

# The Herrington Recovery

## Alumni Association Newsletter



### *From the Desk of our President*

Hello Alumni, Friends, and  
Supporters,

Summer is almost upon us. I always like this time of year when things are warming up and turning green. It also means that our annual summer picnic is almost here. More on that shortly...

I wanted to start by reflecting a little bit on the Winter of 2026. It has been an emotional and challenging start to 2026 for our alumni in that we have experienced some losses that have really hit home. At the end of January, we lost our dear friend Jeff Radtke. Jeff went through the Herrington program in 2008, and he was a fixture at the Oconomowoc AA meetings for many years. Jeff passionately embraced recovery - he was an active HMAA board member and poured himself into many of our activities including the annual picnic and our HRC New Year's event. Jeff was a gentle soul who was always willing to help a newcomer feel welcome. He was a good friend, and he will be missed but never forgotten. Sadly, tragedy also struck the family of our current board member Jim Dropik. Jim's son Dillon passed away in March of 2026. Dillon was a kind and loving person who was also a graduate of the HRC program. Our hearts and sympathies go out to Jim, Marilyn, and the entire Dropik family. Emotionally, this was a lot to take in. I have not had a lot of experience with loss like this, and to have two deaths hit so close to home was very jarring. Gratefully, my first and immediate reaction was to be of service - to simply be there for the grieving families. In the past I would have hesitated to reach out - what would I say? What can I possibly do? Fear would have gotten in the way of doing the right thing. But this program has taught me to do God's will and to focus on others, so I reached out - What I said didn't matter. I was able to simply be there for Lisa and Jim... to listen, to comfort them, and just to let them know that I care. I learned that it's not about what we say, we simply need to be there for others in their time of need.

Our presence is what matters. My wife and I attended memorial services for both Jeff and Dillon. And while they were certainly sad, they were also uplifting tributes to two amazing people who left a lasting legacy to those around them. I also walked away from both services feeling very touched by the outpouring and support that our AA and alumni community showed to the Radtke and Dropik families. I almost felt a sense of pride in how many alumni showed up to pay their respects and to offer comfort. That is what we do as a recovering community - we care for each other, we uplift each other, and we show up when needed. While I am still very much saddened by the loss of Jeff and Dillon, I am more grateful than ever to be part of this terrific family of recovery.

Please mark your calendars for Saturday, June 20th. That is the date for the 41st Annual HMAA Alumni Picnic. Details on the picnic can be found in a flyer in this newsletter. It will be held at the Multi-Purpose Center on the Roger's campus in Oconomowoc, WI. The picnic will include speakers, a wonderful lunch provided by Rogers, games, fellowship, and an open fireside gratitude meeting to close out the day. All alumni, family, and friends are welcome to attend. There is no cost and you can come and go as you like. This is always a wonderful event, and I hope to see you all there! We will also be doing special honorariums to pay tribute to both Jeff Radtke and Dillon Dropik.

I'd love to hear your ideas on how the HMAA 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 the blessings of recovery with all of you.

Scott Elston, HMAA Board President  
262-442-0837 • cscottelston@gmail.com

**Save the Date**  
**41st Annual Summer Picnic**  
June 20th, 2026  
**39th Annual Winter Retreat**  
January 8-10th 2027



## Finally Surrendered

By: SJ

I'm one of the lucky ones who grabbed onto recovery after almost 30 years of holding out, and I have not had to relapse. I think my drinking was ruined before I even started. I had three grandparents who were alcoholics and eventually went into AA, quit drinking, and died sober. I was surrounded by alcoholism, and I was often disturbed by other people's drinking. But when I started drinking at 13 years old, I was immediately off to the races.

My drinking usually came with heavy remorse and shame when I woke up the next morning. Deep down inside, I think I knew my drinking was not normal or okay.

I grew up in a medium-sized town a few hours north of Milwaukee. I had a relatively good childhood with two parents who I believe were good parents and gave us a very nice life. Of course, we had issues like most families do, and my father was an alcoholic, but he taught us many good things and loved us tremendously.

My father was a successful business owner and usually the life of the party. My mother stayed home, was a great cook and housekeeper, and was there to watch over us and provide us with wonderful opportunities.

My goal was to make it to University of Wisconsin–Madison, so I studied hard, stayed active in sports and extracurricular activities, and had friends. I was also raised in a religion that taught me good morals and values, and I believed God was loving.

Although I was disturbed by many family members' drinking, I believe I was born an alcoholic. When I had my first drink on the last day of 8th grade, I loved it, and I had no real control. The first time I drank, I blacked out, which I later learned was a sign that I was an alcoholic.

I was always drawn to friends who had alcoholic parents or who would later become alcoholics themselves. Every man I ever dated was an alcoholic or an addict. We are drawn to each other — the chaos, the drama, the shame — as if there is an unspoken pull between us.

Many bad things happened because of my drinking, including making poor life choices that changed the path of my life and my children's lives. My drinking and bad decision-making harmed

my parents, my brother, my children, many friends, coworkers, and even strangers who probably felt unsettled after interacting with me.

I went through a nasty divorce that caused pain for our three children and others. My ex was — and still is — an active alcoholic, so we were both struggling in life.

After my children were born, I substantially cut back on drinking, but that did not help with the depression and anxiety that plagued me. Almost all the alcoholics I know suffered from depression and anxiety when they were actively drinking or newly sober, which I believe goes hand in hand with alcoholism.

Because I was not drinking nearly as much as I used to, I convinced myself that I was not an alcoholic like my father or my ex. What I have learned is that normal people usually don't have to quit drinking. Normal drinkers don't continue drinking after bad things repeatedly happen because of alcohol, while simultaneously trying to manage, control, or quit.

I was trying to manage and control my drinking by creating rules for myself. I was depressed and struggling to cope with life because I no longer had my liquid courage or my "relaxing friend," alcohol, to count on. I stayed extremely busy with my three children, their appointments, sports, religion classes, and volunteering — anything to avoid having too much time on my hands.

Of course, whenever I allowed myself to drink, who knew what would happen? I was limiting it as much as I could, but when I drank the way I truly wanted to drink, I was a disaster. Since I was not drinking that way as often as I used to, I was lying to myself and fooling many outsiders. I never had a DUI or legal trouble, so I did not have those obvious consequences.

I was finally called out on my drinking by my attorney and a friend on the very same day, and something snapped inside of me. I surrendered that day and called a woman who had been suggested to me. She has been my sponsor ever since — for more than 16 years now.

My sponsor got me busy with Alcoholics Anonymous, and for the first year I basically did things I did not want to do and did not feel like doing. I was extremely uncomfortable, overwhelmed, and miserable — but I surrendered and was willing because I wanted my life to get better.

I had friends in AA who had fantastic lives. They still had normal life issues like everyone else, but they smiled, laughed, had fun, and were peaceful people. They were actually having more fun than my old drinking friends. This shocked me because I thought all my fun would end if I stopped drinking. Truthfully, the "fun" at the end of my drinking was rare and questionable anyway.

I wanted what the people in AA had, and I could not stand the way I was living anymore. I became willing to do whatever my sponsor suggested because she clearly knew what she was talking about. She had many years of sobriety and a good life.

Working the 12 Steps changed my life and substantially reduced — and often eliminated — my depression and anxiety. Even today,

16 years later, I do as much or more than I did when I was new because I want to keep this gift. I do not want to fall away from recovery or return to depression.

My life is much happier and easier when I help others, attend meetings, and hear the spiritual message of sobriety.

I watched family and friends who believed they could “stop drinking on their own” without help, and I also watched those who got involved in AA. The people active in AA — who had sponsors and worked the Steps — were laughing, happy, peaceful, and had healthier relationships. Those who tried to do it alone were often angry, miserable, depressed, anxious, and usually unable to stay sober for very long.

Those differences helped me decide to become active in AA.

I lost two of my best high school friends to alcoholism. One died at 50 and the other at 56 when their bodies shut down. If I had continued drinking the way they did, I could have gone down that same path, and my children could have lost their mother far too early.

My daughter once told me that I changed the trajectory of our family and that she is grateful I am sober, stable, and dependable. She has friends whose parents are complete disasters physically and mentally because of alcoholism.

Somehow I accepted the gift, while my two friends did not. I do not believe I am special or more deserving than they were. I simply grabbed onto the gift and refused to let go. I have attended far too many funerals that remind me to take alcoholism seriously and stay active in recovery.

My life today is better than it has ever been. Because I quit drinking, worked an AA program, and stayed sober, I now have peace, clarity, purpose, and the ability to help others. I am a better mother, daughter, sister, and wife.

I remarried the love of my life and now have my first truly healthy relationship with a partner. I have physical sobriety and, most days, emotional sobriety too. What could be better than that?

Today I feel my feelings without being terrified of them. I can go anywhere in the world and hold my head high with a clear mind.

Around seven years into sobriety, I began an entirely new career that never would have been possible if I had not gotten sober and stable in AA.

Over the last 16 years, I have sponsored many women, and that has become one of the greatest gifts of my life. I have also made incredible friendships in AA with people who are trying to live healthy, honest, spiritually connected lives.

We talk about real things and real life without pretending. We support each other through life’s ups and downs. We show up for one another.

There is also an enormous recovery community filled with fun events and amazing people. I have met people from all over the

world in meetings, and my life is so much bigger than it was when I was drinking.

I cannot imagine returning to the dark and confusing life I once lived in active alcoholism. Today I understand that alcoholism was never just about the number of drinks I consumed.

Alcoholism held my mind, body, and spirit hostage. I was not free.

It took time to break free from that obsession of the mind, but today I am free. I would not trade this freedom or my connection with God for anything.

I am finally living a life worth living. My relationships are healthy, I have found purpose, and I have found my people — people who want to live healthy and free.

To the newcomers: welcome. We are here for you. We truly hope you stay and do not let alcoholism lure you back out there, where it wants to destroy you.

I have seen the impossible become possible in AA. I have seen people with the lowest bottoms turn their lives around, smile again, and eventually live free if they stay and do the work that is suggested.

Stay until you love it like I do. Stay until you cannot imagine going back to alcoholism and addiction. Stay until you are healthy and free.

Just stay. Thank you for a better life.



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!*



## The First Year By: Tim K.

Alcohol was my escape from reality. I used it to fill the emptiness I felt and to numb my mind so I didn't have to face life. For a while, it gave me what I thought was freedom, happiness, serenity, and peace. But none of that was real. My alcoholism only allowed me to live in denial while I slowly abandoned everything that mattered to me. It pushed me down a path of destruction that hurt both myself and the people closest to me.

I won't go into every "war story," but I want to share enough for you to understand where I came from. I was born in Milwaukee to an average family. Like many families in the '80s, we had our relational, economic, and social good days and struggles. However, through all of this, I did not develop the ability to effectively communicate my feelings and emotions.

During middle school and high school, I often felt misunderstood and had a hard time fitting into what everyone else considered normal. Around 8th grade, I discovered drugs and alcohol. They gave me a sense of acceptance that I had been missing, and that identity became a comfort I clung to. Anytime life seemed to close in on me, I dug in deeper and found solace in the addictive lifestyle.

This pattern continued through high school, into my marriage, and while starting a family. I didn't know how to communicate what I was feeling, and when life became overwhelming, alcohol became my escape. Over time, through isolation, denial, and lie after lie, I damaged nearly everything I held dear. I was losing my faith, my family, my career, and my sanity. I had reached my bottom and decided that I needed to go to Rogers Behavioral Health.

I want to share what has changed over the past year and the impact Rogers and Alcoholics Anonymous have had on my life.

The first few weeks of detox and residential treatment terrified me. I felt alone and began to realize that everything I thought I knew about emotions, feelings, and coping was completely wrong. The shame and guilt that had accumulated in my life up to that point had me stumbling through life like I was feeling my way through a dark room. I had lost hope.

For the next two weeks, I started immersing myself in the AA community, but I soon became frustrated that nothing felt different. I was going to a meeting every day and attending all the classes, but nothing seemed to be changing. I was still miserable, and the only thing that had ever brought me serenity in the past was gone.

At a point of frustration and desperation, I cried out to God and said that if He was there, He would have to help me. I vowed that I would do everything that was offered to me at HRC — even Pilates — if He would help pull me out of this and restore my life.

I started noticing people in this community who had what I was looking for. This was especially true at the Ladish Center. There were people with decades of sobriety, and they genuinely seemed happy. I realized that recovery was like any other investment — I would get out of it what I put into it — so I began to work.

I went to every class and took notes. I attended every talk, actively listened, and applied what I learned to my life. I journaled and became more honest and vulnerable with the counseling staff than I ever thought possible. I also began being of service and helping newer people.

After a few weeks of being intentional about my growth, things started changing. It turns out that you cannot catch sobriety like a cold — it is persistence, not proximity.

I would not say that I have everything figured out, nor do I expect to. However, here is what I know: this program, along with AA, has not stopped emotions or feelings. It has not balanced out the good and bad days, and it has not eliminated anger or pain. It has not erased shame or childhood trauma.

What this program has done is give me the tools to understand what emotions I am feeling and help me talk about what is happening internally so I no longer need to escape or react externally.

I have begun repairing my faith, my relationship with my family, and most importantly, my relationship with myself. I came to understand that there is a right way to approach sobriety, and it will not be easy. But most things worthwhile are not easy.

I am beginning to experience real freedom, happiness, serenity, and peace.

I would encourage anyone beginning this journey to dig your heels in and do everything you are asked to do. Be uncomfortable, and don't give up when it gets tough. Reach out and ask for help — you are worth it.

I will not give up on my path forward. I am standing strong on the 12 Steps and the community of AA. I know life will still happen, and difficult times will come, but I also know I can face them because I have God, my family, and this HRC community behind me every step of the way.



## 41<sup>st</sup> Annual Herrington McBride Alumni Summer Picnic

Saturday June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Rogers Oconomowoc Campus, Multi-Purpose Center

### Approximate Timeline for the Day (times may shift):

- 9:00am Check-In and Continental Breakfast
- 10:00am Welcome from Scott Elston / Opening Prayer
- 10:15am Special Honorarium(s) from HMAA for those we have lost this year.
- 10:30am 15-minute Speaker: [Lisa Radtke](#)
- 10:45am Morning Speakers: [Jim and Marilyn Dropik](#)
- 11:30am Annual HMAA Meeting chaired by HMAA President Scott Elston
- 12:00pm Picnic Lunch (Provided by Rogers Behavioral Health) – lunch served from 12:00-1:30pm
- 1:30pm Afternoon Speaker: [Pete Jones](#)
- 2:30pm Raffle Prizes / Open Afternoon including the following activities:
- Recovery Olympics for HRC residents and other participants – led by Kenny B.
  - Other Activities: Trivial Pursuit, Giant Jenga, Bocce Ball, Frisbee, Corn Hole, Ice Cream Truck, Fellowship, and more!
- 4:30pm Bring your own grilling items (grill, grilling and leftovers from lunch will be provided)
- 6:00pm Results and Prizes for Recovery Olympics. (Prizes provided by T-Lon Products)
- 6:30pm Fireside Open Gratitude Open Meeting. Hosted by: [Rob McCreadie](#)

**All Recovering Alumni and Family/Friends of Herrington McBride are Welcome!**

**The Picnic is on Rain or Shine!**



## *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

John Movroydis – Archivist

Bill Martens

Rob McCreddie

John Hopkins

Bob Olson

Kristin Simons

James Dropik

Michael Ingrassia

Kenny Blaine

Jennifer Evancy

Billy O'Dwyer

Paul Magel

#### **Probationary Members:**

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:**

**Christa Bando, Editor**

[christa.bando@gmail.com](mailto:christa.bando@gmail.com) | 414.807.6645

**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**