals. I wanted to stop at this point it was far too late for me to accomplish that feat on my own.

I lost all the jobs I cared about. Somehow I managed to get hired on ski patrol at Mammoth Lakes. I also worked a few outdoor education contracts for a school in Santa Monica. During these trips I was responsible for the safety and well being of a dozen high school kids in the wilderness. The truth is the only thing I was responsible for was making sure I picked up enough heroin and cocaine to last me through those trips. No one had a clue, I'm sure they thought I drank too much sometimes but cocaine and heroin? That is crazy. I was crazy and so full of shit.

I hung on to heroin and cocaine as long as I possibly could. While in college I started to grow and sell pot so I had a way to support such an expensive habit. Usually \$100 a day on and off for five years. When I ran out of heroin I would try to shoot up Benadryl, vodka, that black crumb that sort of smells like heroin. I was addicted to the needle.

I got arrested for selling a couple grams of hash to an undercover agent. That was it for me. I was doped up at the time and didn't think too much of it. My girlfriend leaving me, getting kicked out of my house, and my dog dying had really raised my tolerance for emotional pain.

When it finally registered in my drug-addled brain what was about to happen—prison for three years—I was ready to take other peoples' advice. Maybe I didn't know everything. It became clear to me then that all these problems were of my own making and I needed help. Like treatment. I wanted to go now. I was desperate and I would do anything.

I went to a wilderness therapy program that began the greatest transformation of my life. It is surreal to write about it. One day I have \$9,000 debt, no friends, totaled car, no girl, and I'm so sick I think I will die. Now that debt is gone, I have a nice truck. I pay my rent easily. I buy whatever I want at the grocery store. I am dating a pretty lady who has been sober a number of years. Recovery didn't bring my dog back to life but it has transformed every aspect of my life far quicker than I could imagine. I bought shoes the other day. That's a big deal to a junky like me. I didn't have to think for hours about whether I would regret spending that money when I needed "a bag." I just bought the shoes. I don't even need them. I just like them. I now enjoy doing things I was certain I hated.

None of this compares to the change that happened inside me. Spirituality was something I was after and tried so many approaches to finding. Why didn't I ever try the 12 steps mentioned in Alcoholics Anonymous? Because I thought I was smarter than that perhaps. Working the 12 steps with a sponsor changed everything for me. I can meditate. It wasn't that I didn't know how. I just couldn't. I make decisions today and I don't need to lock myself in my room and "think" about my options and the rippling effect of even my tiniest decisions. I was shown a new way of living and I'm excited. I get excited writing about it and talking about it. I didn't believe in miracles, never have. We have science to explain that.

Someone suggested I look for "coincidences." There are an overwhelming number of coincidences in my life. Recovery has done for me what drugs and alcohol used to. I am convinced that I will never have to take another drug or drink as long as I continue to grow spiritually.

Grayson—Childhood Trauma

There was something about me that was different than everyone else. I was gross. I was slow. I was awkward. Deep inside, I always knew this. I tried my best to forget it and at times I was really close to forgetting the darkest moments in my life. No matter how much I drank or used I could not completely wipe my memory clean of the filth that was imbedded in who I was.

We are as sick as our secrets. When I was about ten years old a family friend molested me. He was 16 years old and I thought he was so cool. He played football and had a lot of friends. He also paid me attention and would hang out with me after school. It made me feel special that he wanted to hang out with me. I was fat and my peers made fun of me. To have someone to hang out with who was so cool and not make fun of me was exciting.

One day we were at the pool in our apartment complex around mid morning. We were in the laundry room within the pool complex. I do not remember the whole experience and that is probably a good thing. I have heard people say kids have an ability to not remember traumatizing events in their childhood; it is a defense mechanism. I think I used mine that morning. What I do remember is Sammy's penis in my mouth. I remember being scared and confused. It felt wrong. I felt guilty. I did not want anyone to know what I had done.

It became true what everyone said about me. I was fat and clumsy. More than that, I was disgusted with myself. I shouldn't have done that. I wouldn't tell a soul about this experience until I was in my late 20s. I lived most of my life with an overwhelming sense of guilt, shame, and disgust. I absolutely hated myself for letting someone take advantage of me like that. I hated the way I looked and I hated the way I sounded. I was awkward and fat. I was sure that people could tell what I had done just by looking at me.

Drugs and alcohol temporarily relieved me from the guilt and shame that only amplified when I sobered up. This created a vicious cycle of self-hate and mental torture. I did not know how to deal with the gravity of it all. I began to tell myself that it really wasn't that big of a deal. I told myself that for years. I told myself it wasn't a big deal and I began looking for other things to blame my shame and guilt on. It was a big deal. I was only ten years old. I did not know how to stand up for myself. Especially to my coolest friend Sammy. It was not my fault. I needed to be honest with someone. I wanted to tell someone.

When I was 26, I got a therapist. She was drop-dead gorgeous and I was attracted to her. How could I tell someone I was so attracted to? I couldn't. I wanted to know if this traumatic event was causing a lot of pain. I wanted some validation. I couldn't tell her. I never told her. This was becoming unmanageable and at the time when I was seeing a therapist my drug and alcohol use was a means to live. I absolutely needed it to stay alive. I felt like it helped me breathe. It was more than just taking a little too much. I needed to drown myself. I woke up everyday feeling like shit and dreading having to be alive one more day. I drank and used in the morning before breakfast. I didn't have a choice anymore. That was a luxury long gone. I did it out of obligation. I did not even want to. The shame and guilt continued to build as I went against my word to myself and I was trapped in a dark place with no way out.

With tears in my eyes I finally told my therapist who worked at the treatment facility I went to years later. It was our first session and I didn't give a fuck. I was in a tremendous amount of pain and someone needed to hear this. I simply couldn't stand it anymore; I was going to kill myself. His response was shocking. He looked me in the eyes and told me with deep sincerity that he was honored to be trusted with this. He told me he was thrilled for me because I was in a spot where I could be honest and walk through the pain. He explained it to me like I had never thought of before. He encouraged me to share my story with other people in the group. I took his advice. Every single time I shared my experience someone in the group would say, "Me too."

The more open I was about this the more freedom I had. I could breathe again. Also, I wasn't getting high or drunk. I was just ok. It was a strange feeling at first. It was like waiting for a shock that never came. Waiting for a plane to crash that never did. Waiting for something terrible to happen but instead it was wonderful. It was counterintuitive. When I started to be honest with another man about my childhood experience I began to heal. I had been guarding a wound for so long I never let it heal. I tried to cover it up and it got infected until it almost killed me. The healing and growth that followed after being honest was quick and magical. I am not ashamed of my story any more. It is just a part of who I am and I know there are

so many people that have a similar experience who would benefit from being open and honest about it.



Patty—Walking Miles

As a young girl, I walked all the time. Walking the many hills of my suburban Atlanta neighborhood was refreshing. Donning my sneakers, I hit the asphalt. Never knowing which street I might choose or how long it would be, I just walked. I gazed at all the tall southern pines and large magnolia trees, looking up at the sky and soaking in the sunlight. Once, I picked roses from a neighbor's bushes as I walked by. Letting go of life's problems as I moved and gained a new perspective as I breathed. When walking, I had many conversations with God. We discussed all kinds of things, me sharing my hopes and dreams, struggles, and disappointments. Him giving me hope and reassurance, knowing He is sovereign and always good. I relied on this relationship to give fulfillment and purpose. Finding answers to my questions and direction when I lacked clarity.

Today I continue walking and absorbing all the elements of nature (I'm a professed tree hugger) while conversing with God.

He meets me where I am and fills up my soul.

I tried, for a while, to have my needs met in family, only to be left empty and disappointed. God is my source of fulfillment and strength, helping me to be ok when things or people around me are not ok. He is my all in all and He is enough and I was going to need Him in the worst way.



Grayson—First Drink

The first few times I got drunk it was clear I had a problem. I knew well before I took the first drink why I was going to drink. Because I wanted to get drunk. I knew it would make me feel like a rock star. I knew it was the solution to my problems before I even tried it. My mind was made up a long time before I experienced the first drink. I think I was 14 years old and my friend's older brother hid some gin in the woods behind his house. It was in a 20-ounce water bottle.

One Friday after school my two friends and I were going to find it and pass it around a few times. This was my chance to fix the way I felt. I was so excited and it was all I thought about at school. I simply couldn't wait for class to be over so I could feel great. I knew it was going to be amazing. I was not patient. I was eager to find this water bottle and my friends knew I was excited. I was in a hurry but they didn't seem to be in such a rush. They lingered after class and I wanted to run home.

We got to my friends house and started our journey. We were walking casually to find this bottle that we hoped to find somewhere near a tree in the woods. I was out front walking much faster than the rest. I had a plan. I was going to drink all of it so I tried to make sure I was in a position to do so. I knew they would be mad at me but I didn't care. I would be drunk and nothing would matter.

Finally my friends shouted, "It's over there." Without missing a beat I ran over to the bottle opened it up and chugged all of it. I drank it so fast I didn't have time to throw up. I had been practicing in my mind how quickly I was going to drink it. I threw the empty bottle down and my friends started yelling at me. I didn't care; it felt like I drank a bottle of hair spray. I leaned over and let the saliva flow out of my mouth. I was fighting back the urge to vomit with all my might. My stomach was upset and did not want all that warm gin in it. My mind won that battle. I kept all the warm gin down and waited for the effects. They were almost immediate. I didn't give a fuck about anything. I was talkative and energetic. I was slim and attractive. We were planning on going to a party at this popular girl's house and I couldn't wait. I was sure I would be more popular because I was drunk and fun to be around. I don't think it worked out like that though. My friends had to babysit me to make sure I didn't say anything dumb or hurt myself. They were successful in the latter but I said tons of dumb shit and looked like a fool. We got back to my friend's house and I continued to be obnoxious. I peed on his floor and passed out right next to my puddle of urine. My friends were upset with

me but I was in love. I had found my cure. Needless to say, this was only the beginning of peeing on floors, irritating my friends, and having others manage my life. I didn't see any of that in the beginning. It was all glorious. I didn't need friends like I thought I needed alcohol.

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Patty's Idol

When I was a little girl, I idolized Julie Andrews. I wanted to be her. I owned her record albums, "The Sound of Music" and "Mary Poppins." I would dance and sing all around the living room. The album covers were full of pictures relating to every song and I spent hours lost in make-believe. So, when I grew up and had kids of my own, naturally I believed they should be like the Von Trapp children or the Banks children. We would sing and dance our troubles away—Not. My vision of going on hikes through the meadow with a guitar in tow quickly evaporated in the world of reality. "I'm tired, I'm hungry," replaced the jovial laughter of my fantasy kids.

I did not give up. We went to the park a lot. And I substituted McDonald's playground for the Swiss Alps.

I bought lots of books just to quickly have them replaced by Game Boy. I put a lot of stock in being a Mary Poppins kind of mom but I was losing.

Middle school took my kids away even further. They began experimenting with drugs and alcohol. Sneaking out of the house at the wee hours of the night was common.

This is not how it's supposed to be. This is not according to plan.

Prayer and journaling became a common practice for me. Crying out to God, "God help." was often all I could express. Exasperated and weary, I plugged away. Learning a whole new skill set of administering drug tests in my kitchen. This is not normal, is it? What happened? Disney did not play out in my world.

Life was hard and I labored to breathe. My kids were going downhill fast. My sadness and heartache were unbearable. I remember walking into church after Grayson's car wreck and panning the sanctuary, looking for someone to confide in, someone safe to tell all I was going through, someone who would understand. I finally found someone to talk to who was understanding but the truth is they didn't really understand.

I always felt lost and hurting right in the middle of church. I could hardly think straight and struggled to continue my daily duties. What in the world was I going to cook for dinner? I was often paralyzed. In my pain with no one to comfort me, I learned, years later that God would be that comfort, deep in my soul, and I learned to be ok when those around me were not ok.

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Car Wreck—Grayson

It was the first time I was in a car that flipped over. I was almost 16 years old and I did not know it was the first of many wrecks to come. I was almost a freshman in high school and I could not wait to have access to guns, drugs, sex and my own money. Something inside me felt like I needed an advantage over everyone else. Something about me made me different and I wanted to be one step ahead of the rest of the world. Drugs, alcohol, money, and women were going to be the answer. The first time I bought weed I spent \$40 dollars. The second time I spent \$400. There was a direct correlation between how much pot I had and how many people wanted to hang out with me. I figured it out. If I had more drugs I'd have more friends. This was part of my advantage over you.

My dad let me drive his Acura RL 3.5 when I got my learners permit. It was black. I couldn't wait to put rims on it. I had plans for a sound system and many other additions that would make people want to hang out with me. I was certain my life was boring and no one wanted to be around me as is, so I needed to spice things up a bit.

It was so exciting to sneak out and go to parties with high school dropouts and others who were affiliated

with gangs. I wanted a gun badly. I had started selling pot to my friends and felt like this was going to be the key to my happiness. I had “mentors” who taught me all about getting high and how to buy and sell drugs. My spare time was spent on Erowid or other websites that were a cyber encyclopedia for everything related to drugs. I had found my bible and I was obsessed. I wanted nothing to do with you if you were not going to get high with me, and I was certain no one wanted to be around me unless I had access to said drugs.

One of the mentors, Brad, had endless amounts of Xanax and painkillers. He would meet me and sell me as many of his pills as I wanted for \$5 a piece. These were just for me. I wasn't going to sell any of these; they were too precious to me and would remain my biggest asset for years to come. Brad used to take me to parties with college-aged kids and other high school dropouts. Brad had a gun.

Brad knew how to fight and stuck up for me. He was one of the first people I felt like I had a relationship with. He told me how to do cocaine and how to smoke crack ... something that would be a part of my life sooner than later. Sneaking out became routine. I would take Xanax and then I would be able to relax and drink like everyone else at parties. I was one of the last people awake still drinking and smoking with fewer and fewer people to indulge with me. I would hang out with anyone at that point if you would drink all night with me.

I would drive clear across town to party with someone I hardly knew just to not be alone. One night sticks out. I went to a friend of a friend's house. I knew who these people were but I was not invited directly by the person whose house it was. I had my Xanax and painkillers and a large bag of weed, plenty enough to make friends for the night. Plus I was driving a really nice car. I struggled to make conversations and felt that I didn't belong at this party. Everyone was laughing and dancing, and it looked fake. None of them looked like I felt inside. Lost.

As the night dragged on I continued to drink and smoke cigarette after cigarette, joint after joint, pill after pill. I was told it was time to leave the party, It was around 2 a.m. and I sure as shit didn't want to go home. I hadn't reached my comfort level yet. I was certain I wouldn't be able to sleep if I went home. I met a guy everyone called “Snow” because of his gang affiliation and he was white. He was a loser. He was 17 and a high school dropout. He told me he knew a party but it was kind of far away. No problem I said, I can drive. Thank God I didn't need to home.

We drove for about 45 minutes. I had to get gas. We were in unpopulated farmland in South Carolina. Everything was very spread out. As the road kept unwinding I began to relax more into the leather seat of my dad's car. Snow didn't have a license so I had to drive. I finally felt stoned and drunk and my eyes got heavy. I couldn't keep them open as hard as I tried. I would catch myself nodding out behind the wheel and it would scare me awake for a few minutes before it happened again. We stopped at a run-down countryside gas station run by an old lady who looked like she hadn't slept for days. Snow didn't have any money for gas. He didn't have anything to offer.

Why was I hanging out with this loser? What the hell am I doing an hour away from home? What the fuck are my parents going to think when they wake up and realize I'm not home? I will figure something out; right now I just need gas. I filled up my tank and got behind the wheel again. I was sure I was more awake now. I was wrong. I fell asleep behind the wheel at the gas station and apparently so did Snow because he didn't say anything. When I woke up I told him he had to drive that I was too tired and fucked up. Snow assured me he was fine to drive. As soon as I buckled my seat belt in the passenger seat of Dad's car I let the Benzo-alcohol blanket take me. I was in a comfortable coma only to be rudely awakened by a violent swerve that pumped adrenaline into every part of my body and then glass. Lots of glass. And then what I thought was smoke, but it was the powder from the airbags. I waited for pain. I knew it always came after the adrenaline. It never came. I was fine, so was Snow. We were upside down. We shimmied out of a window. No big deal. That was my first thought. I just needed a minute and I could figure out what to do. We will just flip the car over drive to Snow's place and get the windows fixed tomorrow. Perfect. We had a plan.

Flipping the car over was easier said than done. I felt strong but not strong enough to flip over the crinkled black car that my dad let me use. I was fucked, but I wouldn't realize that for at least 10 more years. OK, plan b? We could walk back to the gas station and ask someone to pull us out of the ditch, drive to Snow's, and then get the windows fixed tomorrow. This time Snow said he could help me pay for the damage. For some fucked up reason I believed, knowing that he had nothing.

We walked miles and miles in the dark to the gas station with the old lady. The sun was starting to come

up and people were beginning their Sundays. As customers rolled in we asked them if they could tow us out of a ditch. No one was willing to help us. I was hungry, starving actually. When had I eaten last? Forget about that right now. What can we do? Snow could call his parents. He called his mom. I heard her raspy cigarette voice over the phone, "What did you do, are you in jail?"

"No" he replied. Then I heard a click. Snow called her worthless. I was running out of plans. I did have a big bag of weed and a few pills left. My lifeline. The whole world could be burning down around me but if I had some Xanax and weed, it was going to be a great day. Well, plan C? Let's walk back to the car and see if we can flip it back over. It is light out now maybe it will be easier in the light. I also had a case of Budweiser in the trunk and getting drunk usually helped me to figure these sort of things out. I had no idea how severe the situation was.

We walked back to the car. My cell phone was dead thank God because I didn't want to tell anyone what just happened. That would make it seem too real. I needed to smoke some weed and figure this out. As we got closer to the car a cop passed us, then we saw him pull over next to what appeared to be a horrible wreck. There were ambulances and a fire truck as well. Holy shit. It was my dad's car. Seeing it in the light was confusing.

My brain raced back to the weed I had in my pocket. I was at a safe distance to toss it and no one would know I ever had it, but why would I throw away my lifeline when I needed it the most? I decided to keep it and tied it to the drawstrings inside my shorts. As we approached the car, I got my story straight. I was driving because Snow didn't have insurance. We were going to get breakfast early in the morning before church when a squirrel ran out in front of my car and I swerved to miss it and over-corrected and the car just flipped over.

He believed me. Oh shit, what if they look in the trunk and find the beer? Thankfully they didn't nor did they want to speak to my parents. The tow truck came and he gave me his card and told me where to go when I wanted to get some of my things out of the car. Do you need a ride asked the police officer? Shit. We do need a ride but I don't want to get in the cop car with a bag of weed. I didn't have any options at this point and I was pretty sure I was not getting arrested. He was very polite. No breathalyzer sobriety test or even the slightest suggestion that maybe I was drunk or high. I guess this is working out pretty well.

We got a ride back to Snow's house. His parents were not there and it looked like they hadn't been there for weeks. His brother was sleeping on the floor of their empty trailer with a small blanket. He said I could help myself to something to eat and a shower. He had nothing to eat and no towels or soap. I lay down on the empty floor and attempted to sleep, hopeful that when I woke up I would figure out the missing piece to this puzzle and be able to explain this to my parents in the most strategic way.

I was tired to my bones but I could not escape the situation. I was pissed off at Snow because he was home and nothing had really changed for him. I had totaled my father's car and there would be consequences.

As I lay there, I knew my parents would wonder why I wasn't at home, why I was hanging out with a high school dropout who I didn't even know his name and why the hell I was so far from home. I know they would ask if drugs or alcohol were involved. I didn't expect that a simple "no" would end that train of thought. After the phone call I had their sympathy for being in a wreck early in the morning, I told them it was scary but the police officer was nice and that no one was hurt. That's the most important thing. They would be here in about an hour. I didn't want them to see Snow; I didn't want them to come inside. I didn't want to throw away my weed and I definitely didn't want to give it to Snow. Fucking asshole.

They came to pick me up and we hugged. They said they were glad I was ok and asked again if drugs or alcohol were involved. I assured them beyond a shadow of a doubt that there were not. We went to get some things out of the car and the tow truck driver told me how lucky I was to be alive and without a scratch. Yeah whatever, how am I supposed to get the beer out of the trunk and into my father's Tahoe? I don't know how but I did it flawlessly. No one saw me get the case of beer into my father's car right at my feet.

We drove for almost an hour and they never saw it sitting right by my feet. I'm really good at this I thought. We got home and I told them I was exhausted. I managed to get the beer up to my room and on ice. I had made it. I gave myself plenty of credit for my accomplishment and would enjoy some beers to celebrate. I was in the clear. No one had a clue what I had been through last night and how drunk and high I was. My parents had no idea I was actually out partying all night and not waking up early to get breakfast before Snow and I went to church. As I lined up empty Budweiser cans along my window I was very proud of myself and

the lies I told. I was going to be great at this. Probably too good.

I had my pot under my mattress, a dozen more cold beers, a full prescription of Ambien and a few Xanax. I felt untouchable. If there is one who can ruin that feeling it is my father. At that time and most of my childhood he was very angry. I thought it was normal for dads to yell. That is just what they do. It seemed unpredictable at times. This time, I guess you could say it was predictable he would be upset, very upset.

I told my parents I was tired and needed to go to bed early. I think my father felt like he was missing a part of the story or maybe he just wanted to check on me. I thought he was going to kill me. I actually thought he was going to hurt or kill me.

He came into my room and exploded. He lost control. It was frightening to say the least. I was half drunk and in a pretty good mood and then a moment later I was terrified. The feeling of terror escalated as he saw all the empty beer cans. He immediately looked under my mattress and found my bag of weed. There was nothing I could say. I was out of lies. I was caught. I had no more plans. My father was furious and his anger was not declining. My mother was worried for the safety of her eldest son. My dad yelled and yelled. I don't even know what he said I was so terrified. I couldn't think. There was too much anger to think. I just watched. I watched him unravel.

He did not know how to handle this new information, that his oldest son was an alcoholic and a drug addict. He could not control his eldest son and that infuriated him. He proceeded to take my computer out of my room at once and asked for my cell phone. My life was over. I couldn't sneak out without a phone to call people and I couldn't do any more research about drugs without my computer. Shit. I had no more pot and no more beer. My father's anger trumps all highs. I was not feeling any more of the alcohol. And then I realized something. I was saved. I had nearly a month's prescription of Ambien. That stuff will totally remove me from my shitty reality. If I snort a couple of those I will be fine again.

My mother figured out how to calm my father down. I think. Or maybe he was just too tired to be angry anymore and had to recharge before the next event. All I wanted was for it to be dark and time for them to go to bed so I could pretend to take another shower and snort a couple Ambien. Things did not work out for me as I had hoped that night. I was caught and it was becoming clear to everyone that I had a serious problem. I did not think that I would be in a treatment center soon but I did know it would take a lot more than something like that to make me want to change. I was just getting started and had big plans for myself.

§

God Hears Patty's Prayer

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SEP

I prided myself in being a good mother, why was my son so unhappy? He was smoking pot and drinking and hanging out with guys who were going nowhere. He had changed and I was worried.

We tried everything to get him to stop. We hoped church youth group, restriction, positive reinforcement, or therapy would do the trick. The therapist said he was a well-adjusted kid. (He was quite good at telling people what they wanted to hear). Nothing helped, he only pulled away more.

While experiencing great pain and desperation I prayed to God, crying out for Him to get my son's attention, do whatever it takes, but keep him safe.

And that's exactly what happened, he was in a terrible car wreck and came away from it without a scratch. Surely this will get his attention. We drove far to pick him up and stopped by the mechanic's to see the totaled car and let Grayson retrieve his school backpack.

That evening, thinking he was up in his bedroom, grateful to be alive and rethinking his current lifestyle, he was drinking beers he had smuggled home from the back of the wrecked car. My husband heard noise from his bedroom and went to check on the poor guy. When he saw him guzzling beers, he flipped out. In his anger, my husband started to remove everything from my son's room. We were at a loss in our desperate state.

We searched the Internet for treatment centers and found one in Arkansas. Our hope was renewed. Finally, something to save my son. We packed up and left within a few days.

Grayson begged us to give him another chance and did not want or need treatment.

Stopping off in Atlanta on our way he nabbed some Hydrocodone from my mom's medicine cabinet and took them the remainder of the trip. He took so much that it made him sick to his stomach. I thought he had a stomach bug. I had much to learn about addiction. And thinking I knew a lot about my son, the staff at the rehab said I only knew the tip of the iceberg. How can that be?

I will never forget dropping him off at Capstone. After we get him checked in, Grayson tells me he does not want any formal goodbye. So, I walk out of the office of the treatment center and leave my 16 year old with total strangers, putting all my hope in them to fix my son.

As soon as the door shut behind me I broke down crying. I was overcome with a sense of relief and sadness. At least I was leaving him in a strange place where I knew he would be safe for the next three months.

After arriving home and waiting a few weeks we get the coveted phone call from Capstone when I get to hear from my son. We had just entertained company for dinner and I was holding on to a wine bottle with a small amount inside. I took the call from Grayson and he sounded horrible. I was devastated and overcome with grief. I hung up the phone and clung to the bottle of wine, frozen in pain. "What if he never gets better? What if he never loves you?" These were questions I was asking God while I was slumped in the couch clinging to the remainder of wine. In my devastation I vowed to God to fast and pray in hopes to get the answers to my questions. So, the following day I did just that and in my petitioning I heard from God that I can experience peace and even joy regardless of Grayson getting better. I can experience a supernatural peace and joy regardless of my circumstances. This was a life-changing moment for me. I still had great sadness and grief but I also had hope. Hope for myself finding healing from the pain.

§

PC Mom

My son was in rehab and I still had two middle school children at home and a husband to feed and care for. I was overwhelmed with my circumstances.

While visiting the beaches of South Carolina, I noticed a family with adult children playing bocce ball. Watching them joke and interact with one another left me longing for that experience with my family. Why can't we have what they have. They are not torn apart because of drugs. They are not arguing or absent. They are healthy, happy, and engaged. I longed for that connection with my family, wanting to put an end to the devastation that addiction brings.

I remember pulling up behind a car that had a bumper sticker—PC mom—announcing that the driver of this vehicle had a child who was a student at Presbyterian College. Why can't I be a PC mom? This is not fair. I want a normal, happy family. I wanted the pain to stop and deeply desired to be a PC mom.

What is wrong and how can I make it right. I read many books and went to therapy in hopes to fix the wrong in my family, all to no avail. I then learned to find the relief and hope I was searching for by surrendering to God and connecting with community. By surrendering my situation to God and finding a community of people who had a similar experience, I found what I needed.

This helped me to connect with God and that peace and joy that I yearned was available to me. I shared my pain and heartache with others. They knew the same pain. We were united together in our grief.

I learned to hand things over to God—Let go and let God—was the solution. And I did with others who at one time also wanted to be a "PC mom."

§

Capstone—Grayson

I did not want to go to treatment. I did not want to stop getting high. I had first experimented with cocaine back home. It was incredible. I had learned a lot since my recent car wreck. I knew how to hide the cash I made from selling pot. I kept it tied to the drawstrings of my cargo shorts next to a Visine bottle of bleach for passing drug test. I was invincible. It was hard to keep up with the lies about who I was hanging out with and what I was spending my money on but I was managing. Cocaine was helpful, it allowed me to talk to anyone no matter how much Xanax I took or how much I drank. I never understood why people did cocaine socially. I thought that was a waste. I would always go to the bathroom and do it alone because I didn't want to share. I didn't want you to know I had it because I didn't want to share. I passed many drug tests that I shouldn't have thanks to a couple drops of bleach in my urine. One day I think I stopped giving a fuck or maybe I couldn't see straight or maybe I just forgot to drop some bleach in my urine and my parents found out that I had failed a drug test for cocaine. I didn't care because I didn't think there was anything they could do. Wrong, I was a minor so there was plenty they could do.

I was going to get treatment. They told me and I resisted. I did not want to go. They were desperate for a solution to my drug and alcohol problem (if you could even call it that). When I was high or drunk I didn't mind the idea of rehab. When I was sober, I fucking hated it. I was scared. My emotions were a rollercoaster and I didn't know what I really wanted. I didn't want to need drugs and alcohol to be normal but I couldn't conceive a world without them. They told me that dog therapy was a part of the program. I would do anything for a dog. Absolutely anything. I needed a friend. So I agreed to go. I also knew that we were going to stop in Atlanta to visit my grandma before we went and her medicine cabinet was always stocked. I figured I could stay high the whole way to Arkansas and then I would have a dog in three months.

At this time in my life I was very depressed. My search for purpose and friends was proving to me that I had no purpose and I would never have friends. It was me against the world. My parents didn't even know what to do with me. The only thing I knew was how to stay high and that was my purpose. Drugs were my best friend.

We drove to grandma's house and thank God she had pills. Ambien and Vicodin. What a wonderful combination. I remember not caring how much I took and would take handfuls until I was sick. I was trying to escape my reality and it was hard to take enough pills to mask my feeling of worthlessness. Ambien helped a lot, but snorting it doesn't last very long, plus snorting Ambien first thing in the morning makes for a very confusing day. I don't remember most of the trip. I do remember that when I was high it was easy, when I was coming down it was hard and I tried to make everyone as miserable as I was. Somehow we made it to Arkansas. I had a lot more pills left and I knew they were going to search me. Throw them away? Hell no. I decided to take the rest and I wasn't concerned if it killed me, actually that sounds pretty nice. A great solution to my problems. So I took the rest. My parents left and I was alone. Me against the world again.

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Note To Readers: As the narrative continues, names leave no doubt who is speaking.

Jump (Patty)

When my oldest son was at rehab we went to visit. We participated in several team activities with several other families. One of these activities was to jump off a 40-foot post, free falling to the ground. I was terrified. I climbed up this tall post and was strapped into a harness with a wire that would kick in at the last minute before touching the ground. The wire was on my back, so I did not have the security of seeing or holding on to the wire. Just jumping and trusting the contraption to save me. Despite paralyzing fear, I forced myself to move forward. I made myself leap and have "leaped" many time since.

I often reflect on that exercise and am able to push through scary situations in my live, trusting God to catch me. It also helps me to make myself move, to do something in my life that creates forward movement. Take the next right step, the step that's right in front of me.

Learning to trust. I remember a time when someone asked if I could ever trust someone in my life who had broken my trust. I may not be ready to trust certain people in my life, but knowing I can rely on God helps me to live empowered. I can move forward in my life resting in the fact that God is there to catch me every time. When gripped by fear it's important that I keep jumping.

§

Lessons From Capstone (Grayson)

After Capstone I could not wait to get high. There were so many drugs I had yet to try. I thought I knew a lot about drugs but apparently I didn't know anything. I learned about smoking meth, ecstasy, and shooting up heroin. These were all things I could not wait to do. I learned about shooting up cocaine with heroin, that being the best combination. There were many combinations I couldn't wait to try. LSD and ecstasy. Mushrooms and ecstasy. Cocaine and mushrooms. There are countless combinations and drugs that I was dying to try.

The first day at Capstone I met a friend, someone who was in the same situation as I was. His name was Tyler and he was a meth addict and a really good liar. We vowed to stay friends and play the game of recovery. We promised we would see each other after the three months and get high together. We agreed that we must do whatever it takes to get out of here as soon as possible.

This wouldn't be so bad I thought. We walked around the property and found some mushrooms growing on the ground. Maybe these will get us high ... We ate handfuls of those filthy mushrooms to no avail. We spent the next three months putting up with everyone's bullshit and swapping stories of our drug escapades. His were incredibly more interesting than mine.

He taught me how to superglue the flap on an ATM machine and wait for people to try and use it. They thought the machine was broke. He taught me to scrape the super glue off and voila. Their money was now my money. He taught me about Ketamine and how to shoot it up. He made clear one thing. Using a needle is the best. I simply could not wait to try it.

I would get so excited talking to him and others about drugs that it was worth my stay in the middle of Arkansas. Between that and my dog, Mr. Biggs, I was doing all right. I wanted my parents to feel like shit for all the trouble they put me through and I made sure to communicate that to them during my weekly phone calls. This was a waste of their money and my time. I couldn't wait to prove them wrong. My therapist at the program told me one day that I could never safely drink alcohol again. What the fuck I thought. I'm not even 16. First of all I don't care if I drink it "safely" and secondly fuck you. The nerve.

I made it through the three months hating most of it except for the two-week backpacking trip. That would be something I took with me for the rest of my life, a love for the outdoors and recreation. I'm fairly certain without finding that I would have killed myself one way or another.

Mr. Biggs is the greatest creature I have ever had the privilege of knowing. He was with me everywhere for the next 12 years. The Appalachian Trail. Classrooms. Graduation. Concerts. And jail cells. He was my best friend.

After Capstone, I knew I wasn't going to be able to go back to my high school with all my friends. I would be going to a private Christian school. I was pissed. I wanted nothing to do with this goody two-shoe school. Where would I find drugs and alcohol? It would prove far easier than I thought. Private schools have better drugs. Fact.

I got high just a couple days after Capstone. Adderall. Tyler would be proud. I had a really hard time making friends, until I took a few Adderall. All of a sudden people noticed me. I had something to offer. And the high lasted all day. I was doing magic tricks I taught myself when I was on restriction and making friends at a rapid rate. It reaffirmed that I needed drugs and alcohol to be accepted and the sooner I accepted that, the easier my life would be.

I got caught. I said how ashamed I was and that my life was really hard at a new school. I promised to never do it again. I got a slap on the wrist and a new car. I started to play football. I was good at it and my

pursuit of drugs and alcohol slowed a little. I was captain of the football team, made good grades and even praised Jesus on the weekends.

I began looking for something deeper. I enjoyed psychology class. I enjoyed reading the *Bible* and trying to figure out what was going on when it was written. I wanted an answer for my questions of the afterlife. Salvation didn't make sense to me but I was sure it would soon enough if I pursued it. This proved futile and gave me no answers. No burning bush for me. I gave my life to this and got nothing in return. There was no answer in the scripture. There was no relief when someone laid hands on me and prayed. There were lots of pretty girls though and they seemed very interested in guys who were living like Jesus. I wanted to be happy. To fit in. To have a pretty wife and an easy life, but those things weren't coming to me quick enough.

In frustration I pursued this lifestyle with more dedication. Maybe I wasn't trying hard enough. I should stop watching porn; that's probably what is cutting me off from the sunlight of the spirit. Nope, that didn't work either. I was still alone, broken, and worthless. I decided to go to a Christian college where I could really study some of these ideas and connect with other people that have it figured out. I remember one night being frustrated with all the bullshit answers I got from professors about what the afterlife is like and what the Trinity is. They don't know, I thought to myself. It is impossible to know these things, but they spoke with certainty and this was not ok with me.

I took a class on the beauty of God's creation; one of the assignments was how we, as the hands of God, could use nature as a tool for salvation in others. What a burden I thought. If there is a God he sure as fuck doesn't need me to "translate" anything. He doesn't need me to point out his beauty. If it exists then people will see it. If not, then they won't. I don't want to get in the middle of what he is trying to communicate. This assignment rubbed me the wrong way to say the least. It bothered me.

At least I had a clear stance on the topic at hand. I wrote exactly how I felt and was proud of my final product. I rarely applied myself 100 percent. I didn't need to. I turned in my paper, double-spaced, MLA format, and met all the expectations for length and citations. I got a B+. I expected to be told to re-write it because of what I thought about the class. My teacher pulled me aside after class. She told me that my paper was well written. She also said that if this is what I think I should consider transferring to another school with secular views.

That was all I needed to say fuck it. No one left to argue with. I had reached my conclusion and was ready to move on. I had missed out on a lot of drinking, drugging, and sex. I felt stupid for pursuing a religious lifestyle when I knew what I wanted after all. I wanted to party. I wanted to have sex and smoke weed during the week. I remember hearing my pastor preach about the horrors of college and all the lost kids who smoke and drink all day. That sounded fantastic to me. Sign me up. I knew exactly where to go. Clemson University.

§

A Bad Break At Clemson (Grayson)

Clemson was a little more challenging, but I still found it unnecessary to study. A lot of classes I didn't even need to attend. I could just show up for midterm and final. There was tons of booze and pot. A lot of girls who wanted to sleep with me, one of whom was my resident assistant. Wow, this was it. This was what I was waiting for my whole life. I had friends who drank and smoked all day with me. A pretty girl who would have sex with me whenever and lots of parties.

The glamour lasted a couple weeks. Soon the parties became dull. The girl was annoying and wanted a relationship. I couldn't smoke enough weed. It wasn't that I couldn't find it; I simply could not consume enough of it. For some reason Xanax was hard to find and expensive. This was frustrating, I knew there were better drugs around but I had a hard time finding them. I bought some fake acid and spent all day pissed off trying to smoke enough weed to activate the LSD. It never happened.

I drank more and more and withdrew from my friends. I didn't want to party any more. I didn't want a degree. This was all pointless. I didn't want anything. I had a lot of options, being as young and bright as I was, but I didn't want anything. I didn't want to come over; I didn't want you to come over. I didn't want to

go to the lake. I didn't want to tailgate. It was all boring to me. I wanted to live in a hole underground and stay high. I would rather be alone and stoned than do anything else with anyone. Depression was a normal feeling now, and I didn't want anyone to know I felt that way. I thought if I didn't address it, it would go away. Plus I didn't have a good reason to be depressed. I was just maladjusted to life and hadn't found anything to be excited about.

I talked to a friend about rafting. That sounded exciting, a casual lifestyle where drinking and smoking pot were nearly a part of any guide job. No more formal education. Just live in a tent by the river and sleep with many of the college-aged clients who were just looking for a fun weekend. I found something to be excited about. I wanted to move West and start a new life. I grew up playing in rivers. I'm a water boy. Always was and always will be. My mother likes to tell everyone that when I was a baby she dunked me under water and I would cry, but she wasn't going to raise kids that didn't know and enjoy how to swim. I love it. I love the swift water.

I did my research. I found a place where I would be trained in two weeks. I called a place in Washington—the farthest place from home and my depression. They were willing to hire me if I drove across country. Perfect. I fantasized about how wonderful my life was going to be. I fantasized about my new friends, the parties, and the fictional girlfriend who was waiting for me all the way across the country. I made it to the end of the semester with decent grades. Something happened though.

Two weeks before the semester was over I broke my collarbone. Snapped like a dry piece of wood. I knew exactly what happened when I tried to pick up my helmet. I was crushed as soon as I realized what I had done. This means no rafting. I held back the tears, not from the pain, from the disappointment. I told my friends to take me to the hospital. They insisted I was fine. I told them I would hit them with my good arm if they didn't take me immediately.

After the X-ray, the nurse said it looked good and I would be ok. That gave me false hope. Between that and three shots of morphine, I had hope that my life would be ok. Until the doctor told me I needed surgery. The warm blanket of opioids left and I lost it. My life was over. I was sobbing. My hopes and dreams were dead. I had no plan and no purpose any more. My fantasy was dead.

I did get some pretty strong painkillers. This was it. I had a Vicodin and Percocet for the day and another painkiller mixed with a hypnotic to help me sleep with the excruciating pain. I was set to forget rafting. Forget college. I just needed more of these pills. I spent most of the days drooling on myself and telling everyone that these pills didn't work. I called the doctor and expressed my discomfort. He refused to give me any more—it had only been three days. Fuck you then. I will go to another doctor. The next day I was in another doctor's office and she understood me. She believed that I was in terrible pain and needed stronger medication. Thank God. She prescribed me enough opiates to knock out an elephant twice. Plus, I had everything from the previous doctor. I knew I could make a lot of money selling them to my friends, but I desperately needed them, so that was out of the question. With a little pot, some booze, and a few of my life-saving opiates, I could face any situation with confidence. I could handle things. My life was finally manageable. I would party with friends and take my nighttime meds during the day. I usually passed out within an hour of taking one of those pills. Then I would wake up at odd hours wondering how I got to bed. Why was the bed wet? I woke up with candy in my mouth and full beers spilled all over me. It wasn't embarrassing. It wasn't anything. I was cut off from any sort of reality and that was fine with me.

The morning after one of these experiences I awoke to someone banging on my friend's apartment door. I was fully clothed holding a full beer that I somehow managed to not spill as I slept through the night. How rude I thought. Why are they banging the door so violently? It was 2 p.m. but I didn't know that. I opened the door and was shocked. My mother. Oh shit. There was nothing I could do. There was far too much to try to hide. I did not let her in. She came in.

"Hi Jon," she said to my friend. And then she looked at me and said we need to talk. She told me she was scared for my life. That seemed a little dramatic to me. She said people died all the time from mixing opiates with booze. Also dramatic.

The truth was that I was unhappy. I didn't have a lot in common with my friends outside of getting fucked up. I wasn't remembering most of the good times. I suppose it was time for a change. It was her idea. She knew that I wanted a change of environment. She said I need to get out of here, away from these friends and this lifestyle. I agreed but for different reasons. For the first time in my life I was addicted to painkillers,

and I didn't like needing them. It takes away a lot of the fun when drugs are a necessity rather than a luxury. I told her I would leave soon. I knew no one out West and had no real plans. Just go. Prove to myself I could do something. Prove to myself I could make friends if I was desperate. Prove to myself I can stop taking so many pills. Prove to my father I can get a job and make some money. I sure had a lot to prove.

§

Getting Better (Patty)

I began to get better and heal. Little did I know that Grayson was getting worse. He took off and moved to Colorado. I was very supportive. I felt he needed to get away and have his own life. Looking back, I believe he was running away and wanting to isolate. I wanted to see him go after something and have a happy life.

In my own journey of recovery, as I was getting healthy, I began to notice my unhealthy coping. Recognizing ways I would give away my power to others. Learning that I can leave a room and have healthy boundaries with others was revolutionary. Seeing how I over-functioned for family members and "helped" someone just to relieve my own anxiety. I began to see my health and unhealthy ways more clearly. This enabled me to live freer and to take better care of myself. I began to feel empowered. I would get phone calls from my grown children in distress and I learned to say, "I know you know what to do. I know you'll figure it out." I was empowering them to take responsibility for their own lives. I was able to take better care of myself when I let others take care of themselves. I was able to respect their struggle and allow them the dignity to fail.

Freedom resulted from my new behavior.

§

Kingsley (Patty)

Shortly after my oldest son went to rehab, my husband and I were on a business trip to Arizona. Upon arriving in Arizona, I was struck by a culture that places emphasis on creation, a worshiping of the physical elements in nature. I found myself struggling and conversing with God, asking to see someone who worships the creator and not creation. Not giving my prayer much thought, I walked to breakfast. As I traveled through this ornate hotel and down a wide, fancy hallway, I saw and heard someone singing. I walked toward this man singing, thinking the music was the most beautiful sound I had ever heard. Though unable to make out any words he was singing, only the melody, I felt transported to a different dimension, just this angelic creature and me. I walked up to this man and words came spilling out, "Who are you worshipping?"

"The King of Kings, the Lord of Lords," he said. We shared a moment, exchanging names and occupations. Kingsley, from Jamaica, who works for the hotel told me that everything would be ok. God's in control. Experiencing the greatest comfort and awe over the transcending music I just heard, it took me a moment to realize my prayer had been answered and I felt God's great care. God was personal and real, answering my plea and giving comfort to my soul and its heartache. Kingsley's voice and reassuring words of hope, I knew, were gifts from God.

§

A Tearful Drive West (Grayson)

I cried most of the 26-hour drive to Colorado. I had Mr. Biggs, four years old now, with me and it didn't bother him one bit that everything I had was in my car and that I was leaving everything familiar. My mother was very supportive and for that I am grateful, but she still didn't understand the emotional turmoil I was going through. No one did. Being alone in a car driving to a place I didn't know made the loneliness that much more powerful. I had a few pills and plenty of weed. I had to take the pills strategically to get me to Colorado. I couldn't take them all too soon or I was sure I wouldn't make it.

I wanted to turn around so bad. This was absurd I thought. This is not going to fix me, nothing will. I was broken and shattered into a million pieces. I couldn't remember a time when I was ok. This was all I knew and it was exhausting. I needed friends. I needed someone to understand me for once. I needed answers that had nothing to do with God.

My mom talked too much about God. I think she still does. You know what really frustrates me? God's will. God will take care of his children. God has a plan for you. I heard God say ... All those comments make me want to explode. How can God actually give a shit if I feel like this and he has never done anything about it despite my desperate search for an answer? How are my parents so foolish to believe in a loving God? They were educated people; it made no sense to me. It still irritates me. I'm fine with being a little irritated these days though.

The hole inside me was not getting any smaller as I drove closer to Colorado. I had an unrelenting feeling of impending doom. I was going to get in a wreck and die. My dog was going to run away. I was going to get pulled over and arrested for possession, which is actually surprising that that didn't happen. I watched the clock and made sure to smoke every hour. Early in the trip, I made a point to pull over and smoke outside my white Ford Explorer, which would be home for the next few weeks. Then I decided it was safer to smoke inside my car. Then I was so paranoid, I would change my mind constantly switching my methods. There's not enough Febreeze to mask that smoke. Eye drops did not clear my eyes from crying and smoking. I was a wreck and I didn't know what I was doing. I called my mother and expressed my concerns. She encouraged me to keep going.

I was searching desperately for something to make me whole for once. At night, I would drink excessively and watch movies on my laptop in the back of my Explorer with my dog. I had a black futon mattress that fit perfectly in the back. I would not have made it to sleep if it wasn't for the booze. It gave me a moment to recharge and repair the damage I had done to my psyche during the day. I didn't know it at the time but I was tearing myself up with comments about how ugly I was. How uncoordinated. I replayed all the hurtful moments of my childhood in hopes the anger would give me strength to change. I continued to engage myself in negative and hurtful comments all the way to Colorado.

I knew no one here. The only thing I remember was seeing a picture of Rocky Mountain National Park in a backpacker magazine. It looked so peaceful. It was much bigger than my problems and me. In the presence of those peaks, I was certain, my problems would dissolve. So I punched Rocky Mountain National Park in my GPS and off I went. I had big plans to get to the top of as many peaks as possible. I had \$2,000 from my grandparents who desperately wanted me to live right down the road from them, the irony, however, is that though they wanted me to stay their money helped me go.

I passed through the entrance gate to the Rocky Mountain National Park with no map and minimal camping equipment. I was ready to suffer more. I deserved it. The ranger explained to me that dogs were not allowed on any of the trails and must be leashed at all times. What? I can't hike anything with my dog? I drove 1,600 miles to hike around and I can't?

I swallowed my frustration and found a campsite. I needed to drink and smoke and figure out my next move. I spent the next three days at my campsite smoking and drinking and being nervous someone was going to arrest me. Mr. Biggs did not mind one bit that we couldn't hike together. He was perfectly content lying on the ground and watching me smoke and drink aggressively in hopes to fill the dark hole in me, part of the reason I loved him. He was always ok. He was always at peace. He had the sweetest eyes that always expressed his love for me. He was creative, too. I would spend hours watching him watch wildlife. He desperately wanted to catch a squirrel. I wanted to let him try because I knew he would never catch one, but I was too scared to get a ticket to let him off the leash.

One night as I was preparing my Chef Boyardee on my green Coleman stove, Mr. Biggs was scheming. I

did not see the family of mule deer grazing right next to our campsite. Mr. Biggs saw them. He remained quite. He knew he wasn't able to chase anything when he was tied up so he began to chew through his leash. He has done this before. He chewed through his leash and took off like a lightning bolt. One minute he was half asleep. The next minute he was tearing through the campground barking and hollering at the innocent deer. He was in heaven and for the first time in months I laughed. I laughed so hard. It was refreshing to see him so wild.

My laughter stopped when I saw the park ranger quickly walking over to my campsite. "You need to leash your dog," said the ranger. I replied that he was on a leash however he had chewed through it. I knew I wasn't going to catch my dog. He would come back when he was done and the deer were gone, and he did. The park ranger scolded me and did not write me a ticket. For a few minutes that night I was able to escape my hopeless situation and enjoyed being where I was.

I felt that my time in Rocky Mountain National Park had come to an end and I should begin to pursue friendship. My time isolating in the wilderness left me somewhat refreshed from all the driving and crying. The air was cool and I was in a new and exciting environment. My fantasy of new friends and a new life seemed plausible once more. I drove to Boulder.

I had no idea what to do when I got there. I began to unravel. I had no one. Just my dog that was making things very difficult. I couldn't stay in the hostel or most hotels with him. I needed a place to sleep. That was my next step. Just a place to get drunk and pass out. After that, I would have the energy to find some friends. I stayed in the cheapest hotel I could find. There I was, all alone clear across the country in a hotel room with my dog. Talk about being lonely. I was never one to watch TV all day, it makes me depressed, but I needed a distraction, so I watched as much TV as possible and got wasted. It was the best way to fix the horrendous problems with myself.

I knew I had problems. I didn't know exactly what they were. I hated the way my voice sounded; I hated the way I looked in pictures. I hated the fact that at one point in time I was religious. I hated the cross tattoo I had on my shoulder. I hated myself. It was more than that though. I was a failure. I hadn't done anything with my life. I blew all my extra cash on drugs and alcohol. I needed to change. I needed to exercise, but I was too depressed to do anything about it. I was stuck.

I spent a few days on Craigslist looking to rent a room in a house that would be a great way to meet like-minded people. I chose to land in Boulder because everyone was young and happy. They all rode bikes. The hiking trails were always packed with happy couples and their dogs. This is where I could find salvation. I found an affordable room and went to meet the tenants.

I walked through the door and immediately knew this was the spot for me. There were bikes, hammocks, houseplants, and three huge bongos on the coffee table. Not one, but three intricate and detailed bongos, all for very different occasions. I was elated. There were Frisbees and longboards. Someone just finished making breakfast and offered me a cup of coffee. They were so nice and accepting. Most importantly they loved Mr. Biggs. He was a charmer after all. We spent the next couple hours smoking pot and talking about mutual interests.

They were curious. "What brought you to Colorado?"

"Well, I just got tired of the South and church," I told them. "I wanted to be in a place where I could hike, bike, and smoke weed." They told me of all the wonderful shows on the weekends and the numerous hiking trails. I couldn't wait to start my new life. They were impressed with the quality of weed I brought from South Carolina; they didn't think we had good weed in the South. I was pleased to pack bowl after bowl after bowl. I could have sat there all day talking to my new best friends but they had class and work and slowly dissipated. We talked lease terms and I told them I would get some money together and come back tomorrow. They said I could move in immediately.

I was so excited. It was like I found a shortcut to the cool kids. They were all good-looking, four out of five were in a band, and one had a beautiful girlfriend who walked barefoot everywhere and didn't wear a bra. I wanted this life. Finally, things have turned around for me.

I was the shit. Look at what I had done. I was brave enough to drive across country and pursue something I wanted and I got it. I was so proud of myself. I was fooling myself but I didn't care. At least I felt better. For a short time my drinking slowed down and I smoked like a chimney. I embraced the idea of marijuana being a medicine and a gift. I spent hours on their couch rotating between the three bongos, smoking with any

fortunate soul that walked through the door. I had no job, so my days looked like this: Wake up early, walk my dog, make coffee and oatmeal, and sit on the couch smoking, waiting for my roommates to wake up. As they woke up, I would smoke with them. They would all leave for work or school and I was alone again. Smoking and smoking.

I was alone on the couch smoking one day and this joyful Asian character walked right into our living room. No one knocked at this house. The door was always unlocked and everyone was welcomed. I liked that. Dave and I became instant friends. He showed me around Boulder. Took me to the parks and would smoke weed with me all day. He had class too but it didn't seem to take up too much of his time. We spent all day hiking with Biggs and smoking pot. Finally, I have a best friend. I have never had a best friend that was human. Dave liked to drink a little more than me. Perfect. It made my drinking not look so bad. This was going to work out great.

I began looking for a job, my confidence was returning and I was going to put it to good use. I immediately got a job at a calzone place. Soon I would become the manager. Me? A manager? That's crazy. As manager and pot connoisseur, I encouraged everyone to come to work stoned and to take regular smoke breaks to stay focused on customer satisfaction. We were making calzones for God's sake. We must stay high. Soon I was bringing cases of beer to work to manage the 12-hour shifts.

I reminded myself of my accomplishments, when depression and feelings of worthlessness came back, that I was managing a pizza restaurant. That I had friends, and that I had moved to Colorado and was paying rent in a house. My partying escalated to new levels. My roommates liked to stay up all night at shows and after parties. I was beyond excited. We could walk or ride bikes everywhere. Finally my drinking and driving problem was solved. I could get filthy drunk and walk and that I did.

Mushrooms and ecstasy started to become a regular occurrence. I was exposed to new and interesting music like Sound Tribe Sector Nine where the first time I took acid was also the first time I took molly, and I took more than one hit of each. I was in a spiritual place for that show. I was overwhelmed with serotonin. I could no longer dance. I was in a different world.

Things were so fresh and exciting to me and I needed to sit down and absorb the messages. I spent most of the Sound Tribe concert sitting down unable to converse with my friends. I was not able to smoke pot. Literally, all I could do was smile and look at the lights. I was so distant and felt like I had figured out something vital to my existence. I tasted something I thought was true. The universe accepted me and everything I hated about myself was part of me and what made me unique.

Psychedelics helped me accept who I was and that I knew nothing about life and God. I had countless deep conversations with strangers about the meaning of life. I was on a spiritual journey. This was it. I found the key to life. I thought I could stay in that spot forever. I didn't need to sleep again. I made sure to tell all my new friends that I loved them. I really loved them. And they told me they really loved me.

It all ended too quickly. The music stopped and I had to drive home. Holy shit. I have to drive home. I tried to explain to others that I was much too distorted to drive. They assured me they would help. We wouldn't listen to music on the way home and everyone would pay attention. Ok, I thought. We are all in this together. By some miracle of God we made the 45-minute drive back to our house where we smoked pot until the sun came up. These were my people and I felt accepted and appreciated.

The confusion that followed such a profound spiritual experience is hard to describe. I lay in bed for as long as I could. The hunger started to hurt in my stomach but I had no appetite. I needed to go to the grocery store. My brain felt like it was scattered into a thousand pieces all across the world. I was exhausted from thinking about life and everything spiritual.

I managed to get myself to the grocery store. The confusion got more and more problematic as I strolled the aisles in my pajamas and slippers looking for something to help me. I had thoughts and then forgot them in the same instant. I would make up my mind and then forget what I just decided. This was frustrating. I wanted to be back in my bed where I could hide under the covers. I knew I needed to eat something, anything. I got the only thing that looked appetizing to me—three boxes of gushers. I ate them all and went to sleep. Had I done more damage than good? I couldn't think about that. I hung onto the feeling that I had finally found an answer to this fucked-up world and couldn't wait to visit that spiritual place again.



Pass The Mashed Potatoes (Patty)

When my oldest son was at rehab, I learned to communicate without getting emotionally charged. After delivering consequences to our teenage children, I would follow with a “pass the mash potatoes” attitude in order to move on. This exercise helped me to lessen my own reaction to the situation. If things got more heated, I would turn to my husband and ask if he would like to take a walk or go to the store. That kept me from getting caught up in the drama.

Living in a way that I could respond and not have to “react” to situations helped keep the emotions under control. Empowered in my relationships, I no longer took the bait. When invited to ride the crazy train I declined. I detached from the craziness of others and detachment with love allows me to care for my loved ones and not be a caregiver. I show love but don’t enable the addict, one time, for instance, delivering homemade soup to my son who was out of money. Also, I was clear and stated my truth. I spoke up for myself, not speaking in code but saying what I meant simply and clearly. I controlled my emotions and actions and chose my words wisely.



No More Berating (Patty)

As I delved into my own recovery, I’m reminded of a time years ago when a person berated me. I just sat there and took it. I froze in disbelief and shock as this person flung verbal insults my way. It hurt. It never occurred to me to get up and leave the room. I felt compelled to sit and take the abuse, since the person insulting me was “older and wiser.”

When I began recognizing healthy behavior for myself, I knew I had been giving my power to others. No more. Now I politely get up and leave, a novel act that empowers me to take a stand when necessary.

I read people better and can tell if someone is a safe person to interact with. I have choices I never knew I had as relationships go, and today the most important relationship I have is with myself.

