

## For the Weekly Calendar:



### AA Meetings – Rogers Hospital – Oconomowoc

Monday – 7:00 Evening

Wednesday – 7:00 Evening

Thursday – 7:00 Evening

Saturday – 7:04 Morning (Nobody makes it by 7:00!)

Sunday – 8:30 Morning

### 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.



### Announcements

June 21 2014: Herrington McBride Reunion Picnic  
We are looking for a volunteer(s) to help facilitate the new HMAA website. Any alumni interested please email [pgrabski1@gmail.com](mailto:pgrabski1@gmail.com)



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## Herrington McBride Board Members

*Serving our Recovering Alumni & Their Friends:*

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The Herrington McBride Alumni Association  
Spring Edition, 2014

# The Herrington Recovery

## Alumni Association Quarterly



### From the Desk of our President

By: Rob McCreadie

I'm hoping that by the time this goes to print we will have some spring weather and will be able to look back on the winter of 2013-14 and the onslaught of polar vortices with a sense of accomplishment for having survived another Wisconsin winter. I'm not certain whether due to my impending old age or increased clarity of mind, but this seems to have been a particularly brutal year! In spite of the frigid temperatures, we have had a lot going on with your Alumni Association and related activities and have already had a busy 2014.

We ended 2013 with another successful New Year's Eve celebration at Herrington Recovery Center. Residents, board members and guests ate, sang karaoke and played pool. Per usual, Jeff Radtke did an awesome job of planning and execution, Mike Ingrilli provided another legendary dinner and Chris G. is our new reigning pool tournament champion. The 2014 HMAA Alumni Retreat has come and gone. On January 20<sup>th</sup> Herrington invited more than 20 members of the AA and NA communities to a preferred sponsor meet and greet with Herrington's Medical Director, Dr. Michael Miller, Cindy Suszek, Clinical Services Manager, therapists and staff. This was an opportunity for members of the Herrington treatment team to meet a group of recovering individuals who are qualified and willing to sponsor residents in treatment and for us to meet staff members.

Our next big event will be the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Herrington McBride Alumni Picnic on Saturday, June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2014. Our Alumni Speaker will be Paola A. who became a member of the Herrington family in November of 2005. Come and partake in the festivities, including fellowship, Paola A. sharing her experience, strength and hope, AA and Al-Anon speakers, our gourmet picnic, scavenger hunt, fun and activities for the whole family and kids of all ages. This will be Bob Olson's last year as lead organizer for the reunion, so please help us to express our appreciation

and gratitude for all of the dedicated and loving work Bob has put in over the years to insure that each year's reunion outshines the last.

Projects in the works include a Herrington House Halloween event, our Hope Shot column which will spotlight some of the "winners" in the recovering community and we hope to make the Herrington website a reality to provide information, resources and access to the HMAA and our Board of Directors.

If you've got at least one year of solid recovery and are willing to share your experience strength and hope with current residents, please feel free to email me at [clean@wi.rr.com](mailto:clean@wi.rr.com) in order to begin the process of being approved to speak at the house.

As always, I welcome feedback and suggestions as to how we can improve our alumni association in order to continue our mission and to support residents in treatment and throughout their transitions into the recovering community. Thanks to all for your continued kindness and support!

**Sobriety  
Delivers  
Everything  
Alcohol  
Promised**

### Thank You

By: Anonymous

I was born the eldest of three children. Neither my parents nor sister and brother were alcoholic, which might seem unusual. In fact, I can't establish any genetic link at all in my family. I had an excellent and privileged childhood and adolescence. My parents were very moral, respectable people of good standing in the community. I was given every possible opportunity in life – private school education, a convertible at 16, trip to Europe at 20, lavish wedding, beautiful home, etc.

In short, I can't blame anybody or anything for my alcoholism, although I spent years blaming everything and everyone around me. I really believed I was incredibly unlucky - awful things just kept on happening to poor I'll ole me. So I drank.

I blamed the weather, my home, my spouse, my boss, my doctor - and I drank. My actions, I felt, were always justified by the words "if you had my problems you would drink, too". I was able to make my story sound so tragic I was always able to find people to drink with and sympathise with the sad saga of my life. If not, I drank alone and, with all the activity in my head, I really didn't care whether I had company or not.

In fact, as my drinking progressed I preferred solitary drinking. Very few people could keep up with me and I felt they had no staying power. You see, as well as all my other self-perceived talents - beauty, brains, ability, etc, I was also an authority on every subject. My God, I was wise. Those around me were truly blessed with my presence! All these things I believed when I was drinking - but oh how different was the reality.

Today, three and a half years sober, I frequently reflect on my drinking, although it often seems like a bad dream. I must never forget what it was like, what happened and what it's like now. I find it almost impossible to believe that my alcoholism had progressed to the point it had and yet my denial was so strong I truly couldn't see that I had a problem. I really believed that I was cursed with bad nerves and occasionally drank a bit too much. Denial is certainly not a river in Egypt!

I can see very clearly now that alcoholism was my lot from the day I picked up my first drink. I always seemed to want more than others and never seemed to know when to stop. As social life progressed so did my drinking. I was always surrounded by equally heavy drinkers so nothing seemed unusual at the time. It is interesting today to note that some of the old crowd is dead - others, the lucky ones, are in AA.

After my last hospitalization I consulted an alcohol counselor and she agreed with me. I didn't look like an alkie! This was music to my ears. I was now going to prove I could drink socially. It seemed easy enough - 2 drinks per day and 3 alcohol free days a week. However, something always happened to upset my alcohol free days so I figured I'd start again the following week. The realization that I could not adhere to this drinking schedule frightened me and I was forced to admit I was powerless over alcohol.

At this time, I very reluctantly contacted AA - for the simple reason I had nowhere else to go. I didn't expect much because I couldn't envisage a life without alcohol, but on the other hand the life I had was on a

rapid downhill slide. Years previously I had attended a few meetings and had made the mistake of only picking differences instead of picking similarities and as an atheist all the "God talk" put me off. With the progression of the disease over the ensuing 12 years I had accomplished the lot - everything those members had spoken of years before.

This time, there was no longer any doubt in my mind that I was an alcoholic but, of course, knowledge of and acceptance of alcoholism are very different things. I'm a Scorpio, very determined, very stubborn - so after a few months in AA, living pill and alcohol free, I decided that the problem was pills, not alcohol - so I drank again. I can't afford to ever forget that time, because all denial was gone. I realized that I was completely beaten, that I was powerless over alcohol and AA was my only hope. Once I realized that instead of being a sacrifice giving up alcohol, it was a bonus living clean and sober, my life took on a quality I'd never known. I owe my life to AA, it has taught me so much.

Through one local hospital I do 12 Step work which I love. It gives me an opportunity to give away what I've been given. I'm grateful for every second of every day, always aware that if it were not for AA there is a very strong chance I'd be dead by now. I love every aspect of my life and the past years of recovery have been the best of all. For me, life really did begin at ... 45.

AA has given me everything I ever wanted and more than I ever dreamed of - thank you AA.



### Reflections on my Recovery Journey

By: Scott Elston

As I sit down to write this piece, I am sitting at an airport... heading home after some client appointments for work. I can't help but reflect on the significant contrast between what it was like back in my active drinking days and what it is like today. I used to love airports because it was a great place to get some serious drinking done. I used to frequent airport bars during

my travels and I would even prioritize my travel plans around getting some additional bar time. I would book lengthy layovers so I could get that extra time with my best friend Jack Daniels. As my alcoholism progressed, airport bars were the perfect places for me to drink - I was fundamentally alone... yet surrounded by other hard core drinkers, the drinks were paid for by my employer and I was out of sight from those in my life who were concerned about my drinking. No guilt, no looks of concern from loved ones... just me and my alcohol doing it my way... that is how I liked it. And of course this was all perfectly normal... look at all of these other business professionals doing the same thing. I never reached my final destination sober and I was typically very hung over for my appointments and commitments.

Today I have a very different experience when I travel for work. I still like airports but for very different reasons. When I happen to have layovers, I am able to use my time wisely to get things done and to be of service to others. I am able to catch up on work and customer follow-up, I am able to connect with friends and colleagues and I am able to touch base with my sponsor and sponsees. It's quite a contrast - today I am able to use my airport time to be productive and connected to others instead of isolated and self-absorbed. This is just one of the countless gifts that my sobriety has opened up for me.

I was a resident at Herrington for seven weeks during the fall of 2006 and gratefully I have not picked up a drink since. I always describe my Herrington experience as being yanked out of my comfort zone for seven weeks. By that I mean that I had to learn and do things while at Herrington that were not natural for me or comfortable for me... at all. I was not comfortable with expressing emotions and talking about my feelings yet Herrington asked me to do that on a daily basis. I was not comfortable with being honest (either to myself or to others). I lied for so long about so many things I didn't know how to be honest... yet Herrington forced me to get honest. I was not comfortable sharing and opening up to others. I was so afraid of what people might think about me if they got to know the real Scott. Herrington made me do that as well. None of these things were easy but they were all what I needed and they all had positive results. I always tell residents today that if they don't feel uncomfortable while they are at Herrington then they probably aren't working hard enough.

My first year of sobriety was full of ups and downs and numerous challenges... but in the end it all served to strengthen my sobriety. I was glad to be sober and I knew it was what I needed but I struggled a great deal with patience. I kept hearing the Promises read at meetings and I wanted them all to come true for me

right now! It took me awhile to really grasp the portions in the Promises about "sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly" and needing to work for them. I also faced some pretty heavy-duty "life on life's terms" kind of stuff during my first year of sobriety: I went through a divorce, and I also lost a few of my finger-tips in a bizarre snow-blower "incident". (Believe it or not, I was 100% sober when it happened). These were some crazy things to go through early in sobriety but they taught me two very important things: there is no challenge or problem in life that a drink will make better and that I didn't have to go through these events alone. My sponsor, my friends in the program and my AA meetings all helped me to get through these challenges and I am so grateful that I had my support network to lean on. I can't even imagine having to go through a divorce without sobriety and the community of AA behind me. Today I look at all of these challenges that I went through as blessings. They seemed hard at the time but in hindsight they were simply obstacles to teach me valuable lessons, to strengthen my program and to help me grow into the person I am today. This perspective is another tremendous gift that sobriety has provided for me.

Fast forward to today... I have over seven years of sobriety and God-willing I will have many, many more. My sponsor likes to remind me that I am still just a mere toddler in my recovery journey. I have come a long way, but I still have a ton to learn and lots of growth opportunity. That perspective helps me a lot... I can feel good about my progress but I also need to remain teachable and to not get cocky in sobriety. I have always loved the concept of "Progress... not Perfection." Even though I am not drinking I still need to work on my "ism" every day. Some of my old thoughts and behaviors still rear their ugly head. At times I can still be self-centered, overly sensitive, impatient and a complete perfectionist. (I can hear my Herrington counselor Charlie talking about KING BABY). The difference today is that I am more self-aware... I can usually catch these old thoughts and behaviors fairly quickly and I don't need to act on them. If I do act on them, then I am able to make amends. I can't do any of this, however, on my own. Meetings, friendships, sponsor, sponsees, the 12 steps and my higher power... I need all of these to help warn me when the old behaviors are coming out and to guide me to do the next right thing. I am so tremendously grateful for Herrington and my recovery program and I plan on enjoying the rest of the journey.

I am still at the airport... my flight is getting ready to board. Reflecting on my sobriety... I couldn't think of a better way to spend my airport time today.

## The Winter Retreat & “Who Created Peter Rabbit?”

By: John Aschenbrenner  
Alias “Johnny the German”



According to the thirty-four of us, who gathered taking shelter from the bitter cold at the Redemptorist Retreat Center, around the fires burning in The Neumann Room and Library, it was a retreat to remember. Everyone agreed the speakers all opened their hearts, explaining how difficult life had gotten because of their addictions, what it took to get into a viable recovery, and what they continue to need to accomplish on a day to day basis to maintain and enrich their recoveries and ongoing lives.

John opened the retreat on Friday evening with his comments on his own recovery over the years, having themed the retreat, “Just Another Day in Paradise,” – a phrase for which he has become known at Herrington. Weekend speakers were either very early in their recoveries or those who have achieved years in the program – two had just recently been discharged from Herrington, two had recent difficulties with relapse and regaining their workable programs moving forward, and one is a relatively new therapist to the treatment center. Tears, laughter, fresh insights into our Spirituality and strong camaraderie among those attending were bound even more closely together. Saturday morning we brought in our important guests – the current residents at the treatment center, who stayed long enough to hear two of the speakers.

The tension began to mount during the day, as Johnny the Greek and Johnny the German chose their teams for the Trivial Pursuit Playoff – Johnny the Greek hoping to win back the title for the Greeks after a forfeiture at our

last retreat and another dismal loss at the Summer Reunion. The game was one of the best ever – both teams ahead and behind for the two hours of play, until both teams pies were filled with all categories won and heading for the center of the board for that ultimate final question. The Germans at last were at the center, and the Greeks chose the category for the Germans, and then the question. “Give ‘em “Art & Literature,” one of the Greeks demanded, “What do the Germans know about those things?” Johnny the Greek had already taken off his shirt – sweating bullets as his trembling hands clutched the table.

The question was asked, “Who created Peter Rabbit?” Both teams fell into moments of hushed tension, and all that could be heard was a whispered, “Who the hell would know that?” Without hesitation, Johnny the German confidently pronounced, “Beatrix Potter!”

For the third time, the ugly 2 foot high losers trophy found its way into Johnny & Debbie “The Greeks,” car. One could almost make out what Debbie was muttering under her breath, knowing the ugly angel holding the brass spittoon would again grace the center of the fireplace mantle for the third time! Let the challenge go forward! I will again gather my team of Germans to play Trivial Pursuit against the Greeks and hold the title during the June Reunion!



### The Gift

Hi my name is Hilda, and I’m a grateful recovered alcoholic. I believe with my whole being in that statement today. And let me say, that it has taken a long time to get there.

My date of sobriety is Sep 14, 1992. When I got here I was broken physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. I had no clue what was to be in my future. I don’t believe I wanted a future, because all I could even fathom was dark and void of any kind of love. But, my God had other ideas, and I was brought to the AA fellowship. I was given a sponsor who focused on the steps. I was told in order to not drink again I would have to work these steps.

So my journey began. We all have life experiences that seem only heavy and sad. It has been my experience that without those I might not be where I am today. I remember coming back into the program two days before my daughter’s twelfth birthday. There were no words or feelings that I could have offered to change her world and perception. She absolutely hated me and didn’t believe me -- and wasn’t going to. My older daughter had married to get away from me. I remember saying if I made it to my sixteenth anniversary of sobriety, that this then-12 year old would get my medallion because she deserved it. You see, her birthday was on the 16th.

When I reached that anniversary, I went to visit her on that birthday, her 28th, my 16th celebration of sobriety. I intended this to be her celebration. She turned it around -- she’d bought me a special, recovery medallion and put it in a wooden frame for me. You see, she loved me and trusted me and accepted me again. Healing is precious and in God’s time. We just take the steps and live a better way, one day at a time. My feeling low was changed to feeling love because I chose to begin my journey of loving me so that I could love you.

This lovely daughter said to me then, “Mom, it’s time to quit being guilty about me and my sister’s

life. We are grown; the choices are ours and so also the responsibility of them.

And today, I have to let go of a granddaughter, who lives with her other grandmother. The legal system didn’t go the way I wanted, and she and we leave the results to God.

You see, each of us, me, my daughter, and granddaughter all have our own journeys. I’m still learning to stay in my sandbox. When feeling low, my mind tells me it would be different, IF I had lived different. But my heart tells me to let go and let God and live life today.

I have family issues, financial issues, relationship issues, living issues and with God I overcome myself, not others. I am far from being able to have this attitude all the time, but I have humbled myself to accept that God will always carry through, no matter what. I was also introduced to the precious traditions, which today I hold so dear to my heart. Tradition 1 reads: Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA unity. The experiences of everyone who shares in AA touch my heart. The way I keep this gift today is working with others. The gift isn’t mine. My life is no longer lost, dark, void. I found love in a God that had always been there, and I was willing to go to any length to stay sober and have been given love, forgiveness, compassion, and still remain teachable because I am not cured.

What I know today is that I’m no longer under the bondage of the physical allergy and the mental obsession of the drink controlling my mind. That has been removed by God’s love and grace through my willingness to do his will.

I have been given the fulfillment of a spiritual awakening as a result of working the steps. I am completely aware that this gift of love is only there today if my spiritual connection to this power is in fit condition.

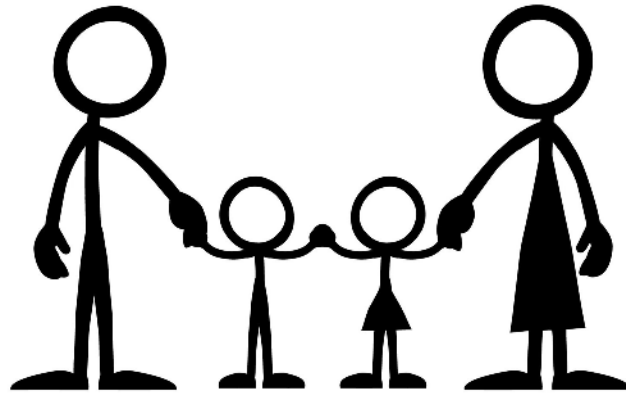
This daughter recently told me, “You are not the person before, or after you drank. You are entirely different.” Is that so bad? I asked myself. No. I am who God sees. I hope I always will be.



If you want to lift yourself up,  
lift up someone else.  
–Booker T. Washington

I have found that the process of  
discovering who I really am begins  
with knowing who I really don’t  
want to be.

— Alcoholics Anonymous



## Family Recovery

As I drove to my first family day I felt that familiar knot in my stomach tighten up. I was angry and hurt but I was only going to show my anger. I couldn't cry there because I was afraid that if I started I wouldn't stop.

I had been told by the family counselor, "if for no other reason, go for yourself". I didn't even know what this meant but I went and today I am grateful I did.

It was at family day that I reached my bottom. I didn't like the person I was. I was miserable. I left early that day after telling my husband that I didn't think I could stay married anymore and I meant it.

We had a baby boy and though I still loved my husband very much, I wasn't willing to take our son on the roller coaster ride of addiction. I put pressure on myself to make this decision soon; do I stay or go?

Out of complete desperation I went to Al-Anon. I wanted someone to tell me what to do. It didn't happen that night – nobody was giving advice. This was very foreign to me since where I come from people love to tell you what to do. What I did get was a gift of suggestion that changed my life; "if you're not in danger (which I wasn't) give yourself 6 months in the program before you make any life altering decisions". This had never occurred to me. I don't have to react to crisis with more crises!

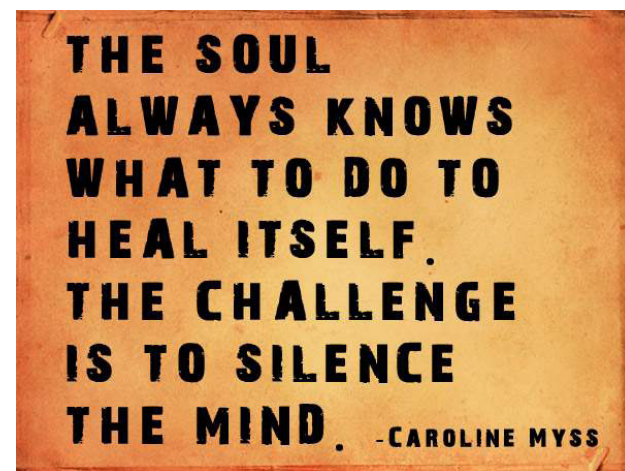
I had no idea what a sponsor was or why I needed one. But I asked a woman to sponsor me that first night because I was willing to do anything to feel better. It took a lot of effort to go to meetings at first but I started to learn a lot about myself.

I came to my marriage with my own baggage. I had been affected by the disease of alcoholism my whole life and, as a result, became very good at obsessing over other people, avoiding conflict and worrying. This was what was making me so unhappy. I had no idea how hard I had been to live with.

Al-Anon has given me a spiritual awareness that allowed me to stay out of my husband's way and focus on myself. I no longer take other peoples' moods or actions personal. Most days I can see when something is none of my business. I know now that the only thing I have control over is my attitude. I have learned to 'accept life on life's terms' and because of this I no longer live with a knot in my stomach. All of my relationships have improved because I am getting better.

I came to Al-anon because my marriage was falling apart. I wanted to know if I should stay or go. I did get my answer but not the way I expected it. I had to work the Steps with my sponsor, go to meetings and do service work. Only then did it become very clear to me that staying married was the best decision for me and my family.

Today Al-anon is not something I do, its part of who I am. It saved my life and my family and that is why I keep coming back. -Toni G.



## Step Nine and the Promises

Drinking and promiscuity were the hallmarks of my first years in high school. Like the song said, I was looking for love in all the wrong places. My freshman year I attended an all-girl denominational school which was totally against my wishes. While the first year my behavior was tolerable by year two I wanted out. The nuns' gage of outrageous and unacceptable was quite low and so by sneaking out at night during a retreat and sharing the lurid details of my waywardness with my classmates I was called out. After being interviewed and honest to a fault my parents were called in and I was asked to leave. It was one of the happiest days of my life. I was grounded for the summer but I always looked at being grounded as optional. My parents looked the other way because it took too much energy to try to keep track of me.

Attending my small, hometown public school for the first time in my life was such a freeing adventure. I felt grown up and on my own. I didn't have a boyfriend. I was a member of a clique of boys my age. I had sex often and mostly with older boys. As a minor, birth control pills were not available to me in the mid-1960s. I used the rhythm method for birth control and it worked for awhile.

Fear gripped me when I realized I was pregnant and I knew everything would change. My father told me what I already knew, that if I chose to keep the child I would be uneducated, stuck in that depressing town, living in a rat hole apartment and working at the paper mill for the rest of my life. He said that if I went to a large city during the pregnancy and gave the child up for adoption he would set me up in college. My fight was gone, I left with a whimper. I had a healthy baby boy and I gave him up.

My father did set me up in college and I quickly wasted the opportunity. I drank, did drugs, skipped classes and hung around with like-minded people. During the following seventeen years I binge drank, slept with numerous men, married twice and threw away many more opportunities. I never considered having another child because I carried around guilt and shame and I knew that I didn't deserve to have another when I had given up the first.

Coming into AA and recovery, the birth and adoption of my son became an open wound. As an attempt at healing and amends I wrote a letter to my son and sent it to his file at the adoption agency. Over the next years I sent several letters to his file in an attempt to heal myself and in the unlikely chance that he would check his file that he would know that I thought of him and cared.

After seventeen years in sobriety a miracle happened and I was reunited with my son. I won't explain all of the details but I will say with certainty that God led us back to each other. My son was thirty-five years old and miraculously welcomed me with open arms. I also was blessed with a loving daughter-in-law and four grandchildren. We have been reunited for ten years now and I have become an integral part of all of their lives.

Today I have twenty-seven years of continuous sobriety and I continue to work the steps and go to meetings. I am living proof that the promises do come true and that they are placed in the Big Book after Step 9 for a reason. -Kay M



If you have made mistakes...there is always another chance for you...you may have a fresh start any moment you choose, for this thing we call 'Failure' is not the falling down but the staying down. – Mary Pickford