

The Herrington Recovery

Alumni Association Newsletter



From the Desk of our President

Hello Alumni, Friends, and Supporters,

Winter is in full swing in the state of Wisconsin. I hope all of you in Wisconsin have been keeping warm and staying safe. For all of you in warmer climates, I am envious and likely need to add another

resentment to my list to discuss with my sponsor . With all seriousness, I truly hope you are all experiencing a terrific start to 2026, wherever you may be.

The Herrington McBride Alumni Association kicked off 2026 by sponsoring our flagship winter event: The HMAA Winter Retreat! This year's 38th annual retreat was held on January 2nd – January 4th at the Redemptorist Retreat Center in Oconomowoc, WI. This year's theme was "HOPE," and the weekend provided ample opportunities for connection, sharing, reflection and enjoying each other's company and friendship. All said and done, 42 people stayed the weekend – including 14 recipients of scholarships made possible by the HMAA Brian Kenevan Scholarship Fund. We were joined by the Oconomowoc HRC residents on Saturday morning and the West Allis HRC residents on Saturday night. What I particularly loved about this year's retreat was the diversity of attendees. We had attendees that had over 20 years of sobriety and others that had literally days of sobriety – all were welcome, and all helped to create the very spiritual atmosphere that permeated the weekend. All the speakers demonstrated courage and vulnerability by sharing their stories – I took something powerful away from every one of them. This year also included a panel discussion on the importance of mental health led by Mike I, Michelle V and Tim (Timmers) L. This discussion generated some great dialogue and sharing on the interdependencies between mental health and recovery. As has been standard, we topped off Saturday night with ice cream (compliments of John M. and Bill M.) and games that promoted laughter and fellowship. I thought it was a terrific retreat and my

heartfelt thanks to Jim Dropik who works tirelessly to make the retreat happen and to ensure that those in need can take advantage of our scholarships. Thank You Jim for all that you do!

Our next big event on the books is the HMAA Alumni Picnic which is scheduled for Saturday June 20th. More information to come as we get closer. And who knows, we may even come up with another event idea between now and then as we are always thinking about additional ways to drive connection and carry the message of recovery forward.

To that end, I'd love to hear your ideas on how the board can better serve our alumni and HRC residents. Please feel free to reach out using the contact information below. I look forward to staying connected and continuing to share in the blessings of recovery with all of you.

Scott Elston, HMAA Board President
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Save the Dates

39th Annual Winter Retreat
January 8-10th 2027

41st Annual Summer Picnic
June 20th, 2026



Fourteen Months Sober

By: Beth E.

I'm still feeling the love from the 38th Annual HMAA Winter Retreat, which was held at the Redemptorist Retreat Center January 2-4.

This was my third sober retreat, and what a way to ring in the New Year. I attended last year and was grateful to be able to make it again this year. Getting away, staying on a beautiful snowy lake, breathing in some fresh Wisconsin air, bonding with old friends, and making new ones is always something I need in my life.

I spoke briefly (off the cuff) at last year's retreat, so when Jim D. reached out and asked me to be a main speaker this year, it was an easy yes.

"Hope" was the main theme of the weekend, with a side of mental illness—right up my alley and touching on all aspects of my sobriety journey. I was especially grateful that the HRC residents were in attendance to hear my testimony of hope and recovery during my time at Herrington McBride. What a special place.

This year, HMAA was able to provide 14 scholarships to those in recovery through a generous donation from the Rogers Hospital Foundation and donations to the Brian Kenevan Memorial Scholarship Fund. Thank you to the Rogers Hospital Foundation for their continued support of this much-needed retreat in the community. Thank you to Jim Dropik for another amazing retreat. Engaging speakers, wonderful food, and plenty of snacks this year!

I'll leave you with my 2026 anthem:

"In a world where disappearing is easy and commitment is rare, cherish the ones who stay."

Who speak their truth, fight for the connection, and choose to grow with you—those people are gold."

Thank you to all the people from HMAA who have helped me grow so much these past 14 months. I'm grateful to be a part of this empowering sober community. Blessings for 2026!



Knockin on Heaven's Door

By: Jim Z

The editor approached me at the Early Bird meeting on a Saturday morning this past December and asked if I would write an article for the newsletter. I informed her that I didn't go through treatment at Herrington McBride. I was what I choose to call myself, "a walk-on" to the AA program. She persisted, so here I am—writing my journey.

I grew up in Oconomowoc. I am the oldest of six siblings, attended a Lutheran elementary school for eight years, and then graduated from Oconomowoc High School. My father was a liquor salesman, and my mom was a secretary for the same company when I was younger. I remember alcohol was used frequently by both parents, but we never saw it as a problem.

I recall tasting wine for the first time when I was in sixth grade, and it tasted like grape juice. I was a freshman in high school when I had my first drinking episode with a group of friends. I stole some brandy from my parents' stash and shared it with my friends. We were all over served and, of course, had a good time.

This was the beginning of my journey with alcohol, and it continued through high school and then four and a half years in college. One time, while in college, my friends and I had a discussion about whether we were drinking too much. We decided to limit our consumption, but that only lasted two weeks.

I graduated from college in 1972 and married my college sweetheart in 1973. My first post-college job was working as a childcare worker at an all-boys residential treatment center. In

1975, I became a police officer and experienced a traumatic, life-changing event. In 1982, my partner was shot, and I shot and killed the person who did it. After that incident, I drank heavily for a year until my wife informed me that things would have to change or she would leave. I quit drinking “cold turkey” and found a replacement in vigorous physical activity that included long-distance running, biking, and skiing. I never sought counseling or even considered AA. At the time, I believed AA was for individuals with no self-control.

My son was born in 1986 and my daughter in 1990. My alcohol use was under control and confined to special occasions. In 1992, my wife was diagnosed with cancer, and she survived with treatment until 2002, the year I retired from the police force. She passed away that year from the disease. My drinking was still under control. My children were the strings that kept me from excessive drinking.

In 2005, I was introduced to a woman and instantly fell in love. We married in 2006. I was still in control of my drinking, still doing numerous physical activities with her, and seemingly happy.

Then something changed. I began thinking about my past and the “what ifs.” I had flashbacks of my trauma and grieved the loss of my first wife. I hadn’t dealt with these events. My current wife was concerned that I wasn’t fully committed to this new life. For the first time in my life, I sought professional help.

My drinking started to increase, but only with beer. I thought my wife was the one with the problem, so a friend introduced me to AA. I attended meetings once a week for several months, always thinking it wasn’t me who had the problem. I stopped drinking during that time.

In 2012, both my parents passed away, and in 2014 my youngest brother died from glioblastoma. My drinking increased again. At first it was social, but it became more intense. I began drinking IPA beer, thinking the stronger the better. I started drinking brandy and whiskey with water. That changed to just whiskey and brandy, and instead of social drinking, I drank alone. I kept telling myself I could stop drinking. “Tomorrow is the day. I will stop.” Tomorrow would come, and I couldn’t stop. This pattern intensified until I started having my first drink at 9:00 a.m. and drinking throughout the day. My marriage was deteriorating as I continued blaming my wife and focusing on how lousy my life was.

I made my excessive drinking public in front of my family on Thanksgiving Day in 2019. My wife knew there was a problem, but I thought I was good at keeping it limited to just her. There were raised eyebrows and verbalized concern over my behavior.

That Christmas, we were going to visit family and our granddaughter in California. This trip was planned with anticipation. My wife decided she couldn’t go and pretend everything was fine when it wasn’t. She needed time alone to think about our relationship. She wanted me to do the same.

When I returned, I was willing to work on my drinking problem. I told my wife I wouldn’t drink. I went to an alcohol and drug counselor and lied about how much I was drinking. I attended one AA meeting at Rogers and told my wife how sick those people seemed.

Then I started drinking a glass of wine at dinner. It turned into two glasses, then eventually a bottle, and not long after that, I was back to drinking whiskey and bourbon. This time, I was much better at hiding alcohol in different locations around the house.

On September 4, 2020, I took a few swigs from a bottle of whiskey I had hidden in my closet just before my wife and I were going out to dinner. I forgot to hide the bottle when I left the room, and my wife found it. She was very upset and strongly suggested I go to AA—or else.

On September 4, 2020, I had my last drink of alcohol. I went to an AA meeting at St. John’s Episcopal Church, attended my First Step meeting, and got a sponsor.

For the first several months, I attended AA meetings in person several times a week but later switched to Zoom meetings due to COVID. This proved to be an advantage, as I could attend a variety of AA meetings without leaving the house. Over time, I chose which online meetings I enjoyed, and when COVID restrictions decreased, I continued attending four meetings per week.

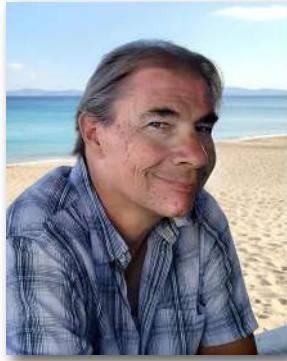
I have been sober for five years. During that time, I began to learn who I am. I’ve learned about the spirituality of AA, which changed my life. I learned that there is more to sobriety than quitting drinking. I witnessed true friendships and learned the significance of true faith. I have learned that if not for my Higher Power and AA, I would not be here today.



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

Check with your employer to see if they offer donation matching — it's an easy way to double the impact of your gift!

In Memorium



The Herrington McBride Alumni Association sadly lost one of our dear members - *Jeff Radtke* passed away peacefully on January 31, 2026. Jeff found recovery while going through the Herrington program in Oconomowoc in 2008. Jeff passionately embraced recovery – he consistently attended AA meetings at Rogers, sponsored others, and did everything he could to share the positive message of our program with others. He was an active member (and VP) of the HMAA Board for many years and poured himself into activities such as the alumni picnic and New Year's gatherings at HRC. Jeff was a kind and gentle soul who was always willing to welcome a newcomer and to lift up those around him. He was a dear friend, and he will be greatly missed, but never forgotten - His kind and caring legacy will live on. Please keep Jeff's family, especially his loving wife Lisa in your prayers. Information on Jeff's obituary and upcoming service is below.

Link to Jeff's Obituary: <https://www.pagenkopf.com/obituaries/jeffrey-radtke>

Upcoming Services for Jeff Radtke:
Pagenkopf Funeral Home 2228 Silver Maple Ln,
Oconomowoc, WI 53066
Saturday, February 28, 2026
Visitation 1:00pm – 3:00pm
Celebration of Life starts at 3:00pm

DAILY REMINDER
**Sobriety isn't
“I HAVE to”
it's “I GET to”**

I get to Wake up feeling well rested.

I get to Enjoy quality time with loved ones.

I get to Show up for myself.

#DRBROOKESCHILLER

The Architecture of a Day

It isn't a mountain you climb in a night,
Nor a battle won in a single, sharp fight.
It's the quiet decision when morning is gray,
To simply stand upright and walk through the day.

The fog that once anchored the soul to the floor,
Is lifting its weight as you walk through the door.
The world hasn't changed, but your vision is clear;
There's a silence that's peaceful, instead of just fear.

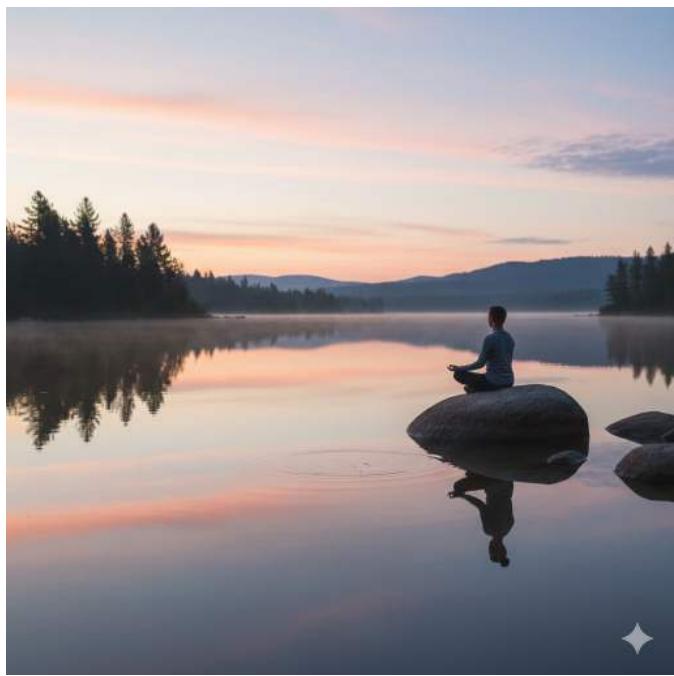
Each hour is a brick in a house made of grace,
Where honesty finally has its own space.
Forgiving the person you used to be then,
So the person you are can start over again.

It's a slow-growing garden, a steady, calm beat,
The feeling of solid earth under your feet.
You aren't just surviving the dark and the rain;
You're learning to bloom in the absence of pain.

Recovery Word Scramble

1. HPELIOWFS _____
2. RPNSOSO _____
3. TLEWEV TESSP _____
4. YERROVCE _____
5. AECCTNAEPC _____
6. IHREHG PREOW _____
7. EON DYA TA A TMIE _____
8. ESRNDERUR _____
9. THOSYEN _____
10. AYONYNIMT _____

See Answer key on following page



One Day at a Time

By: Matt T

Alcohol was an early influence in my life. My father was an alcoholic, and he died in a car accident when I was ten years old. At the time, I didn't understand how deeply that loss and that example would shape my own relationship with alcohol, but looking back now, I can see the seeds were planted early.

By sixteen, I was already having run-ins with the law for underage drinking. In my early twenties, I got a DUI. Still, I didn't think I had a problem. Like many of us, I believed I was different.

For years, I limited my drinking mostly to weekends and stuck primarily to beer. I told myself I was being responsible. I thought I was "controlling" it—and to some degree, maybe I was. But I'm sure my work suffered, and more importantly, I wasn't the father or husband I wanted to be.

Things began to change in my mid-thirties. Over one Christmas break, I started drinking mixed drinks, and slowly, almost without noticing, alcohol crept into my nightly routine. Years later, I took a new job that turned out to be a terrible environment for me. I was miserable, and alcohol became my escape.

What started as relief quickly became dependence. My world shrank. I lost interest in most things. The question, "When can I drink next?" became the only thing I looked forward to.

Negative incidents piled up. I fell unconscious on a sidewalk and woke up in an ambulance on the way to the hospital. I

got another OWI. Alcoholism, for me, was like a snowball rolling downhill—slow at first, then suddenly out of control. Eventually, I lost my job. Oddly enough, that part felt like a relief, though not in the way I ever wanted things to end.

During the two months I was out of work, something shifted. I was more present as a father. My priorities changed. I appreciated work again when I found a new job and felt useful. But I still didn't quit drinking—at least not for long. I might have stopped for a couple of months, but alcohol, of course, found its way back in.

Then my marriage ended. I wasn't an engaged or present spouse, and I wasn't the parent my kids deserved. Many nights are still blank spots in my memory—filled in only by embarrassment, shame, and anxiety the next day. When I look honestly at my life, virtually every bad thing that happened can be traced back, in some way, to alcohol.

Alcohol was the boss. I was helpless to it. My life had become unmanageable. It was my constant, terrible companion. I didn't want to admit I was an alcoholic because I believed that once I did, there would be no going back. What I couldn't see then was why I would ever want to go back.

Thankfully, my turning point didn't come after my worst night or worst hangover. It came with a moment of clarity—simple, quiet, and real. I finally admitted to myself, and to my girlfriend (now my fiancée), that I was an alcoholic. I admitted I needed help and that I wanted to stop drinking. That was a little over a year ago.

Today, I'm slowly finding myself again. I'm learning how to remember—both the good and the bad. I'm facing my inner demons instead of numbing them. I'm experiencing life the way it's meant to be lived: sober. Not somber—sober.

I can accept, live with, and even thrive with the fact that I'm an alcoholic. What I can't accept anymore is being a drunk. So I'll keep doing what works—one day and one meeting at a time.

Answer Key for Word Scramble:

1. Fellowship
2. Sponsor
3. Twelve Steps
4. Recovery
5. Acceptance
6. Higher Power
7. One day at a time
8. Surrender
9. Honesty
10. Anonymity

