



The most beautiful stories always  
start with wreckage.

— Jack London —

### Beautiful Wreckage

*My name is Cindy, and I AM an alcoholic. My sobriety date is October 27, 2014. I no longer view that word – “alcoholic” – as a label, but rather an affirmation of a piece of who I truly am. I view this disease as a blessing most of the time, because my acceptance of it has provided a path in my life that I would not have otherwise found had I not admitted I was afflicted. A path of honesty, openness and willingness. A path of self-awareness, with a profound sense of gratitude.*

### A LITTLE BACKGROUND

From my early childhood years, I had emotional struggles. I was born with a birth defect that could not be hidden, as it was smack dab in the middle of my face! I also had a surname that just begged to be ridiculed. Both of these traits prompted incessant and cruel teasing from other children, and worse, the often pitiful staring from adults. This did wonders for my fragile and underdeveloped self-esteem, and became the early onset of anger and resentment in my life. From early on, I learned to dislike myself because I was not “normal”, because I was less deserving of being liked, because I was less than perfect.

I could never seem to cope with the people around me, the things I had to do or place I had to go, or the situations I found myself in. People around me could never seem to really understand what I was going through. Sure, they tried to help, but it was to no avail – partially because they didn’t get it, and partially because I wouldn’t trust them enough to do so. It had always seemed to me that life was nothing but a series of invisible brick walls. Some of them in place since the beginning of time, and some of them jaggedly jutting into existence as if in some sci-fi thriller where an earthquake shifts the planet’s surface into a treacherous landscape.

Like a rat in a maze, I would run into obstacles at every turn. I was almost always frustrated at life, and my inability to control it. Frustration became one of my primary emotions, and it permeated every aspect of my personality, manifesting itself in every thought, word, and deed. From my irritation, anger, fears, disappointments and resentments were born. The negativity within me grew like weeds, and overwhelmed the garden of my soul.

In a relatively short period of time, I was overtaken by adversity, and fell into a seemingly functional depression. There were times when I wondered what the point was of continuing on, but more often I simply felt like a robot, going through the motions of this shitty life because that’s what people did, right? Go to school or work, deal with assholes with the occasional really nice person, go home, eat, sleep, repeat. A good many of my teen and early adult years were spent viewing life as “dumb” and “pointless”.

As I now look back, sure I have regrets. I have regrets for the time I missed, and people I hurt, as a result of my actions. I regret the emotional turmoil that I put my parents through. I also realize now that I unwittingly put myself through that same turmoil quite unnecessarily. However, I was sick. My alcoholism had completely taken me over, and controlled my life. My only redemption is that I now do the best I can to lead a life of being of love, service and guidance for my fellows, being a living example, and using my experience to offer hope and strength.

I invite you to follow my journey thus far.

### THE WRECKAGE

I was no stranger to the taste of alcoholic beverages from a very young age. I don’t recall exactly how young I was when my brother (two years my junior) and I began sneakily taste-testing the liquor from my grandparent’s basement bar. Most of what we tested was awful, but we thought we were cool because it made us feel more “grown-up”. We often would also pilfer the backwash of almost empty beers at any given family event where a few were being tossed back.

My first real drunk was at the age of fourteen. I had eagerly guzzled half a bottle of Rumplemintz to fit in with the “friends” I was with. Within an hour I was stumbling to get to a friend’s house (a true and sober friend), and within two hours I was passing out in her bedroom, and waking up every few minutes to vomit. She, herself being only thirteen and not knowing what to do with me, called my parents. My dad came to pick me up. I remember the horror I felt at him seeing me in that condition, as well as the intense shame for having let my parents down.

The remainder of my high school years were spent being a weekend-warrior. I would attend any party I could with my peers, and knock back as many tap beers as I could before it was time to go home. I became good at hiding my buzzed state from my parents, mostly because I would just go straight to my room and to bed upon returning home. This was the beginning of my becoming a “functional” alcoholic. I was able to manage living life, while enjoying alcohol and its effects in secrecy.

In my early twenties, I married my first husband. Looking back, and knowing what I know now, we were both very broken and sick people. Even though we had two children together, our marriage did not last. He was very verbally abusive, and physically threatening (although he never actually physically harmed me). My respect for myself disappeared, and I would overcompensate for that with material things and being out of the house as much as possible, usually going to bars with “friends”.

In August of 2001, coming home from the bar, I ran my car off the road and hit a wooden telephone pole. The police and emergency personnel were absolutely baffled that I was even alive, much less walking and talking. They had surmised I must have hit that pole at approximately 60mph, literally shredding it on impact. The only injuries I sustained in the accident were a bruised collar bone (from the seat belt I was thankfully wearing, although that was a rare occurrence) and jammed finger. My pride was also hurt because I had to face the legal consequences of my first OWI, of which I was convicted in early 2002.

Over the next two years, my marriage to my first husband disintegrated rapidly. The abuse became out of control, and so did my going out to bars to drink. I told myself that as long as I didn’t drive, I could still go out and drink any time I wanted. The OWI and the resulting accident did not have the effect on me that it should have. At the time, I viewed it as a “cool” story to tell my “friends” – how I survived a certain death experience.

My first husband and I separated and divorced in 2003. Shortly before our separation, I became intimately involved with my second husband, and moved in with him in late 2003. We married in 2005, ten days after I discovered I was pregnant with our daughter. We were a blended family – my two boys from my first marriage, and his son from a prior relationship. For a long time, we were able to function as a family ... until we couldn’t anymore because my drinking and accompanying attitude problem became too damaging, and slowly

### The Importance of Staying Connected

Earlier this year, ten recent graduates from Herrington planned a fun weekend and went skiing at Devil’s Head Mountain.



The weekend proved to be a wonderful way to reconnect and provide support to each other a few months out of treatment. At Herrington, we learn how important it is to stay connected with friends. Some people meet lifelong best friends while in treatment, so going on this ski trip and reuniting with friends was an immensely rewarding experience. It was also a great way for everyone to stay motivated and strong in their recovery.

It’s important to remember that drug and alcohol treatment doesn’t have to only be serious. While it is something that’s important and requires a lot of work, that doesn’t mean that fun can’t be involved. Just as laughter is the best medicine, leisure activities can be highly important as a therapeutic approach. It’s also great for keeping connected after treatment. The group is already planning their next adventure!- Anna R.

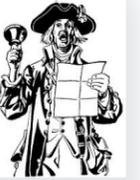
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### For the Weekly Calendar:



AA Meetings – Rogers Hospital – Oconomowoc  
Monday – 7:00 Evening  
Wednesday – 7:00 Evening  
Thursday – 6:00 Evening  
Saturday – 7:04 Morning (Nobody makes it by 7:00!)  
Sunday – 8:30 Morning  
Saturday – 7:00 Evening (NA Meeting)  
Rogers Hospital – West Allis  
Sunday – 6:00 Evening  
Wednesday – 7:30 Evening (NA Meeting)  
Saturday – 9:00 Morning

Al-Anon Meeting-Rogers Hospital Oconomowoc  
Tuesday – 7:00 Evening

*Alumni interested in doing Tuesday Evening RAPs with current Herrington Residents or if you’re interested in having Pizza with Residents every first Tuesday of March & September, contact Rob at: [clean@wi.rr.com](mailto:clean@wi.rr.com) for information on how to proceed.*



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began to shred the fabric of the family unit.

My new beau was, and still is, an amazing man. He isn't without his own faults, but who is? He was someone I could relate to and have fun with, but almost everything we did together involved drinking. Shooting pool or darts at bars, karaoke – also at bars, Badger games, Packer parties, Summerfest, camping, card games, road trips, and just grilling out at home. It wasn't long before my excessive drinking became a very serious concern for him, and threatened the security of our relationship.

My husband and I have been through a number of emotionally intense and profoundly impactful events throughout our marriage.

People close to us, that are aware of the happenings we've experienced, are in awe – even to this day - that we managed to stay together through them. The types of events we contended with were the kind that can completely demolish a person – financially, emotionally, and mentally – much less two people, one of whom was in utter denial of the significant problem that the use of alcohol had become.

I began to use alcohol as a means to “relieve” stress and “cope” with life around me. In my mind, and often used as a verbal defense, my drinking wasn't a problem because I was still highly functional, holding a job, raising kids, and keeping house – mostly. However, regardless of my belief that I was a practical and useful member of my household and society, I was not at peace with myself. This lack of peace crept out all too often and was lashed like a whip into the faces of those whom I believed had wronged me, including my husband and children. I became very agitated – restless, irritable and discontent – on a regular basis.

In 2009, I realized internally that I had a drinking problem. I could see how it was impacting my life, my family and even my job. I was constantly blaming, spewing negative remarks, hurting people I loved with my harsh words. But the true tragedy is that I didn't talk about what was really going on inside me. My consistent outward negativity, frazzled and fragmented thinking, and lack of genuine honesty with myself about the severity of my drinking problem, caused me to become extremely emotionally unstable. While I would occasionally journal about the radical thoughts, emotions, and grandiose plans I would create to curb or control my drinking, I could never seem to make those things come to fruition. I was lacking something bigger to get the ball rolling, so to speak.

In January 2013, I happened upon two of my children getting into trouble of an extremely severe nature. I was instantly traumatized by it, and this event, and the seemingly endless months of all sorts of issues that followed, is what sent me over the edge between what semblance of sanity I had left, and an insanity so permeating that I was no longer functional in any capacity. My drinking sky-rocketed, and so did the instability of my emotional and mental well-being.

In March 2013, I was arrested for my 2nd OWI. Given the amount of time that had passed since the first one, this was considered a “second first”, and it was a municipal offense. At the sentencing, I was informed that any future infractions in this regard, and this would count as a true 2nd offense, and the next time I would be charged with a 3rd.

In February 2014, on my wedding anniversary, I called in sick to work, and after my husband had left for work, proceeded to drink myself into a stupor. I called my husband at work to ask him to pick up our daughter from school because I was too drunk to drive. That night, he took me to detox, where I spent five days. I was given medication for depression and anxiety, and told to go to therapy, and it was suggested I attend a recovery program, such as AA. I went to one meeting, and spent the entire hour judging everyone in the room except myself. I was quite obviously still sick, and in full denial of my illness.

By spring of 2014, all the boys had gone to live with their other perspective parents, shattering our home and diminishing our family

of six to a family of three. I could not cope with that, on any level, particularly given that my husband and I had grown so far apart. However, my sobriety lasted for two months. Memorial Day Weekend and the start of summer gave my alcoholism the avenue it needed to get me drinking again. Rapidly, I was thrown back into the internal turmoil that I had just escaped from, and was not equipped to fight the disease once it grasped me again.

Several months of madness and hysteria followed, driving a rock solid wedge between me and my husband, as well as alienating my children from me. They were all a nuisance to me, detracting from my uncomfortably comfortable isolation where my only friend was alcohol. I began to become paranoid, hiding (or so I thought) how much I was drinking. I was humiliated by how often I would pass out, literally wherever I happened to be, and ashamed by the frequency with which I had problems with incontinence. My insanity reached a point where I actually rationalized buying pads for the bed and adult diapers to avoid the mess of it, instead of quitting drinking to stop it from happening completely.

October 26, 2014 – Trick or Treat Day in our neighborhood. I had my boys that day, and began drinking at 2:30pm, while my son and I played cards. By 4pm, when I took my daughter around the neighborhood, I was already intoxicated well beyond the legal limit. I really don't remember much about driving her from house to house, and didn't give a single thought to all the children and parents that were walking along the sides of the road and up and down driveways as I drove past – drunk.

My boys had made comments to me that I should slow down or stop drinking because I was getting drunk. I barked something along the lines of “shut up” and continued to guzzle down beers. Around 6:15pm, we left to take my boys back to their dad's house. Backing out of the driveway, I hit the basketball hoop that is cemented into the ground, and nearly got my minivan stuck in the culvert at the edge of our property. My boys continued to question whether I was okay to drive, even suggesting that I just pull back into the garage and they could call their dad to pick them up. Defiant, and believing that I could get myself under control (after all, I had driven drunk countless times before and made it from A to B just fine), I continued to drive.

Upon entering the freeway, I nearly ran my own vehicle, as well as a passing vehicle, off the road at 70mph. As I traveled further, I was swerving and overcorrecting due to my impaired state. I had to close one eye to see semi-straight, and the entire surface of the earth seemed to change with each movement of my head. I knew I was too drunk to drive, but I kept going. All the while, my boys were begging and pleading with me to pull over and stop the car. My oldest son, who has never shown very much emotion freely and outwardly, struggled in those moments with anger and immense fear – probably for his life, and the lives of his brother and sister who were also in the car – and with his voice cracking on the verge of breaking into tears, demanded that I pull over immediately.

Something inside me broke exactly at that moment. My baby boy (even though he was my oldest child) was visibly terrified because his life was threatened, and I was the one doing that to him.

I pulled off the freeway and drove to an empty mall parking lot. I dropped the boys off and told them I would wait until their dad came to get them. I pulled into an empty space about 100 yards away, and waited with my daughter in the back seat. Within moments, flashing lights behind me had my stomach in knots. At 6:30pm, I failed the field sobriety test miserably, and was immediately arrested, with my 9-year-old daughter watching, panicked and terrified, from the back seat of my van.

As I lay in my holding cell that night, now sobering up, I carefully and honestly considered what had just happened. This was the first time, likely since childhood, that I was acutely honest with myself. I thought

of the impact on my children. I almost killed them. I could have killed myself. I could have killed that poor driver that had to swerve to avoid my erratic lane deviation. I could have killed children and parents walking along my street just trying to enjoy Halloween. The profound terror in my son's voice repeatedly echoed in my head as I closed my teary eyes, asked God to help me because I couldn't live like this anymore, and passed out.

On October 27th, I was admitted once again into detox, and on October 31st, I readily accepted commitment to residential treatment at Herrington Recovery Center. Very often I thank God for providing that opportunity for me. Had I not surrendered and asked for His help, I truly believe I would have continued living my way, which had definitely not worked.

## THE BEAUTY OF IT

I have given much detail about my past in order to provide context for the depths of the insanity I was trapped in and that was caused by alcoholism. I have several co-occurring disorders, but the most severe of all of them is alcoholism. It feeds all the other disorders and creates havoc and chaos in my body, mind and soul. My alcoholic thinking almost destroyed me, and my family – literally and figuratively. That is something I'm not willing to risk ever again.

Within days of my admittance into Herrington, I was made aware that it was my oldest son who called 911 to have me arrested. I cannot thoroughly and accurately express, to him or anyone, how proud I am of him for that.

Having been fortunate enough to be immersed in the 12-step recovery-based programming at Herrington, I was given the opportunity and tools to build a strong and solid foundation for my own sobriety journey. What I chose to do with that foundation was up to me. While it hadn't been glaringly obvious to me in the early years of my addiction, alcohol and the insanity of my alcoholism had power over me for most of my adult life. At some point, I had allowed alcohol to become my guiding force in life, and had naively felt I was “just fitting in” or “doing what normal people do”. It was time for me to take back that power and use it to recover from the wreckage I'd made of my life, both internally and externally.

I'm not going to sugar-coat things, and boast that this was a miracle “cure”. The struggle was real. I was angry in my early days of sobriety. Very angry. Being sober and honest with myself meant I had to feel things. Uncomfortable things. That pissed me off, and I made no effort to hide that anger and frustration from anyone – mostly staff – who even dared to breathe in my general vicinity, much less dictate that I needed to follow their schedule and rules. I've since learned through working this program and the subsequent self-discovery that comes with it that my outward anger was just another way to mask actually feeling the emotions that I was supposed to be dealing with. Fear, sadness, false pride. Things that weren't pretty about me.

Don't get me wrong, the staff at Herrington was and is totally amazeballs! My addiction was, quite simply, reluctant to release the death-grip it had on me, and as a result, the staff took the brunt of that because they were closest to me at the time. I love the staff there, and am forever grateful for their kindness and patience with me.

Having distance from the influences of the outside world, including the people I loved, afforded me the ability to focus on me, and my recovery. Working with a Behavioral Specialist, I had a couple of major breakthroughs in some of the co-occurring disorders that accompanied, and were made exorbitantly worse, by my addiction to alcohol. Working through the step-work provided offered me the opportunity to further open that door of honesty with myself that had been knocked ajar when I lay in that jail cell and surrendered against the internal fight I had been living.

Even while being angry and resistant, I did the best I possibly could to really get honest, to achieve openness, and maintain my willingness. I had to get honest with myself before I could truly get honest with anyone else. If I wasn't honest, I couldn't really accept that I was an alcoholic. If I couldn't accept that, then I couldn't accept help for it, and I knew that I would eventually return to the insanity, whether or not I drank although that would have been a likely side effect. I had to be open to things that were not comfortable for me. I didn't like feelings. I wanted to run, hide, shield – whatever I could do to avoid them. Getting open for me was more difficult than getting honest. And for the record, I'm still not open to some of the activities we did in Rec Therapy – even though I am very grateful for the lessons Dena was teaching while I stewed and pouted like a child on the sidelines! I also had to remain willing. It's easy to be willing to do anything when you're in a heap of trouble, just to relieve the burden. I had to continue to fuel that willingness to further myself along in the honest and open categories. All three attributes go hand-in-hand in order for this program to work for me, and in order for me to be able to work the program.

Since leaving Herrington, I have achieved many milestones on my sobriety journey. Some big and some small, but all very meaningful to me. I still have struggles from time to time, but I use the foundation I created at Herrington to continue to build up my recovery, with the help of my sponsor and sobriety family. As cliché as it is, I truly do try to live my life one day at a time. I do the best I can to maintain genuine humility and teach-ability. I look for ways to promote kindness in the world, by being of love and service where and when I am capable and able. I rely on my sponsor and sobriety family to help guide me through difficult times, and I wholeheartedly trust that I will be okay no matter what life does (because life happens) because I strive for spiritual fitness on a daily and continual basis.

I was given an opportunity at a new life, a new way to live, a chance to get to know the real me. Ego aside, I really am a pretty cool person. I am comfortable with me today – feelings and all – and I consciously make it a point to be grateful for that. I work the 12-step program outlined in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, and I am able to accept that my journey will be ongoing, and ever-changing. The only constant will be my choice. The choice of whether to work this program to the best of my ability and live of life of peace and gratitude, even in the face of adversity, or go back out there, take that drink, and get sucked back into the insanity I was so desperate to escape from. Which path do I choose? I choose the real me – a person of integrity and honesty, who practices humility, gratitude and acceptance, and someone who enjoys life today.

Today, I enjoy the relationships I have with my children, and respect the growing that my husband and I experience together. I am honored to share my experience with other addicts and alcoholics, and offer hope that there is a way out of the insanity and the snarly, tangled, emotional mess. That there is not only a solution for them, but also that they don't have to be alone on their journey. Just as I was never alone on mine. Whether it was the staff at Herrington Recovery Center, my husband, my children, my family, or the real friends I've made in the AA program, I am eternally and perpetually grateful for their love and support as I continue on this sober path, and truly appreciate my sober life! From the wreckage that was my life, comes a general sense of peace and serenity that I now enjoy. And that is beautiful. –Cindy W.