

The Moving Finger

The Herrington McBride Alumni Association

Fall 2008

It can be a grueling job for both counselor and patient. The BIG D- denial-lingers in the eyes of every addict. As counselors we address that denial in a myriad of ways. Here is an example of a first session in treatment. It goes something like this. Counselor, "So, you're an addict." Patient, "That's what they tell me." Counselor, "Well, what do you think?" Patient, "I don't know, you're the counselor, you tell me." Counselor, "Ok, you're an addict." Patient, "No I'm not." Counselor, "I thought you didn't know." Patient, "Well, I do and I'm not." Counselor, "Well then, why are you here?" Patient, "Because everybody else thinks that I need to be here." Counselor, "Well, why does everybody else think that you need to be here except for you?" Patient, "I don't know, you'll have to ask them." Counselor, "But everybody else is out there getting on with their lives and you are sitting here with me, so why don't you explain to me why everybody else believes that you need to be here" Patient, "Apparently they think I drink too much." Counselor, "Well, do you?" Patient, "Nope." And so it begins...

Sometimes people come in for treatment who are ready. I mean really ready. Motivated, remorseful, in a world of pain and anguish. They see the error of their ways. They admit defeat and are willing to do whatever it takes, and then... they start to feel better. Ugh. So now, it goes something like this. Counselor, "Tell me what brought you to Herrington." Patient, "I'm an alcoholic, I can't stop drinking, my husband is leaving me, my children won't talk to me, my liver hurts, I'm sick all the time, I lost my job, I want so badly to get well. I'm an alcoholic, I know I am." Counselor, "Sounds like you're ready to do some work." Patient, "I am, I really am." Counselor, "Great. Let's get started." Ten days later.... Counselor, "Why are you dragging your feet getting your First step done?" Patient, "I know this stuff already. All the assignments are so redundant. I don't see the benefit in doing this stuff over and over again, it's boring." Counselor, "Hmmm... what happened to that willingness to do whatever it takes?" Patient, "Well, I'm willing, but I don't see the sense in it." Counselor, "Sometimes we aren't going to see the sense in something, but it's important to trust the process, and do it any way." Patient, "I'll do it, but for the record I think it's BS." Counselor, "Well, if you do it only for the sake of doing it and have a negative attitude and a closed mind, little will be gained." Patient, "I don't know why you're making such a big thing out of this." Counselor, "So you don't wind up coming back here full of pain and anguish again following a relapse, that is, if you're lucky enough to make it back." Patient, "Well, that's not going to happen to me. I'm better now. I know what I need to do. I won't drink again, I know it. I've seen the light." Counselor, (big sigh) "Oh boy..." And on we go. Do either of these scenarios sound familiar? We all know that there are many more where those came from. We all have our stories. They are all the same, and yet they are all different.

This disease wreaks havoc on our spiritual, physical and mental health. It robs us of so much. Our dignity, self respect, clear rational thinking, the love and trust of our families, and for some, tragically, life itself. The treatment team jumps in with both feet in an attempt to intervene in the disease process.

The relationship between patient and counselor is the catalyst for change in the treatment process. To trust the counselor is a guide to trusting the process of recovery. From there you take what you've learned and transfer that trust to a Power greater than all of us. And when that happens, when you really take off with HP, it is nothing less than magnificent. Treatment is only the beginning. Through treatment we begin

to see a transformation happen, and yet, it is only the beginning. The real work takes place out there, in day to day living. That's where the real test is. How willing are you to take what you have learned and put it into practice at home with your family, and in the work place, or, uh um, (clearing my throat)...at the gas pump, or behind the wheel of your car during rush hour traffic?

I both cringe and chuckle as I write this as I recall having a lapse in working my own program as I was trapped between three cars. One car was in front of me, one behind me, and one to the left of me on a two lane road. I was in a hurry and frustrated by not being able to pass the car in front of me. I was tailing rather closely the car ahead of me and cursing at all three people who had me boxed in. Of course, I felt they were deliberately out to get me. Finally, after being obnoxious and ready to do battle the car to my left turned and paved the way for me to go around the driver ahead of me. Well, God has a sense of humor and an ability to bring me to my knees with a good healthy dose of humility when I need it. The car that had been ahead of me turned out to be a woman whom I sponsor in AA. I was so embarrassed. Suddenly I felt about 2 inches tall and just wanted to disappear. She rolled down her window at the stop light, smiled sweetly, and with a hint of sarcasm in her voice asked if I needed a meeting. Ugh, lesson learned. This is the point where I remember "progress, not perfection", and "we are not saints" no matter how long we've been sober! I prayed earnestly in the beginning of my sobriety to never forget the gut wrenching pain of where I came from, as I believe if we forget we are then destined to go back. God has blessed me with my request as I have never forgotten, and the memory of the pain is never far away. We must not become complacent and rest on our laurels as the Big Book so wisely states. Attendance at 12 step meetings keep us ever mindful of where we came from and keeps us grounded in sobriety. One thing I have seen over and over again that leads to relapse is when people stop attending 12 step meetings. The old familiar voices in the head become front and center and slowly but surely we think we can drink or use again. Remember, first we go to meetings because we are told to, then we go because we recognize that we need to, and then finally, we go because we want to. An ongoing relationship with our sponsor helps to keep us focused. They help us to understand and integrate the 12 steps into our daily living. They teach us how to remain honest, open, and willing. We learn that we must help one another in sobriety through sponsorship, service work, or by simply showing up, as "we can not keep what we have unless we give it away." Those are the basics to working a program. I want to thank you for allowing us here at Herrington to be a part of your process, and for inspiring us in continuing to believe in what we do. As a counselor I am truly blessed to be a part of people's recovery. To watch the miracle happen. To see what was once a seed... begin to break ground. To see people begin to believe in themselves again. I am lucky and so grateful to be a part of something very special. So, don't be a stranger. No news is not good news. Let us know how you are doing. Stay connected, and reach out to others. Be active in recovery, because collectively, we are a force to be reckoned with against this disease.

The Moving Finger is published by and for the Herrington McBride Alumni Association. Please send story ideas and feedback to: HMAA Box 13581, Wauwatosa, WI 53213 Newsletter Editor: Natalie Zimmerman

Message From the President

As summer comes to a close and we prepare for cooler fall weather take a moment to reflect on this past summer and be grateful for all that you were able to participate in as sober individuals with clear minds. What a gift to be grateful for!

The two big events to report on are the reunion picnic and the continuing process of the building of the new "Herrington by the Lake" project.

The reunion was once again a resounding success with great attendance and good times had by all (and a few tears). Our keynote speaker Paul Sager led us on a heartfelt journey through his story and touched each and every one of us who had the privilege to listen to it.

I'd like to thank Paul for sharing on behalf of all who attended.

The second item to report on is the construction of the new Herrington building being built on the shore of Upper Nashedah. From what I understand after a few bottle necks were navigated (zoning laws and setback requirements etc.) ground breaking is set for late summer or early fall. Completion will be in the later part of 09.

Please be aware that all HMAA alumni and friends have the opportunity for naming rights on individual parts of the new Herrington. For more information on this please contact me.

Also please be reminded that the HMAA is here for all alumni and friends. If anybody has particular questions or suggestions do not hesitate to engage any board member.

Last but not least please welcome our three newest board members; they are Michael Hedrick, Scott Elston and Becky Heins. We look forward to working with three individuals who are dedicated in living and promoting life in recovery.

In closing, I'd like to thank all who gave of their time helping with and attending the reunion and don't forget to sign up for the winter retreat. Its right around the corner.

*With warmest regards,
Bob Olson
President-HMAA*

A Reunion To Remember

By: John Aschenbrenner

After the storms and flooding of a Wisconsin spring and early summer that will long be remembered in the history of the area. June 28th opened into the perfect morning, just threatening enough for us to be reminded of the awesome power that watches over us all. Spirituality was our theme, reflected in the Promises of Recovery—"we will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves."

In record numbers we gathered, and by 10:00 when I offered the opening welcome, we already had almost 200 alumni and friends of alumni in attendance, waiting for Paul's keynote address - and it was well worth the wait! Paul took us back to the early days of his struggle, venturing precariously close to death's door at the age of twenty-four and in a Japanese hospital - writhing in the throes of his first bout with pancreatitis brought on by his late-stage alcoholism. Like the creative writer and storyteller he is, he took us deep into the feelings and caverns of his despair, eventually leading us out and into his precarious early attempts at recovery, through his days at Herrington and struggles with AA. We felt his pain, because it was our pain. We laughed his laughs, and remembered our own awe-inspiring moments during those first years. And when his story was told, Paul received a thunderous standing ovation. It was the beginning of a remarkable day for us all.

Judge Pat and Marion Heinz presented glimpses of the promise for a new Herrington - the groundbreaking for which is just on the horizon. Then as usual, Chef Mickey was ready with loads of burgers and brats, for our annual picnic - always so very nicely afforded us by Rogers Memorial Hospital.

The afternoon's events began with Dan, a local family therapist speaking on relationships in recovery, followed by Sandy & Dick - good friends of the Alumni, speaking about how Al-Anon and AA form a close bond in relationships working a successful program of recovery.

Scavenger hunt participants were sent out on an adventure crafted by Tracy and Lori, as older alumni sought to settle old scores in a Trivial Pursuit playoff game!

Scavengers returned, and the three groups of participants vied for the prizes - as the judges tried to add numbers into the tens of thousands.

As the sun began to set, the day settled around our annual Gratitude Fire - the open AA Meeting which found well over 100 alumni, family members and their friends gathering. As always, our thoughts turned to how grateful we all are for the recovery we continue to be afforded through the Grace of God and the support of our fellows!

Gathering our blankets, it was well after 11 PM when we headed to our cars, holding fulfilling thoughts of an alumni reunion long to be remembered!

Spiritual Recovery

By Paul Sager

I recently heard a speaker who shared a very powerful message. This speaker's story was like the stories of many addicts and alcoholics: the spiraling downfall into addiction, the struggles with self will as a solution, the deepening lows, feeling terminally unique, being beaten, realizing that a mind-altering chemical was the master, and finally getting sober. The speaker then went on to talk about struggling to believe that having fun in a sober life was possible. I totally related.

I vividly remember the hole that I felt in my gut when I arrived at Herrington and realized that my drinking had brought me to the brink of death. Even though I wanted to live, my mind told me that all the fun in life was tied to chemicals. I didn't know if I wanted to live a life without the extreme chaos of drinking and drugging, what I, at the time, thought was "fun."

Thankfully, as I honestly shared my fears with others in the program, I came to believe that fun just might be possible again. I crossed paths with many recovering addicts and alcoholics that not only told me they were finally enjoying life sober and having real fun, they showed me. I went to concerts with them, dinners, bowling, campfires and so much more. Normally our sober group was the rowdiest! This fellowship has taught me that my perception of fun became warped by my alcoholism and drug use.

Essentially, these individuals showed me that I needed to find a new way to live; I needed to cultivate a new perception of fun. I had to open my mind to the possibility that fun wasn't synonymous with alcohol and drugs.

Eventually (after quite a few meetings, discussions and social events), I could see that fun wasn't the alternate reality of a high or drunk. It may have started out as innocent fun when I first drank and used, but it sure didn't turn out that way. In the darkness of the end, there was no more fun. All I could do was find the oblivion I needed to block out the horrible reality of my problems, and in a bigger sense, my existence.

When I look back on my drinking and using experience with sober eyes, I can easily see how my life became totally unmanageable. Yet it took some time for me to finally see how my disease had warped my perception and confused my unmanageability with fun.

Today, my idea of fun is tied into forgetting my ego, accepting the present moment, facing my fears, and feeling the true energy and vitality that life has to offer in all situations, people and encounters.

Okay, I know what you're thinking, "Yeah, but what about when life hands you something horrible: a breakup or divorce, the death of a loved one, a lost job, a flat tire...?"

Well, I know that stuff is never fun. I've had to deal with some bad things since "graduating" from Herrington. Each time something bad (or more clearly, bad from my perspective) has happened to me, I've had a chance to see how solid my program actually is. Early on, I talked a good game, but I worked a thin program. When something happened in my life that was bad enough, I went back to numbness, back to the bottle and back to drugs. Thankfully, each time I made it back to the tables and opened my mind a bit further. Today, I believe that working a strong program means surrounding myself with others of a similar mind: those interested in spiritual growth, those interested in staying sober at any cost,

those "trudging this road of happy destiny", those who realize that the difficult times in life can be the springboards for rapid spiritual growth.

The last time something "bad" happened to me, I did what had been suggested to me so many times; I reached out to others in the program and to my Higher Power, and they propped me up. I can't fully express how fun it is to realize that with the help of others and my Higher Power, I can live life on life's terms, no matter what happens.

In many ways, I completely related to much of what this speaker shared. Yet one sentence in this speaker's message has stuck with me since. He closed with the following statement: "Nothing justifies a drink for an alcoholic."

I couldn't agree more. The only way for me to live a happy life is to accept my alcoholism and addiction, banish my fears, and take life one day at a time with the help of the fellowship. Today, I truly believe that life can be fun again! It already is, provided I work The Steps.

However, this isn't always easy, but the easy thing to do and the right thing to do are rarely ever the same. My perception is constantly changing for the better, as long as I'm not trying to control the uncontrollable.

I feel greatly honored to have been able to share my story at the Herrington/McBride Summer Reunion and Picnic this year. It was an amazing day that again confirmed for me that fun in sobriety is not only possible, it's guaranteed! The Promises do become a reality, as long as I work for them

22nd Annual Winter Retreat

Mark your calendar now -- January 2-4, 2009 -- for a spiritually uplifting experience. The theme will be The Promises: They Will Always Materialize....

Br. Gerry Patton will be the keynote speaker. Many of you know Br. Gerry who is on the staff at the Redemptorist Retreat Center where the retreat will be held. This is a great way to begin the new year.

More information and registration form will be in the winter issue of this newsletter.

As in the past, scholarships will be available.

HMAA Board Changes

At the annual HMAA membership meeting held during the reunion/picnic, three alums were nominated and accepted as members of the board of the association. They are Becky Heins, Michael Hedrick and Scott Elston. They replace Ron Ragotsky, Walt Baranowski and Harold Peterson. Thanks for all of the work done by the retiring board members and welcome to the new members.

In the next issue of the newsletter, an introduction of each board member will be included.

Alums are invited to attend board meetings which are usually held the 1st Tuesday every other month at 6PM at Rogers Memorial Hospital--West Allis. Confirm the date and time with any board member.

Activities & Events

WINTER RETREAT

January 2-4, 2009

Redemptorist Retreat Center

Info and registration in winter newsletter

ANNUAL REUNION/PICNIC

June 2009

Date in the Winter issue

Information in the Spring issue

RAP WITH PERSONS JUST ENTERING RECOVERY

Oconomowoc campus on Tuesdays at 6:00PM

West Allis campus at various days/times

(Individuals must be pre-approved for doing rap session)

PIZZA WITH HERRINGTON RESIDENTS

September 2, 2008 and March 2009

If you are interested in attending, call a board member

12 STEP MEETINGS

AA

Oconomowoc campus

Monday--7PM

Wednesday--7PM

Friday-3PM

(Separate meetings for men and women)

Saturday--7:04AM

Sunday--8:30AM

West Allis campus

Sunday--6PM

Tuesday--7:30PM

Saturday--9AM

NA

West Allis campus

Thursday--7:15PM

Keynote Speaker's Talk

If you would like a copy of the talk given at the reunion/picnic by Paul Sager, copies are available. Send your request and Five Dollars to the address for the newsletter included in this issue or contact one of the board members.

A Counselor's Perspective

By: Deb Adamus

I was at the Alumni picnic on June 29th and saw many familiar faces that warmed my heart. With the rate of recidivism in addiction, it is always important for me to see people staying clean & sober and enjoying the fruits of their labor in recovery. As a counselor, I especially appreciate seeing former residents of Herrington and their families come together for an event such as the picnic, and watch recovery in action. I never tire of it. Watching people rebuilding their lives and relationships, finding peace and joy, and having fun... s o b e r! What a concept.

As I watched others at the picnic I reflected on my own journey of recovery. I was in my early 20s when I became clean and sober. Soon after, I was on a mission and wanted to save addicts and alcoholics. I know, rather naive thinking, not to mention grandiose. Go figure. I have since been humbled. Back in the day of intensive boot-camp counselor training programs, I found myself in a situation that cut my ego down to size rather abruptly. I was told that if I thought for a minute that I was going to "save" people, I better be prepared to take responsibility for when they die too. Well, I learned long ago that I could not take responsibility for either. I am not nearly that powerful. I was also told that I had "better be damn good and ready" to look at myself and my own issues if I was going to be working with other people's lives." Those words have resonated with me throughout the years. I shuddered in my shoes then, and continue to appreciate the wisdom in those words today.

A big part of training was not only didactic learning, it was about "personal growth". In fact, we had our weekly group meeting that was referred to as "Growth Group". Sounds rather menacing doesn't it? In some ways it was, but that's a story for another time. As a recovering person, and as a counselor, it's important for me to continue to go to meetings and work my own program. I must say that I fall short of my ideals more often than I care to admit.

However, I have learned to live life on life's terms. Sometimes with Grace, and sometimes... not so much. But all in all sobriety has been very good to me. All the promises have come true, but not without painstaking effort at times. That's why in the beginning of recovery the Big Book says "We trudge the road of happy destiny." But may I add, not only in the beginning do we "trudge", there are times throughout life where we have to do just that, but that's life, and it is worth it by far. I continue to be passionate about recovery and have found that life in sobriety is just plain good.

I have learned much in 28 years of working as a counselor in this field. I have seen a lot. I have learned that it is both challenging and rewarding. I am given the opportunity to engage with patients in a way that connects with their heart and speaks to their soul. As alcoholics and addicts, we are not warm and fuzzy. When we arrive at Herrington, we are anything but. We are sick, scared, sad, ashamed, and often, mad as hell! We are resentful, defensive, stubborn, self centered, manipulative, and dishonest. We recoil at the thought that we can not drink or use drugs in a socially respectable manner, as we proceed time and again to try and prove that we are NOT, heaven forbid, one of those! Eventually, hopefully, we raise the white flag and surrender. We attempt to turn our Will and our lives over to the care of treatment professionals, and hope like hell that they can help.

continued....