

# *The Herrington Recovery*

## *Alumni Association Newsletter*

---



### *From the Desk of our President*

Hello Alumni, Friends, and Supporters,

I truly hope you are all doing well and enjoying the transition to spring. Spring means that summer is approaching—and for the HMAA, that means it's almost picnic time!

But before I get into our upcoming picnic, I'd like to humbly ask all of you for some help.

Some of you may already know this, but some may not: just about everything the Herrington McBride Alumni Association does to promote recovery for residents and alumni is funded by donations. While Rogers Behavioral Health does cover certain things (like the HMAA picnic lunch), nearly all other events and activities we sponsor are self-funded through our own contributions.

Simply put, our ability to maintain all of the events you've come to appreciate—The Fall Ball, Pizza Nights, etc.—depends on donations from you, our alumni. To be candid, donations have slowed over the past year, and we now find ourselves with lower operational funds than we would like.

So, my ask is simple: please donate what you can to the HMAA! Whether your financial contribution is big or small, it all helps. The last thing we want to do is scale back our activities and events due to insufficient funding.

You can donate using the envelope that accompanied this newsletter, or you can use the QR code to donate via PayPal. Thank you all for your financial support of our collective mission!

Now, on to the fun stuff... it's almost picnic time!

Please mark your calendars for Saturday, June 21st. This will be the date of the 40th Annual HMAA Alumni Picnic. Yes, you read that correctly—the 40th anniversary of this cherished HMAA event!

The picnic will be held at the Multi-Purpose Center on the Rogers Oconomowoc campus. Check-in starts around 9:00 a.m., so come early for coffee, a continental breakfast, and fellowship. We'll kick things off at 10:00 a.m. with opening remarks and some excellent speakers. We are also planning something special for our 40th anniversary!

A picnic lunch—consisting of burgers, brats, hot dogs, salads, chips, and desserts—will be provided by Rogers. Vegetarian options will be available. Water, soda, and lemonade will be available throughout the day.

After lunch, there will be additional speakers, raffle prizes, and some afternoon downtime for games, Recovery Olympics, or simply enjoying each other's company. We'll fire up the grill again around 4:30 p.m., and you can either enjoy some leftovers or bring your own items to grill.

Finally, we'll wrap up the day with a beloved tradition—our fireside open gratitude meeting.

The picnic is open to all friends of Herrington, including residents, alumni, and their families. While it's an all-day affair, you are welcome to come and go as you please. I truly hope to see you there! The Alumni Picnic is a wonderful way to stay connected with this amazing community.

I'd love to hear from you about what else our board can do to serve the needs of our alumni and HRC residents. I welcome your feedback and ideas, so please don't hesitate to reach out using the contact information below.

I look forward to staying connected and celebrating the blessings of recovery together.

See you at the picnic!

Scott Elston, HMAA Board President  
262-442-0837  
[cscottelston@gmail.com](mailto:cscottelston@gmail.com)



## *From the Depths of Hell to Freedom*

I was born on July 30, 1966, to June and Houston Williams. I grew up in a middle-class family on the south side of Chicago. I am the youngest of twelve children, and as the youngest, I was a spoiled brat. Around the age of eight, one of my older sisters lost her battle with addiction and ultimately passed away from a heroin overdose. I was too young to understand exactly what had happened to my beloved sister, but as

I grew older, I learned more about her addiction.

By the time I was thirteen, I took my very first drink of alcohol. I would regularly steal alcohol from my parents' liquor cabinet to feed my habit. Around the time I began high school, I started thinking more about my future and what I wanted to become. I had dreams of playing in the NBA or MLB—I was pretty good at basketball—but that dream was cut short due to my use of alcohol.

Shortly after that, I began selling marijuana and found myself surrounded by the wrong crowd. Not long after, I joined a local gang. At fifteen, I became a father for the first time to a son named Antonio D. Williams. I didn't know or understand how to raise a child while being a child myself. At that time, I was still immersed in the gang lifestyle—continuing to sell drugs and drink daily. I have no clue how I managed to graduate high school.

In 1983, my best friend talked me into joining the Navy. I ultimately agreed, and we went to MEPS to take the test. I passed the examination; however, my best friend did not. I ended up going into the Navy alone. I was so angry about going into such an important part of my life by myself.

While I was in boot camp in Great Lakes, Illinois, I lost my second-born child—my daughter, Tiffany Williams. She died due to complications during birth. I was just eighteen years old at the time. About a year after her tragic loss, I was medically discharged from the Navy. I returned home to Chicago and picked up right where I had left off—living a terrible lifestyle of drinking and selling drugs.

At twenty-two, I realized I was no longer drinking for fun. My body needed alcohol just to function. My drinking had turned into an obsession far beyond my mental or physical control. In my heart, I knew I didn't want to continue using alcohol, but I felt as if I needed it to survive. During this time, I confided in my brother, who gave me information about Alcoholics Anonymous. Even then, I knew I wasn't ready to give up alcohol. I recognized I couldn't drink like everyone else—one drink for me would never be just one.

At twenty-three, I was blessed with my third child, Montez Williams. Around this time, I realized I had to make some changes in my life because I wanted to be present in my children's lives. That meant removing myself from gang activity and drug dealing. It weighed heavily on me that I wasn't involved with my children. I hadn't seen my firstborn since he was two years old, and his mother had moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Sadly, we lost touch, which continued to weigh on me.

Despite removing myself from dangerous people, places, and things, I still couldn't remove alcohol from my life—which led to my first DUI. About three years later, at twenty-six, I got my second DUI. By then, my drinking was completely out of control. The following year, I was twenty-seven and had my fourth child, Houston Williams III, but my life was spiraling downhill faster than I could have imagined.

At twenty-eight, I moved to Peoria, Illinois, with one of my sisters and got a roofing job, which I kept for about two years. Despite holding steady work, my drinking got worse, and I needed serious help. At thirty, I was admitted into the Lighthouse Treatment Facility in Bloomington, Illinois. After completing treatment, I moved back to Chicago and into a sober living home called Bill's Family. That place became my safe haven—I stayed for quite some time. Eventually, I became a house manager and was able to maintain sobriety for several years.

After maintaining years of sobriety, I decided it was time to move on and reconnect with my children. I was able to spend more time with Houston and Montez, but I still couldn't find Antonio or his mother. I was also looking for employment, and the job search in Chicago was frustrating. So, I moved to Wisconsin with a friend to seek better opportunities and a fresh start. I landed a great job at A-2 Machine Co. as a CNC Operator.

Unfortunately, shortly after settling in Wisconsin, I relapsed and began drinking again, which led to the loss of my job. Fast forward a few years, and I got married on August 11, 2012. Life seemed beautiful. I had everything I wanted, I got back into programming, and I reestablished my sobriety.

But things didn't stay beautiful. My wife and I began arguing more as I slipped away from sobriety. I didn't think my addiction could get worse than before—but I was wrong. My drinking became the worst it had ever been. My marriage was falling apart, and my wife had become someone I no longer recognized. Our relationship became full of narcissistic behaviors, arguments, resentments, and overall dysfunction. Still, we stayed together.

In 2013, I got a phone call that flipped my world upside down. I was in Menasha, drinking with coworkers after work when I got a call from Antonio's wife. I didn't know what to expect, but when she told me that my son had been sentenced to life in prison—I lost it. All the emotions I had been holding in for years breached the dam. I dropped the phone and cried. I felt helpless. I don't know how long I sat there in that bar as my heart broke.

Along with the grief came overwhelming guilt and regret. "This is all my fault," I thought. "If only I had been more involved in his life, I could have made a difference." I couldn't cope with the fact that my son would spend life in prison. I drank to numb the pain. A couple of years later, at forty-three, I got my third DUI—but I still didn't stop drinking.

For six more years, I sat in that grief, in a marriage that felt like hell. I was miserable, and addiction was the only thing I allowed to keep me company. My life became a cycle of county jails, psych wards, detox centers, and rehabs. Only by the grace of God did I avoid prison—or death. I wanted to end my life many times, but I never had the courage to pull the trigger. For that, I thank God every day.

Eventually, God sent someone who helped lift me out of the whirlpool my life had become—Susan Kircher. She came into my life unexpectedly, as most wonderful things do. Susan helped ease my pain, and with her support, I left my toxic marriage and moved to Watertown, Wisconsin, with nothing but the clothes on my back.

Once settled, things seemed to fall into place. I was still drinking, but I landed a great job at Johnsonville Sausage and worked my way up to Team Lead. I managed to keep my drinking under control for a while—but not for long. Eventually, I relapsed again.

I went to the hospital for detox and was referred to Rogers Behavioral Health in West Allis. I knew I needed help but wasn't ready to let go of alcohol. I left Rogers after two weeks, claiming I had to return to work. That same day, I started drinking again. Within two months, I lost my job, got evicted, became homeless, and Susan left me. I ended up sleeping in the garage of the duplex I was kicked out of.

One morning, I woke up hungry and thirsty and went walking to find food. A stranger saw me and honked. This incredibly kind man offered to buy me a meal and even paid for a week at a Super 8 Motel. He went above and beyond, connecting with his pastor, who referred me to Joe's House—a sober living home in Beaver Dam.

That act of kindness was life-changing. At Joe's House, I got back into AA, found a great job, and stayed sober. I graduated after six months, got my own place, and reconnected with Susan. I continued attending meetings for a while, but eventually, I stopped. I thought I could do sobriety on my own—WRONG.

My brother unexpectedly passed away on September 27, 2023. By then, I had no defense against that first drink. I had left God, AA, my sponsor, and all my support. My father was also battling prostate cancer, and as he worsened, my addiction worsened too. On May 24, 2024, while at work, I received the call that my father had passed.

Once I finished work that day, I went straight to the bar. I was drinking daily while trying to maintain a job and act "normal." Eventually, my body and soul had enough. I broke down. I lay on my couch for over a week—drinking, sleeping, drinking again. I wasn't eating or hydrating. My life was a cycle of despair.

Then, on June 9, 2024, I got a call that my oldest granddaughter had been killed in a head-on collision. She died on impact. That grief broke me. I knew I needed help. I humbled myself and called my employer—I didn't care who found out. I needed help. They sent me to Alarus Healthcare for counseling.

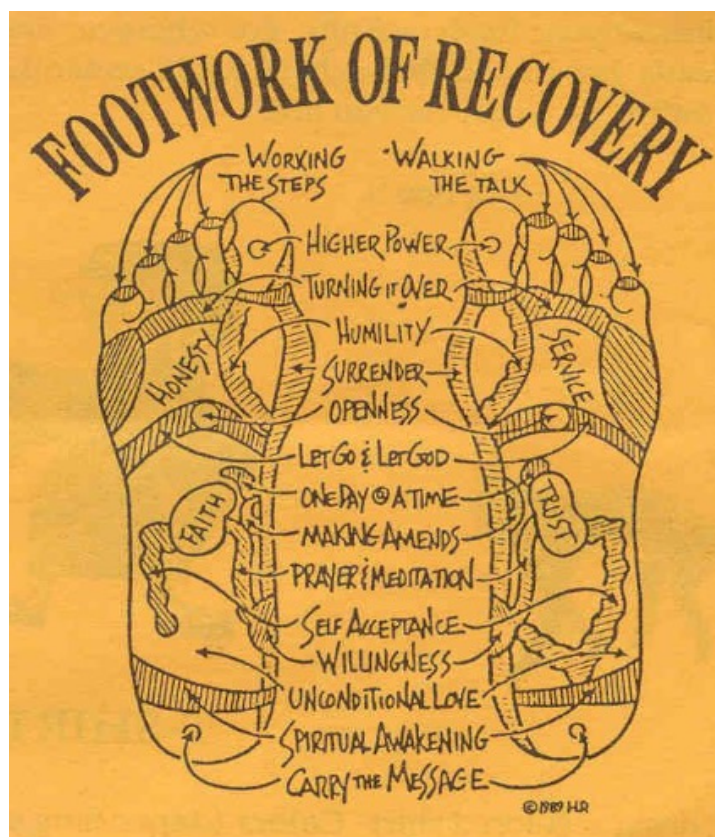
At my appointment, I said before my counselor could even speak: "I'm sick. I need help. I need inpatient care." That was the moment I surrendered. My counselor took me to Beaver Dam Hospital for detox, and from there I returned to Rogers Behavioral Health in Oconomowoc.

On June 12, 2024, after seven days of detox and 30 days of residential treatment, my life was saved. I turned my life over to God. I worked the program thoroughly and humbly. I focused on my inner self and my defects. When I left Rogers, I felt like a new man.

Today, I remain sober and am a proud member of Alcoholics Anonymous. Through prayer, meditation, working the Twelve Steps, and the fellowship of recovery, I now help others as others once helped me. I suffered for years in a hopeless state of mind and body—but today, I am free.

The obsession is gone, by the grace of God and the fellowship of this program. Thank you, Rogers, for saving my life. Thank you for giving me a second chance.

— Houston W.



## Save the Date 38th Annual Winter Retreat January 2-4th, 2026



Now you can use your smartphone to donate to the HMAA using Pay Pal. Just use your smartphone to scan this QR code.





# *The Journey of the Greeks and Germans*

*By: Johnny the Greek*

Twenty-five hundred years after the Golden Age of Greece and the struggling rise of civilization, the Germanic people—who had been cave dwellers at the time of the Golden Age—formed the nation of Germany in 1871. A little less than a hundred years later, in the land of southeastern Wisconsin, an infant boy of German descent was born, whom we know as Johnny the German.

I first met Johnny the German at UW-Whitewater during the second semester of my freshman year, having moved into a local boarding house from the dorms. In the boarding house were a number of young men who I can only describe as being of German descent. It should be noted that Greeks do not feel bad about German students; we only feel a certain sadness for them.

As it turned out, I was getting out of town and attending UW-Madison in the fall. Little did I know that our paths would cross again thirty-five years later at Herrington Recovery House in 2006, in Oconomowoc, in the Stephen King-designed house, which has now been razed and relocated. It is now the Herrington Lakeside Recovery Resort.

At fifty-five years of age, with four beautiful children ranging in age from 15 to 26, I found myself at Herrington House after five days of detoxification. I remember my sad state of hopelessness after four and a half years of continued addiction. I had lived a good and meaningful life for many years; however, the death of my beloved brother, along with my marriage ending in divorce, found me returning to the alcohol abuse of my teenage years—and then to crack cocaine. Fortunately, family and friends stepped in with an intervention and got me enrolled in recovery.

At the time, Johnny the German was a counselor at Herrington House. We were able to piece together our history back to Whitewater, and I was impressed and happy to observe that he had done so well for his family and his life—also having been a school administrator for many years.

Johnny the German wrote an article titled "The Germans vs. The Greeks (Over a Quarter Century of Challenge)" in the last edition of The Herrington Recovery Alumni Association Newsletter. The article relates the beginnings of the Trivial Pursuit contests between the teams of Johnny the German and Johnny the Greek since 2006, and we will meet again at the 40th Annual Summer Picnic on June 21, 2025. We hope to see everyone and their family and friends joining us for this wonderful event.

In the afternoon of the picnic, a number of us will gather to sit down and play an enthusiastic game of Trivial Pursuit, with the team of Johnny the German facing off against the team of Johnny the Greek. I hope you will consider playing with us. Here are several points to consider when choosing your team: Johnny the German, in his article, stated, "The call goes out, GERMANS (or wannabe Germans) UNITE!" In contrast, the Greek team has always taken a Hellenic approach.

In history, Greeks are also referred to as Hellenes, and Hellenism is the opposite of nationalism. Hellenism is something bigger than a nation-state. From ancient times, the language, culture, and values of the Hellenes have significantly impacted the world. Throughout history, non-Hellenic people have adopted and assimilated the values

and aesthetics of the Hellenes. Through this contact, the culture of the Hellenes has not only transformed other cultures but has transformed itself. This relationship is Hellenism.

In fact, an openness to new ideas and embracing beauty and truth wherever you find it are fundamental features of Hellenism. In short, Hellenism is rooted in the history of the Greek people, but it is bigger than Greek culture. It is part of humanity's shared heritage (National Hellenic Museum – What is Hellenism). "And if a man should partake of our culture, let him be called Hellene." — Isocrates, 4th Century B.C.

Not to confuse Johnny the German, and to partially answer the inquiry in his article ("Socrates who???"): while both Isocrates and Socrates were influential figures in ancient Greek philosophy, they differed significantly. Isocrates focused on rhetoric and practical education, while Socrates emphasized ethics and moral inquiry through dialogue, with Isocrates even criticizing the Socratic method. This, however, was done by partaking in a shared journey of beauty and truth—the Hellenic way.

So please, come to the Trivial Pursuit table just as you are or may be, as each of you is welcome on the Greek team—even any enlightened Germans.

In closing my remarks on Johnny the German's article, I would very much like to share how important and wonderful Johnny the German has been in my journey of recovery. When I was leaving Herrington in January 2007, I believe he could sense the fear I had about returning to the real world. It just so happened (coincidence?) that the Friday I was leaving was the start of the Herrington-sponsored retreat of 2007 at the Redemptorist Center. Johnny the German persuaded me to attend. I do not remember if we played Trivial Pursuit that year, but I believe we have played at nearly every subsequent retreat and Summer Picnic.

I am eternally grateful to Johnny the German for all he has done for my journey of recovery. And let the Trivial Pursuit games continue on our mutual journey!



# *Keep One Eye on the Door!*

*By: Johnny the German*

Sorry, this isn't an essay on being careful as a mobster! Rather, it's about being welcoming to the newcomer just coming through the door at a meeting.

Remember back when we first suspected we had a problem with drinking or with any other addictive substance? It certainly didn't happen overnight. The police, your doctor, or family may have been responsible for putting the original notion in your head, and someone along the way suggested you go to a recovery meeting—whether that be AA, NA, or any of the others seeking to help people.

Finally, you went. The building itself seemed foreboding as you parked. It didn't matter what the building was—whether a church basement or a meeting at a recovery clubhouse.

Walking in suspiciously, how many times did you want to turn and quickly retrace your steps back to your car? It isn't easy and can be frightening, because with this first move, you've recognized something in your life that has taken control of you—and yet you're far from fully recognizing it as something you cannot reconcile on your own.

You approach the group sitting around a table. Your skittishness increases, and you want to leave... until someone recognizes you as being new, gets up from the group and approaches you, shakes your hand as he introduces himself, and brings you to the table. You feel welcome, even though you still don't have much of a clue about what comes next. You sit down next to the guy who's made you feel at home. You will never forget that moment—or the person who made you feel welcome. You've done what you finally needed to do.

On a sadder note, I've been to meetings that have become too cliquey and almost inbred—filled with people who concern themselves only with others they already know, having sadly forgotten what it felt like to walk through that door for the first time, feeling the urge to turn around with every step forward. Thank God that those groups are few and far between.

Now let's consider Responsibility—the responsibility of the Recovery Group and that of the individual entering for the first time.

The newcomer has met the responsibility to himself or herself, to family, friends, and society by entering the group.

**“IF THE NEWCOMER DOESN'T FEEL WELCOME, HE WILL QUICKLY TURN AND LEAVE THE MEETING!”**

Considering the responsibility of the Recovery Group and its members, it remains our duty to: **“KEEP ONE EYE ON THE DOOR!”**

Just that simple task of making the newcomer feel welcome may save their life. By bringing them to the table, and potentially calling a “First Step” group, we allow the individual to feel welcome by sharing our beginning stories—and allowing them to no longer feel alone in theirs. We help them see that we are all together in this.

Our responsibility continues—not only to the newcomer but also to the individual returning from a relapse. This is the second most difficult time for a recovering alcoholic or addict: coming back through that door. The returning person needs to not just feel welcome—they need to feel welcome with open arms. As members of the group, we can imagine ourselves trying to get through that door if we were ever to relapse. Like the prodigal son in Scripture, the individual's return after a relapse must be celebrated!

On a personal note, after attending AA meetings over the years, I've come to believe that in recovery, there is no room for relapse—but when relapse does occur, there must be every bit of room for it. Then, the responsibility shifts from the returning individual to the group. It is the responsibility of the Recovery Group to be welcoming, embracing, and to help lift the returning member to a place where there is, once again, no room for relapse.



## *Recovery Tools*

Joe McQuany and Charlie Parmley—known to many as “Joe and Charlie”—first met in 1973 and spent more than three decades sharing their interpretation of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. Their work made the text more accessible to countless individuals who found the original language difficult or outdated. Today, their renowned Joe & Charlie Tapes can be heard on platforms such as YouTube, Audible, Apple Podcasts, Silkworth.net, and through the “Everything AA” app.

If you found their recordings as enlightening as I did but felt overwhelmed by the thought of transcribing their insights yourself—look no further. This book offers a complete transcription, designed not to replace the Big Book, but to serve as a companion guide for those studying the Twelve Step program of recovery.

—Michelle V.

## ***We Are Stronger Together***

*"A new life of endless possibilities can be lived if we are willing to continue our awakening through the practice of [the] Twelve Steps." - Bill W.*

### **ROGERS BEHAVIORAL HEALTH MEETINGS**

**Ladish Center** - 34700 Valley Road, Oconomowoc, WI 53066

Monday - 7 pm, Wednesday - 7 pm, Thursday - 6 pm, Saturday - 7:04 am, Sunday - 8:30 am & 6:00 pm

**Lincoln Center** - 2424 South 102nd Street, West Allis, WI 53227, Thursday - 7 pm

### **Additional Meeting Resources**

**Alcoholics Anonymous:** Download Meeting Guide app or visit Online Intergroup of AA  
<https://aa-intergroup.org/meetings>

**Narcotics Anonymous:** Visit <https://usa-na.org/find-na/>

**Families Anonymous:** Visit <https://familiesanonymous.org/>

**Al-Anon:** Visit <https://al-anon.org/al-anon-meetings/find-an-al-anon-meeting>

### **Get Involved**

Alumni interested in participating in **RAP speaking** or **PIZZA nights** with current HRC residents please contact Kenny Blaine: [kennyblaine0@gmail.com](mailto:kennyblaine0@gmail.com) or 414-559-5529



## ***Herrington McBride***

### ***Board Members***

*Serving our Recovering Alumni & Their Friends:*

#### **Elected Board Members:**

Scott Elston – President

Brad Ingram – Vice President

Jeff McGovern – Treasurer

Sue Caliendo – Secretary

Bill Martens – Archivist

Rob McCreddie

John Hopkins

Bob Olson

Kristin Simons

James Dropik

Michael Ingrassia

Kenny Blaine

Jennifer Evancy

Rick Siewert

Billy O'Dwyer

Paul Magel

John Movroydis

#### **Probationary Members:**

Michelle Von Dross

Christa Bando

#### **Advisors:**

*Matthias Scheuth – Director of the Rogers Foundation*

*The Herrington Recovery is published by The Herrington McBride Association – a not-for-profit organization, with the generous help of Rogers Behavioral Health*

For more information about the **Herrington McBride Alumni Association** visit: <https://rogersbh.org/hmaa>

Layout and Printing - Village Graphics Printing, Hartland, WI

**Sharing your story could inspire someone to re-write their own. HRC Alumni, recovering individuals, or family members of addicted loved ones interested in sharing their story or recovery thoughts/experiences, please contact the Editor. Also, please send name, telephone, address, and email changes to:**

**Michelle VonDross, Editor**

**[mlvshell0884@yahoo.com](mailto:mlvshell0884@yahoo.com) | 414-315-2003**

**NOTE: We will need to remove any names from our mailing list should the newsletter be returned.**

**Address for Automatic Bank Donations: H.M.A.A. – PO Box 456, Oconomowoc, WI 53066**