

Ask the Expert

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CELEBRATING

40

YEARS

Hope After Abuse

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HOPE ISSUE

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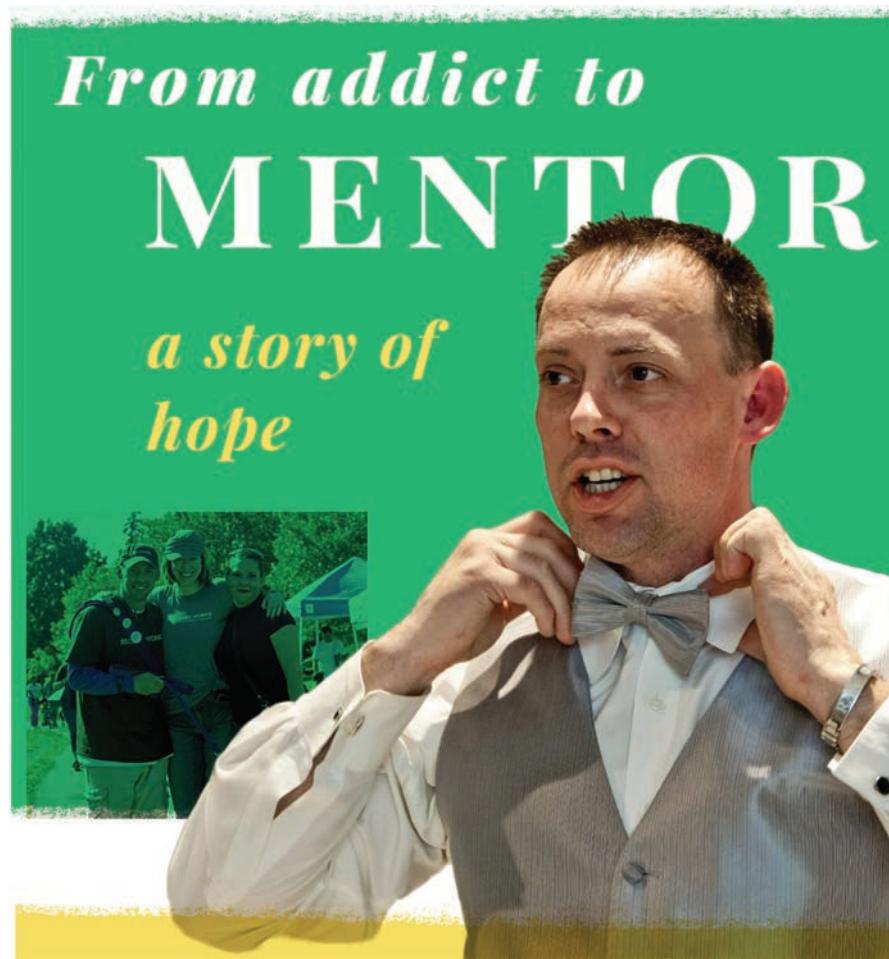
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Despite his gregarious, nice-guy persona, Randy Anderson was a hard case.

He didn't want to live anymore after his wife left him, so he took to using more drugs and selling them, hoping that would do him in. Good at sales and determined to keep feeling high, Anderson soon was easily supporting a thousand-dollar-a-day cocaine habit.

"There's no amount you can't find somebody to sell you," says Anderson.

SHACKLED AND DEFIANT

Eventually, a federal drug task force got a video of a drug delivery at his house and snagged him in a raid. For the first time, Anderson went to jail. "I kind of thought at that point that my life was over," he says. Instead, he clung to his drug-dealing ways and ended up with federal and state charges and a prison

sentence of 87 months. Eventually, Anderson was delivered to a treatment program in shackles and handcuffs.

According to Anderson, a hard-nosed addiction treatment counselor called him on his deceitful ways and told him, "I don't know why I'm wasting my breath on you. You can't do it." Anderson defiantly took that as a challenge and began his first day of sobriety seventeen years ago.

FIRED UP TO KEEP PEOPLE SOBER

Having served his time and broken his habit, Anderson now tells his story over and over in order to advocate for criminal justice reform related to drug use as well as to change individual lives. He is on fire with his mission to keep others from ending up in prison – or worse.

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IN MEMORIAM

Marc Johnigan

(July 11, 1969 - December 16, 2021)

On December 16th, the recovery community lost a member that has contributed to the recovery of so many and changed the path of so many more lives. Along with two other members of the recovery community, Marc Johnigan, Dwayne Jackson and Dwayne's sister Denise Anderson were all killed in a tragic auto accident. Marc was the Executive Director/Founder of the Twin Cities Recovery Project. *Read more on page 5.*

JOHN H. DRIGGS, LICSW

Finding Hope by Being Close to Others

If you lived to be 100, I hope to live to be 100 minus one day, so I never have to live without you.

— WINNIE THE POOH

A real friend is the gift of a lifetime. It is special someone who is in your life in a significant way. Good friendship is a sacred two-sided connection with a person we have much in common with yet also respects differences with each other. A real friend knows our worst qualities and challenges us to forgive ourselves anyway. Or, as Toni Morrison said, someone who give us the total freedom to be ourselves. It is the greatest gift that we can receive and give in our lifetimes.

Never has it been more important than now to have someone who comforts us, tells us we're not crazy, simply wants to spend time with us and gives us hope. Never has the magic of friendship worked more miracles.

※

I remember when this whole ordeal started. Most of us were way too scared to even go out of our houses. We didn't know what we were dealing with. And we feared contaminating each other. So, we saw less of each other in social settings and on holidays. I made a decision to call my best buddies once a week and ask about them. You wouldn't believe what doing that meant to me and my closest pals. During and after the call I felt more relaxed and more normal. I momentarily didn't even think about the pandemic. Our friendly chatter made the ordeal disappear and I had warmer feelings towards my friends, like I could count on them each week. We took turns calling each other. We talked about deep things we normally didn't focus on—worry about losing our parents, our own mortality and whether we felt ready to die, who would take care of our children if we got sick—you know all that important stuff we rarely ever talked about. Of course, we didn't forget to chat about shopping, hair appointments and the lack thereof. We laughed about the stupid things of life we waste time on. I felt this bliss in my body. I felt hopeful that my life would not be in vain. I even felt insanely grateful for these moments that we wouldn't have been able to have without this plague. Who would have guessed there could be this much joy in silly little

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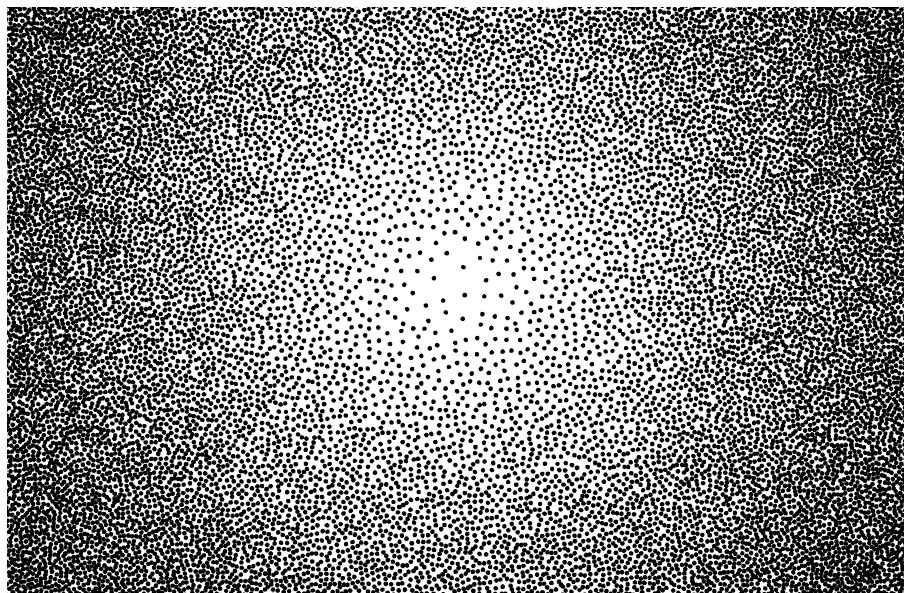


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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hope in the Darkness

by Louise Elowen



"Hope begins in the dark."
ANNE LAMOTT

Throughout my life, that little thing called hope has refused to go away. Even in some of my darkest moments, hope sat there, like a little flame in the darkness, quietly glowing and waiting for me to notice it again.

Through blinding tears, I've seen it shimmer and beckon at me, willing me to pick it up and burn brighter. "Don't give up," it whispered. "You're worth so much more than this." I blinked and wiped away the tears, and somehow dragged myself above the gloomy darkness up toward the light.

Hope takes on many forms. Sometimes it has appeared to me in the form of my dog. Sometimes in a stranger's smile. Yet other times, in a well-timed call from a friend. Just when we think hope doesn't exist anymore, there is a nudge in the darkness which tells us otherwise.

We try to stumble on in the darkness alone, but sometimes we need that extra support, that guiding light, to hold us up and direct us forward.

Hope can go by many names: Optimism, aspiration, ambition, friendship,

dream, plan, wish, support, change, love, and light. All of these things can turn despair into hope. At this time of the year, hope may seem as though it has abandoned us, through the dark nights and cold days. But remember. Hope is always there.

And as winter turns the corner into spring, hope tends to shine a little brighter, with the optimism of new growth, easier to find and hold onto. Tears turn to smiles, and blackness turns to light. Hope is the last thing to hold onto, yet the most important thing to keep going.

Do you have hope for the coming year? Or are you lost in the darkness?

We hope that by reading this edition of *The Phoenix Spirit* that you've taken a step towards renewed hope, new opportunities, new friends, and renewed support. You are never alone if you have hope. Even if you've got to work to find it. It's there. Believe me, I know.

With blessings for a hopeful year ahead,

Louise

But remember.
Hope is always there.



Tips to help you during the Holiday Season

- ✓ Get Enough Sleep
- ✓ Don't Take On Too Much
- ✓ Don't Isolate Yourself
- ✓ Perform A Random Act Of Kindness
- ✓ Everything In Moderation



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Every trial, and every issue we find and face holds within it the seeds of healing, health, wisdom, growth and prosperity. We hope you find a seed in every issue.

The Phoenix Spirit is a bi-monthly publication for people actively working on their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. We are committed to providing articles, advertising, and information about recovery, renewal, and personal growth to help people experience life in a balanced, meaningful way.

The opinions and facts presented in this publication are intended to be diverse and represent those of the writers and/or contributors, and are not necessarily those of *The Phoenix Spirit*. We seek writers and interview subjects who are willing to gift you with their honestly held convictions and insights. We seek to attract advertisers who offer products and services of integrity. But we urge our readers to research, and trust their instincts.

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Can You See Her?

by **Charlotte M.**

I want to start by saying that not all addicts are abusers. And not all abusers are addicts. But in my case, he was. Both. Well, perhaps an “addict in denial,” but most definitely an abuser.

Of course, it didn’t start out like that. Did I think he drank “just a little too much?” Yes. But did I ever think that he’d put alcohol over me? *Never*. Did I think he loved me? *Of course!* At least, in the beginning. But in reality, he was more in love with *himself*. After all, one of his past girlfriends had remarked that “he was like a God” to her, so it was no surprise that the narcissist that he was lapped that up and believed it beyond all reasonable doubt.

But did I ever think that he would drive me to think about suicide, harm myself, and erode all of my self-confidence? *No. Never*.

I was a confident, well-traveled young British woman when I met him. But I was vulnerable. And grieving. At least, I know that now. I didn’t know it then.

Grief is a funny thing. It doesn’t always look like you think it looks. I had just lost my first husband to sudden death in my mid-30’s and struggling to re-find “my place” as a young widow in, what was to me, an alien world. I didn’t “fit” into all of the societal boxes anymore. *What to do?*

Looking back, it was no surprise that I was attracted to the charming American I met on vacation and the life that he offered far away from judging eyes, and the traditional values of my British roots. I felt like someone “got me” – finally. And starting a new life with him in a new country was the breath of fresh air that I much needed.

At least, that’s how he presented himself in those early days. Of course, I now know that was just a façade. A trick to lure me, hook me, and never let me go. Whether intentional or not, there were many times that he could have proved his love to me. But instead, he consumed me, chewed me up, and spat out my shattered heart on the sidewalk. The little questions: “Should someone like you wear that, darling?” The subtle erosion at my self-confidence: “You’re too sensitive.” The isolation from all I knew and loved, built up ever so slowly over the years until I became a neurotic, needy unrecognizable shadow of my former self.

Of course, I begged him to stop drinking. Many times. I thought that I was the one who was “going to save him.” Three ex-wives, numerous ex-girlfriends just “didn’t get him.” But I did. He laughed in my face. The snap and hiss of a beer can popping open at 6 am, as I opened my eyes to greet the day, became a sound of dread and fear. I still jump when I hear it. It signaled that my day could go south before it had even begun. Yet, I hid this shame from the world, fearful that I was the root cause of his drinking (even though he had begun long before I arrived on the scene), and I would just anger him more.

When I couldn’t cope with the emotional burden anymore, I began to self-harm. It’s true. It does help to relieve the pain for a moment, albeit at the cost of

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scars deep within the skin. I even told him what I was doing, and he begged me not to tell anyone. He made me promise that I wouldn’t reveal to *anyone* about what I was doing, even though it was a blatant cry for help. He was ashamed that people would ask, “Why?” and it would reflect badly on him. He convinced me that I would be “taken away” from my beloved dog as people would see me as mad. It wasn’t until years later that I actually saw his smirk as he turned away. And so, I carried on. In secret. And he carried on. Drinking. In secret.

Some nights, in the early years, I packed a bag and drove around in the dark, crying my eyes out, alone and lost, never quite having the courage to leave him. After all, where would I go? He was very fond of reminding me that I couldn’t manage without him – financially, emotionally, and physically, even though the money was mine (in the end, I had to ask *him* permission to have some of *my* money), and I had been a confident, self-supporting young woman when I met him. *Who was she again?* I did not recognize the face staring back at me in the mirror most days.

I tiptoed around him on eggshells. He could snap at nothing. And “punish” me for days with a deafening silence. When I did challenge him on anything, it never turned out well. Like the time that I was having a panic attack going down the freeway, due to his erratic driving, begging him to stop the car and let me out. I was literally clawing at the door handle and window, hyperventilating, and he just looked at me blankly and said if we stopped now, it would take longer to get there. *Longer before he could have a drink*, was what he meant. Or the time that he popped open a beer can, 10 minutes from home, while driving. “Can’t you wait?” I questioned nervously “We’ll be home soon.” He yelled at me. “I’m thirsty!” and continued to swig back the beer can. I asked for a police cruiser to go by. *Please stop him* I prayed silently. But it never happened.

The day that I finally began the long journey to leaving him (for real. There had been many “aborted” attempts previously) was not planned. A routine doctor’s visit led to an outpouring of grief, and I blurted out my sorry tale. She didn’t look surprised. Or judgmental. She calmly assured me that the worse was now over and that I was no longer alone.

From there I started therapy and was then referred to the local domestic abuse legal support team. As she sat there explaining I needed a “safety plan,” I still disbelief that she was talking about me. *Why do I need a safety plan?* After a series of questions, she determined that I had answered 8 of the 18 questions in a way that the police profiled how women had been killed by a partner. That meant I was at 44.44% risk of losing my life if I stayed with him. He had even told me that “in the past” he would have hit me for something. He only pounded on me once in his sleep. But the constant fear was there. *Did I want to stay with him until he had me against a wall in a drunken blackout with no escape?* I was in shock.

Of course, he sucked me back in several times before first came the separation, and then the final “no contact” and divorce. He lied to me and used me again within that time. But when I looked in his eyes that last time, they were dead. And I knew. I wasn’t going to let fear rule my life anymore.

With the help and support of family, friends, neighbors, and even strangers, I got back on my feet, established a safe

home, created a garden, and built a business. I look back at old photos and now see the beautiful young woman who was there all the time. Confident, outgoing, independent, and strong. I just couldn’t see her.

Please send your 1st Person story to phoenix@thephoenixspirit.com. If we decide to publish the article, we will send a note of acceptance. Thank you.



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To place a Resource Directory listing call David at 612-298-5405 or email at david@thephoenixspirit.com

IN MEMORIAM

Marc Johnigan

Letter From the Twin Cities Recovery Project

It is with intense sadness that the Board of Directors of Twin Cities Recovery Project (TCRP) announces the loss of its founder and CEO, Marc Johnigan, in a car accident on December 16. The Board offers condolences to Marc's family, the TCRP Team, colleagues, friends, and the many individuals whom Marc inspired with his passion for recovery.

TCRP began with Marc's conviction that individuals in Recovery need support and a place to socialize. TCRP began in 2016 as a social club in a neighborhood church and has grown into an esteemed provider of culturally relevant peer training and support and a leader in the fight against the opioid epidemic, particularly in the black community. Marc's natural instincts were aided by his genuine curiosity and humility, which made him an accomplished connector of people and ideas. Marc served on local and national advisory groups. He organized "Boots on the Ground", a national virtual conference on community-based programming to reduce stigma and racial disparities in access to opioid use disorder services. Marc will be deeply missed.

TCRP Board Member George Lewis will step in immediately as the acting Interim President/CEO of TCRP.

Respectfully,

Twin Cities Recovery Project, Inc.
Board of Directors



The Phoenix Spirit is posting this letter from interim Twin Cities Recovery Project (TCRP) President, George Lewis. Our condolences to the families of Marc Johnigan, Dwayne Jackson and Dwayne's sister Denise Anderson who were involved in this tragedy. An online fundraiser has been setup for Johnigan's family.

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Michael Omomo is a board certified psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner that is passionate about mental health. Michael's focus is on providing quality, empathetic, and comprehensive mental health services to individuals across the lifespan. He believes in an integrated approach to care of individuals with mental health.

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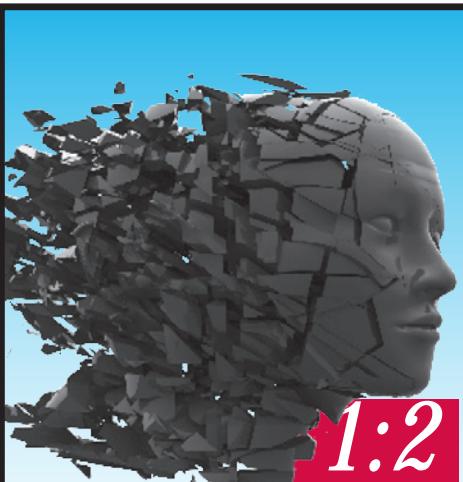
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from page 1

Having watched his sister, birth mother, and father all die due to drug use, "I don't want another brother or family member to have to feel what I felt," he says.

Anderson has used his story and his passion to influence state law, working with state legislators to generate new policies to divert drug users from court to treatment. He also worked for three years in support of legislation that holds the pharmaceutical companies accountable for the opioid crisis – the first of its kind in the nation. He has been active on a number of boards and advocacy groups, and currently serves on an advisory board for the Hennepin County sheriff's office. Recently Anderson was appointed to the Golden Valley Police Commission.

MAKING RECOVERY PERSONAL

Anderson's work is both advocacy and person-to-person service. He travels all over the state to use his story and his passion to help addicts in person wherever he can. He has delivered thousands of Narcan nasal spray kits to addicts and family members to counter overdose effects, and he provides training to others on Narcan use.

Anderson is perhaps most passionate about training other recovering users like himself to be peer counselors. Offering peer counseling services, he believes, is one of the simplest, least expensive, and most accessible ways to address drug addiction. He even helped get state legislation passed to fund peer counseling services in some treatment settings.

"I'm actually an approved provider for the Minnesota certification board here in Minnesota," says Anderson, and he trains others around the world to do peer counseling. "I've trained well over 500 people from 35 States and seven countries," he says, much of the training being done online.

He is now using grant money from Minnesota's pharmaceutical opioid payouts to expand peer counseling services in Minnesota. "I just like to help other people build a career in recovery," he says.

Anderson believes the best link to recovery is the person-to-person connection with someone else who understands what you've been through and can walk with you as you make a new life for yourself in recovery. That was his own experience with the get-tough counselor at the treatment center.



Photos courtesy of Randy Anderson



That counselor had "pushed the father button in me when he said you can't do it, because I'd grown up with a very old school father," says Anderson. "No matter what I did, it was never good enough. He's the kind of dad that always said things like no one remembers who won second place — or losers. He was a very physically, emotionally, verbally abusive father. I've been beaten with baseball bats. I've been thrown through sheetrock walls.

"I look back now and the driving reason why I got sober and decided to try to do recovery is because someone said I couldn't do it, and I've been sober ever since. Here is a guy who had been to prison, who had done all these bad things in his life, and now he's a counselor and he's helping people. I just thought if he can do it, I can do it. I really related to Mark."

The basic principle taught in peer counseling training is "to always treat people as resources, like people are an expert of their own lived experience," says Anderson. That principle forms the top of a three-legged stool, he says. Holding up that stool are the legs of "actively listening, asking good questions, and managing your own stuff." This latter self-management leg refers to keeping one's own emotions and biases in check when issues come up that start feeling personal to the counselor. That may even mean supporting an addict in doing something they'd never do themselves.

Peer counselors in training also learn a process called motivational interviewing to help uncover what personal benefits and difficulties addicts may latch onto to lead themselves to make positive changes.

"We want to find out what you think is best for you and to pull that out of you," says Anderson. "I just want people to be successful. I don't want people to suffer. I want people to get the help, no matter what that looks like for them."

TRUST REGAINED

Anderson is himself a role model for finding his own way to live a productive life beyond his tumultuous life of drug use and prison. He's experienced plenty of hurdles.

"I was recently denied insurance coverage because I have a criminal record," he notes. Yet, he has plenty of reserves to help them through tough times. "I built up enough recovery capital through helping others and advocacy," he says, making it possible for him to turn to others for help when he needs it. His history of service and advocacy has earned him a lot of respect, even among people who have seen his worst side.

"I think the capital — the currency — I have helps build that trust back up with people," says Anderson.

His mother, though, still cautions him about sliding back into his old life.

"I realized like she has a reason for that distrust," he says, "because I did a lot of bad things and that's her experience. I can't take that away from her. I can just keep showing her and keep doing the next right thing and I hope one day she maybe will stop saying those things to me — realize I'm never going to go back and do that again."

Anderson is teaching this and many more lessons he's learned as he works to develop more peer counseling opportunities around the state and beyond. He has started his own small business,

Bold North Recovery and Consulting, that allows him to contract with various organizations to provide consulting and training services. He has applied for grant funds to support expanding peer counseling resources in Minnesota. Anderson wants to see peer counselors readily available to employees in workplaces, whether they are fellow employees or from other trained peer counselors in the community. He intends to help employers offer this employee benefit and know how to use it. He also would like to see peer counselors accessible to addicts in primary clinics, in jails and sober homes, in high schools and colleges, and anywhere addicts can be found.

The next ambition for Anderson is to hold public office. If elected, he would push for criminal justice reform, using his own story to help make his case. Tax monies could be invested more wisely, in his view, than by incarcerating low-level, nonviolent drug offenders. They need medical help, he says.

"Locking me up didn't take away my substance use disorder, but it cost the taxpayers about a half a million dollars. What an utter waste of resources!"

Pat Samples is a Twin Cities writer, writing coach, and champion of creative aging. Her website is patsamples.com.

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Pastor Ed Treat

Treat has been in long-term recovery from addiction for 35 years.

He received his Master of Divinity and a doctorate in ministry from Luther Seminary. From 1994-2019, he was a parish pastor, serving congregations in rural Nebraska and around the Twin Cities.

To provide addiction-recovery support to professional clergy and their families, Treat joined the newly-formed Fellowship of Recovering Lutheran Clergy (FRLC) in 1990. This was a non-profit effort between pastors of the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. In 2001, Treat became the director of the FRLC and remains such today.

Through the FRLC and with some collaboration with the Recovery Ministries of the Episcopal Church (RMEC), Treat launched the Addiction & Faith Conference in 2018 to educate, inspire and equip congregations in addiction ministry. In 2020, Treat founded The Center of Addiction & Faith, as a 501©3 nonprofit. He sits on the boards of the FRLC, the RMEC, the Center of Addiction & Faith, Minnesota Mental Health Connect, and serves on the PAC of Minnesota Recovery Connection.

When he is not practicing social distance during a pandemic, Treat loves to plan group trips and travel. He and his wife Karen, also a Lutheran minister, have four grown children and one granddaughter.

Q How does having a sense of hope impact someone's overall mental health and their recovery?

Hope is the feeling that something good will happen. We hope for so many things, don't we? I hope I don't get COVID-19; I hope my work can really help people; I hope our political situation will improve; I hope we can resolve climate change; I hope my kids stay safe. Hope is expecting good things—even when at times things seem dire.

When we are active in our addiction, we slowly lose hope. Addiction is often referred to as a disease of despair and despair comes from losing hope. We gradually lose hope in our disease because as

FINDING HOPE WHILE IN RECOVERY

Ask the Expert

We feature an expert in the mental health and/or substance use disorder fields to answer questions

our disease progresses and our addiction slowly consumes our lives, we become less responsible. When we become less responsible fewer good things happen and we stop hoping for good things because we continue to be disappointed. We become jaded and cynical, depressed, isolated, which all leads to hopelessness and despair.

A sense of hope gets restored naturally in the recovery process as we discover better things begin to happen in our lives and we dare to become ever more hopeful. Whereas before all our hopes did not materialize, mostly because of our behaviors, but now in recovery even the little things we hope for begin to happen. As we recover, we become progressively more hopeful over time. It takes time to restore and build up our hope muscles, but it is at the core of our mental health and recovery.

Q As a Pastor, how do you help people find hope in their lives?

As a spiritual leader it is my calling in life to always point to something bigger. While we hope for things here on earth and while it's important to remain hopeful for even the little things, there is a much more powerful sense of hope that comes from understanding there is a higher power at work in the universe. Understanding our lives from the perspective of knowing there is something much bigger going on behind all things leads us to a new and infinitely larger sense of hope.

A man dying of AIDS once told me about his near-death experience. He described floating out of his body; of being surrounded by a golden light and loved ones; he described a sense of joy and peace beyond measure; he said he had complete knowledge of everything; he understood that the things we worry about on Earth are so small in the scheme of things; he understood he could stay there or come back to his dying body for a little longer. And then said the thing that stuck with me so profoundly—he said, "I knew I could endure what little time I had left and the pain I was in because I knew I had this waiting for me."

Helping people see and believe there is something bigger going on, that there is a higher power at work who is personal and means us well, knowing that no matter what, come hell or high water, it's all going to be okay in the end—this is the greatest source of hope I know, and I try to impart it every chance I get.

Q What are some ways that people can foster continual hope?

My recovery has taught me more than anything else that we were designed to need each other. We are social beings, and we need love, relationships and yes, accountability. My disease drove me away from all of that. Addiction leads to deep and despairing isolation. The recovery process is a long slow process of restoring those things in my life. For some

reason I naturally resist. There is always a part of me that wants to defy needing others and go my own way. I don't want to be dependent on others. I want to do what I want to do when I want to do it.

I think this is at the core of the human struggle, whether you are in recovery or not. A truly spiritual life and growing sense of hope, meaning and purpose in life comes from giving yourself to the human family in humility and service. The more I die to myself and live for others the more hope and joy and purpose I experience in my soul.

To foster hope, we attend meetings; we try to be there for others; we help where needed. The more I live for myself, the more hopeless I start to feel and the more I give myself to others the more my hope grows.

Q What are some resources that are available for those who are feeling hopeless?

The resources for those feeling hopeless are immense. In fact, I had no idea how many resources were actually out there until I started developing the Center of Addiction and Faith three years ago. There are countless extended hands out there willing to help. There is great help available for just about every affliction under the sun. Just Google what you

are looking for and you will get page after page of resources—free and paid.

The problem is those who are feeling hopeless do not want to reach out their hands. They don't see the point. They are in a downward spiral, and they've tried things but are convinced there is no hope for them. They are closed off and closed down.

This is where it is up to those of us who have come from those dark places ourselves to recognize those who need help and to pursue them. An addict cannot save themselves. They need people who love them to intervene. There needs to be a dogged pursuit with gentle and loving prompts continually reminding those who are hurting they need help—and that you are willing to help them. They will eventually come around, but you have to be patient and persistent.

Q As a person in recovery, how have you found hope?

My sponsor used to say that AA is the last house on the block, meaning it's the last place anyone wants to turn to for help. The addict wants to try everything else first. That was my story. I did not think I had this problem and even until the day I landed in treatment I was convinced something was wrong with me, but it wasn't this.

ASK THE EXPERT to pg 8

HAVE YOU EVER GAMBLED LONGER THAN YOU HAD PLANNED?



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www.MinnesotaGA.com

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I got my first shot of hope while in treatment learning about the disease and what it does, and I realize this explained everything. It made sense and I realized the insanity was finally over. I had hope for the first time in a long time that I could have a normal life—and that's all I wanted was a normal life—something to go right for once.

My hopefulness has been built up over years of attending 12-Step meetings, working the program and watching my life grow from one mountain-top to another. There are setbacks all the time, even to this day. The difference is, when I experience a setback of any kind while I was using, I would turn that setback into opportunity to make it even worse by using and spending money I didn't have doing things that would embarrass and shame me. That setback would go from bad to worse. Now, when I experience setbacks, I know it's temporary and that setbacks are actually gifts to help me grow and expand.

I've also developed my spiritual life through my faith which has given me an expanded sense of hopefulness. My faith has given me a much bigger perspective on life and death and a sense of hope that even death cannot destroy. I had the honor of preaching at my sponsor's funeral and I reminded people that he used to say that AA was the last house on the block, and I was able to stand there and say, actually there is one more house and it's the best one of all.

Q Is there anything else you would like to share about the topic of hope?

Since you asked, I am hopeful that the Center of Addiction and Faith can inspire faith communities to better engage the issue of addiction and play a role in the healing of those who still suffer. With COVID-19 still raging and people dying from addiction at an ever-increasing pace, I think there is great opportunity for churches, synagogues, and mosques all over the country to play a meaningful role in helping to confront these terrible and needless losses. I hope recovering people who are engaged in these communities will step out of hiding and begin to engage their faith communities to do more. Faith communities are one of the first places people turn to for help when struggling with addiction and too often these silently suffering souls walk away disappointed. How crazy is that? If we say this is a spiritual disease requiring a spiritual solution, how is it that faith communities do not have a better response than they do now? I hope those who preach and believe in the love of God can learn to do better on this issue. That's my big hope right now.

If you have a question for the experts, or you are an expert interested in being featured, please email phoenix@thephoenixspirit.com. Experts have not been compensated for their advice.



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*Treatment is available free of charge for qualifying individuals throughout Minnesota.

from page 1

half-hour chit-chats? It's the friendships that made it all work.

※

Such gifts don't happen automatically. Finding and keeping good friends is not a piece of cake. Effort, good judgment, honest self-reflection, and courage are required to have good friends.

WHY ARE CLOSE FRIENDS SO HARD TO FIND?

If being close to others were such an easy thing to do, most of us would have scads of buddies. In fact, the most important human need is the need to attach. We are wired for connection. Most of us would choose to hang out with those dear to us even over eating and drinking. Studies show that infants would choose likenesses of their mothers, even if their mothers are abusive, to offerings of food and drink. So, it's not from lack of desire that we don't have close friends. Yet being close to others is the most difficult thing to do. Why is this?

So many of us have faulty patterns on how to make friends. We develop these patterns from childhood difficulties, and we internalize them in our own flawed adult judgment while affiliating with others. We may have had a pattern of making friends more easily in high school years without knowing ourselves well enough and how we did it. When things come too easily for us we may not know how to make them happen again or feel motivated to work to make them happen again on our own. We may develop a complacency for getting close to others and settle for whoever wanders into our life as a way of making friends. We may like what people can do for us rather than being with people just for the sake of being with them. We may be distracted by another's success or attractiveness and be oblivious to how our apparently good looking friends are affecting us. Perhaps we wish to have our own success by living through others vicariously.

Although this may sound crazy, some of us are drawn towards people who actually hurt us. We waste a lot of our life trying to change or rescue others rather than focusing on what we need to actually care for ourselves. We have trouble letting go of troublesome people in our lives. We are not aware of that by doing this, suffering is our way of unconsciously not getting close to others or admitting our low self-opinion. We prefer to focus on other people's troubles as a distraction from our own inner fear that we may in fact not feel lovable. Our true

inner fear is that we are undeserving of real love and that we will be abandoned once somebody knows us. Focusing on trouble outside ourselves distracts us from these inner fears. All of these faulty patterns are discussed in the book *Too Close For Comfort* by Geraldine K. Piorkowski (Perseus Press, 1994). Most of us are not conscious of these unconscious patterns. Clearly if we were it would be a lot easier to change ourselves and have an easier time finding good friends.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. Laura describes herself as a shy and sensitive person. She is easily hurt when others treat her coldly. On the surface Laura appears and acts like a warm, attractive and intelligent woman but she has a history of avoiding social gatherings and friendship possibilities when others are not completely accepting of her. She has no close friends. As others get to know her more in social gatherings she tends to run away and find excuses for going home early to the safety and loneliness of her home. She takes the "better safe than sorry" approach to life. Initially she might have felt well-received at gatherings but when she is surrounded by silence in social groups, she thinks that people are critical of her and believe bad things about her. She feels that there is something basically unlovable in herself that is hard to put into words that other people see and shun her. Clearly the more she runs from social gatherings her views of herself only get confirmed and others become less interested in her when she does the disappearing act. Her patterns are self-fulfilling—they actually bring about her rejection. Laura's pattern of avoidance is called social anxiety, a common malady of today's youth. Needless to say, her patterns of avoidance actually help create her worst fears. It is almost like she won't let anybody truly care about her. Laura has a history of depression and got more down when she discussed these difficulties with me. She saw no way out then.

It was clear that Laura was quite hopeless and helpless in this way of making friends. So as her professional friend I told her something that knocked her socks off. I said, "You've done a good job of scoping out your problem behaviors. You've been at this a long time. Actually, what you're telling me is quite hopeful." I said there is no reason why she is stuck with such behaviors. Laura looked at me like I was crazy but was intrigued by my optimism. I told Laura that it is rare that

In fact, the most important human need is the need to attach. We are wired for connection.

people can actually spell out their unconscious difficulties as well as she could and that if we made some tweaks to her patterns together she would be off and running with some good friends.

I told her that her self-defeating behaviors actually served a higher purpose in her life for now—that avoiding people is just the thing to do when you lack inner resources for protecting yourself and don't want to see the horrors of your growing up years. I congratulated her on her due diligence in keeping herself safe. The more she talked about her history it became clear what Laura was protecting herself from—her unrecognized, highly critical and unsupportive family environment. Her avoidance in social situations was actually her ally. I told her she did not have to hate her family to be a more social person as her life was now in her own hands. We worked together for some time and Laura developed and discovered many resources in herself that made her life safer and more socially competent. Laura now leaves my office each time with a sparkle in her eyes, a few good prospects for friends and a wish to find a real boyfriend. She has hope for her future.

TOOLS ON HOW TO MAKE GOOD FRIENDS

Let's get down to business in how to make good friends. First of all, realize what you are getting into. It's perfectly alright with me if you sincerely prefer not to be close to others. Not all of us are cut out for intimacy and living without friends is not a federal offense. You have every right to forgo the incredible benefits—good health, positive outlook on life, insurance plan against adversity and greater life meaning—if you decline to have good friends. But if you change your mind and decide to get close to others your work is really cut out for you.

Let's say you've chosen the second option. Consider all of the following in your efforts:

1. **Take complete ownership for your lack of friends.** It's not just bad luck, poor qualities in people you know, where you live in the country or that

other people are not up to your standards. After all, you have chosen to be with the people you are with. It's best to admit to yourself that you've either made bad choices or have avoided meeting people who could be your friends. You're in control of your social life. The reality is that there are many people who might make very good friends to you. It's likely that you've made unwise choices in people you call "friends." Consider reading *Together: The Healing Power of Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World* by Vivek H. Murthy, M.D. (Harper Wave, 2020).

2. **Realize you need to forgive yourself for not having good friends.** You've had a lot of help in past relationships for your relational misfortunes that you may not be aware of. For example, if your parents neglected your emotional life or their emotional life when you were a child, you will likely be aloof with your adult peers today. If your parents were emotionally intrusive with you as a child you will likely be reticent with possible buddies in your adult life. The list of faulty parent/child patterns goes on over and over in your adult life. You've heard the saying, "The hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world." The way you are ruled today by such patterns however is yours to change if you are aware of such tendencies and are willing to make corrections to the patterns. It's best to get professional help to disengage yourself from the faulty patterns and make some real friends.

3. **Learn to make good friends over time.** After all, you have to start somewhere. There are many good people who could make your life more social even when they are not ideal friends. Keep searching for people who have something to offer you as well as you can offer to them. Ask yourself, "Who in my life do I really respect?" and "Who would I be most scared of to ask to be my friend?"

CLOSE TO OTHERS to pg 11



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SUPPORT GROUPS / SOME MAY BE NOT BE MEETING DUE TO COVID-19**MONDAYS**

1900 Mens Al-anon: Monday 5:45-7:15pm, 12-Step meeting, step presentation and small groups, fellowship. 1900 Nicollet Ave., Plymouth Congregational Church. Tom W, 612-281-5230. Enter at parking lot.

CHOW – Culinary Hospitality Outreach and Wellness: Monday (also Tuesday & Wednesdays) at 7pm CST. CHOW is an organization led by culinary and hospitality peers. We believe in a future where our community never loses another person to addiction, burnout, or mental health concerns. We create safe and supportive opportunities for the industry to connect and discuss problems they're facing with others who "get it." Working in the hospitality industry is tough. Let's talk about it. Meetings are currently in virtual format via Zoom. Please visit our website or Facebook page for codes to join in or contact: outreach@chowco.org.

Overeaters Anonymous: Monday mornings, 10-11am. 3rd floor, handicapped accessible. Minnehaha United Methodist Church, 3701 50th St Mpls 55407. For more info call Ana 651-592-7510

Online Gamers Anonymous and Olganon: Mondays at 6:30 at the Cavalier Club, 7179 Washington Ave. South, Edina. Cavalier Club is located on the corner of Valley View and HWY 169. Plenty of free parking! If video games or other excessive tech use is making your life unmanageable or if someone you care about is gaming excessively, we'd love to meet you. More info on this emerging 12 Step Movement at www.olganon.org

Understanding Eating Disorders, Treatment, and Recovery: First Thursday, every other month, 6-7:30pm. The Emily Program staff provides answers to common questions and concerns of families and friends "new" to eating disorders, treatment and recovery. 2265 Como Ave, St. Paul, 55108. Free, drop in. Visit www.emilyprogram.com or call 651-645-5323.

Friends and Families of Suicide: a place of support and comfort where those that have lost a loved one to suicide will be comfortable talking about their own loss as well as hearing about the losses of others. Meets the 3rd Monday of every month 7-9pm, Twin Cities Friends Meeting, 1725 Grand Ave., St Paul, 55105. For info email ffosmn@yahoo.com or call Tracy at 651-587-8006.

Debtors Anonymous: a group of men and women who use the 12-Step program to solve problems with debt and other money issues; www.damnnesota.org 952-953-8438. Check website for locations and different dates and times.

Richfield Codependents Anonymous: 7pm, men & women Richfield Lutheran Church, 60th and Nicollet or call 952-649-9514.

TUESDAYS

Recovering Couples Anonymous, 7pm. We are a 12 Step Group for couples wanting to find new ways to communicate. We provide strong couple support and model healthy couple-ship. Unity Church, 733 Portland Ave, St Paul, 55104. Enter the building through the parking lot door and take the elevator to the basement. Please check us out! Contact Dave at 651-214-5747 or Connie at 651-307-7964 for more information.

Families Anonymous (FA): First and third Tuesday evening of each month, 7pm. Support group for families and friends of those dealing with drug, alcohol or other behavioral issues. Is someone you love destroying family harmony by using drugs or alcohol? Free help exists! Join us at St. Timothy Lutheran Church: 1465 N. Victoria Street, St. Paul, MN 55117, or contact Dave E: 612-701-5575.

Debtors Anonymous: a group of men and women who use the 12-Step program to solve problems with debt and other money issues; www.damnnesota.org 952-953-8438. Tues, 7-8 pm, Unity Church Unitarian (H), 732 Holly Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55104.

Recovery International Meeting at Mary Mother of the Church, 3333 Cliff Road, Burnsville, rm 9 at 3pm. It is a proven self help method to deal with mental illness including depression, anxiety, anger, mood disorders and fears using cognitive behavior therapy. Contact Rita at 952-890-7623.

Emotions Anonymous: For those dealing with emotional stress, depression, etc. 7:30pm at Christ the King Lutheran Church, Room 106, 8600 Fremont Ave., Bloomington. Take Penn Ave. south to 86th. Turn left and go to Fremont, just east of 35W. Brian at 952-888-6029.

Nicotine Anonymous: 7-8pm at St. Columba Church/School, 1330 Blair Ave., St. Paul, 55104. For more info call 952-404-1488. More locations.

SUPPORT GROUPS / SOME MAY BE NOT BE MEETING DUE TO COVID-19**MONDAYS**

Overeaters Anonymous Roseville: Meetings are held from 10-11am (and Saturday's from 8-9) at St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, 2300 N. Hamline Ave., Roseville, Room 218 Call Janie 651-639-4246 for more info.

A.C.A., 5:30-7 pm, Dakota Alano House, 3920 Rahn Rd, Eagan (Hwy 13 & Cedarvale Shop Ctr). 651-452-2921.www.dasinc.org/

A.C.A. 7pm, Saint Michael's Lutheran Church 1660 W City Rd B (at Fry). Roseville. Open to all. Step and Traditions meeting.

Get a Fresh Start! 12-Step AA group, open meeting Tues., 7pm, at Kingswill Church, 1264 109th Ave NE, Blaine. Denny, 763-757-6512.

WEDNESDAYS

AA Meeting, 6:30 – 8:30pm St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, 2300 N. Hamline Ave., Roseville. Call 651-639-4246 for more info.

Overeaters Anonymous: St. Paul Midway: Wednesdays 7-8 PM, Hamline United Methodist Church. Two blocks east of Snelling & Minnehaha. Park in south parking lot, use south entrance to education building. Press buzzer. For more info contact Susan at 651-295-7854.

Adult Children of Alcoholics: Wednesdays @ 7-8:30pm. St. Mary's Episcopal Church, 1895 Laurel Ave, St. Paul. Meets downstairs, sign in the lobby. For more information call Mary at 612-747-0709.

Living Proof MN: Eating disorder online support group. 5:30-6:30pm CST, every Wednesday. Virtual with Zoom app, email for link: info@livingproofmn.com.

Transitions: 7:30 to 9:30pm Support to men and women who are transitioning from incarceration to living in the community. Trained facilitators and peers provide emotional support in a safe, openly honest environment to discuss discouragements, frustrations, temptations. One of the trained facilitators is a woman. The Men's Center, 3249 Hennepin Ave. S. Minneapolis, 612-822-5892. TCM.org

Women's CoDA Group: Women's Only Codependents Anonymous Group. Meets every Wednesday at noon at Colonial Church of Edina, 6200 Colonial Way (Fireside room, S. end of bldg). For more information, call Valerie at 612.741.5281

Workaholics Anonymous: A 12-Step program of recovery for people addicted to non-stop work or continuous activity. Meeting is currently online via Zoom. Call Pat for link to the meeting or questions: 763-560-5199. www.workaholics-anonymous.org.

Marijuana Anonymous, Bloomington, 6-7pm, Minnesota Valley Unitarian Universalist Church 10715 Zenith Ave S. (2 Blocks south of Old Shakopee Rd, on the East side of Zenith) Contact: bloomingtonma@hotmail.com

Atheist/Agnostic Alcoholics Anonymous, 3249 Hennepin Ave S., #55 (Men's Center, in the basement) Mpls, 7-8 pm., Open to Men and Women. For more info write tcAgnostic@gmail.com

THURSDAYS

Co-dependents Anonymous (CoDA): Thursdays pm, Crown of Glory Church 1141 Cardinal St. Chaska 55318. Open to men and women. For more info contact Rita 952-334-9206; www.MinnCoDA.org

Co-dependents Anonymous (CoDA): Thursdays 7pm, Immanuel Lutheran Church 16515 Luther Way, Eden Prairie 55346. Open to men and women. For more info contact Judy M 612-400-2323; www.MinnCoDA.org

Co-dependents Anonymous (CoDA): Thursdays 7pm, NE Recovery Room at 520 NE Lowry Ave., Mpls 55418. Open to men and women. For more info contact Deirdre 612-619-7595; www.MinnCoDA.org

Workaholics Anonymous: 12 step group for finding balance between work, activity and fun. Meets every Thur. 6-7:15 pm. We are currently meeting by Zoom. Contact us for link and any schedule updates: Gretchen 615-423-9444, Liz 612-229-8930, email: wafindingbalance@gmail.com.

New CoDa East Metro Group: Rasmussen College, 8565 Eagle Point Circle N, Lake Elmo (exit north to Radio Dr. on I-94 E). 6:30-7:30pm. Joseph H. at 715-497-6227 or La'Tosia 651-319-2554.

Red Book ACA/ACOA: Recovery Church, 253 State, St. Paul, 7-8:30pm. For more info call Jacob at 612.819.9370 or Bruce at 651-407-6336.

Recovery International Meeting, St Phillip Lutheran Church, 6180 Highway 65 N, Fridley at 7pm. It is a proven self help method to deal with mental illness including depression, anxiety, anger, mood disorders and fears using cognitive behavior therapy. Ken, 763-571-5199.

Recovery International Meeting at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 4100 Lyndale Ave S., Mpls at 7pm. It is a proven self help method to deal with mental illness including depression, anxiety, anger, mood disorders and fears using cognitive behavior therapy. Ruth 612-825-4779.

Adults with ADHD Support Groups: (first time free) Every Thursday morning 10am-noon and every Thursday evening (except last Thurs of the month) 7pm 8:30pm. LDA Minnesota, 6100 Golden Valley Road, Golden Valley, MN 55422. Tel. 952-582-6000 or www.ldaminnesota.org.

FRIDAYS

Food Addicts Anonymous: a 12-step program dedicated to food addiction. Fridays 8-9pm, Living Table United Church of Christ, 3805 E 40th St, Mpls, 55406. LGBT friendly. For more info call Shea at 612-722-5064 or sheahnsn@gmail.com or www.foodaddictsanonymous.org.

Recovering Couples Anonymous: Friday Night @ Minnehaha United Methodist Church, 3701 E 50th St, Mpls, 55417, 6:30 - 8pm. 12-Step couples group meets as couples in recovery from any addiction. The only requirement is the desire to remain committed to each other, and find better ways to communicate and develop intimacy. Call Kathy 612-545-6200 or Allan 612-309-5632.

SATURDAYS

Overeaters Anonymous Meeting: 9am at Macalester-Plymouth United Church, St. Paul. For those still suffering from compulsive overeating, bulimia and anorexia.

Nicotine Anonymous: Sat. 10am at Linden Hills Congregational Church, 4200 Upton Ave South, Mpls. Enter at the back door. 952-404-1488. Call for locations.

Spenders Anonymous: Our purpose is to stop spending compulsively and work toward serenity in our relationship with money. 1-2 pm at Bethany Lutheran Church, 2511 East Franklin Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55406; street parking or in the church lot; enter through the gate on Franklin and ring the bell; www.spenders.org

Northeast Minneapolis CoDependents Anonymous (CoDA) Group: East Side Neighborhood Services, 1700 2nd Street NE, Mpls, 55413 (corner of 2nd Street NE & 17th Ave NE). Park in lot behind building, use rear entry door. Saturdays: 1-2pm. Contact Ralph W. at rwwink@aol.com or 612-382-0674.

CoDA Group: Saturdays 12pm-1:30pm, Suburban North Alano at 15486 Territorial Rd. Maple Grove 55369. Open to men and women. For more info contact Janine 763-458-0812; <http://www.MinnCoDA.org>

Overeaters Anonymous Newcomer Meeting: Third Saturday of the month, 1pm-2pm. Sumner Library, 611 Van White Memorial Blvd., Mpls, 55411. For more info contact Allison @ 612-499-0280, Gene @ 952-835-0789 or visit www.overeaters.org.

Overeaters Anonymous Courage to Change Meeting: Saturday mornings 8-9am at St Christopher's Episcopal Church, 2300 Hamline Ave N. Roseville. Contact Donna with questions at 651-633-3144.

Clutterers Anonymous: St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, 2300 N. Hamline Ave., (Hwy 36) room 220, Roseville. 12 step support group meets the first, third and fifth Sat. of the month, 10-11:15am. www.clutterersanonymous.org

Debtors Anonymous: men and women using the 12-Steps to solve problems with debt and other money issues.; www.damnnesota.org 952-953-8438. 9-10am, Bethel Evangelical Lutheran Church, 4120 17th Ave. S., Mpls, 55407 (rooms 7 & 8, enter sliding glass door facing parking lot.)

Overeaters Anonymous: 8-9 am, Falcon Heights Community Church, 1795 Holton Street, Falcon Heights. Lisa 651-428-3484.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder Support Group: 1st and 3rd Sat. of the month, 11am -1pm at Faith Mennonite Church, 2720 E. 22nd St, Minneapolis. Website: tinyurl.com/tcocdsg. Call before coming for direction. Burt at 612-547-6388.

Adult Children of Alcoholics & Dysfunctional Families: Saturday, 10am, ACA Club Fridley, Moon Plaza, Boardroom in the lower level of Unity Hospital, 550 Osborne Road, Fridley. Please see www.acafridley.com for info.

Men's & Women's Support Group: Meetings every Saturday (including holidays) at 9am. Prince of Peace Church, 7217 W. Broadway, Brooklyn Park. (north entrance.) Informal, safe place to share experiences of joy and concerns. We promote growth & positive change to meet the challenges of our lives. Call 763-443-4290.

South Side Men's Group: Saturdays, 8:20 to 10am Support for men working toward positive personal change. Creekside Community Center, 9801 Penn Ave. S. Bloomington. Visit www.southsidemensgroup.org.

SUNDAYS

Co-dependents Anonymous (CoDA): Sundays 6pm-7:30pm. Located at Unity Hospital 550 Osborne Rd. Fridley 55432. Held in the Boardroom on the lower level. Enter through main doors and take the West elevator down one floor. Open to men and women. For more info contact Aaron 763-670-4894; www.MinnCoDA.org

Adult Children of Alcoholic/ Dysfunctional Families (ACA)-Big Red Book: 11:15am-12:45pm at the Cavalier Club. 7179 Washington Ave S, Edina, MN 55439, voicemail: 507- 312-9423, aca1115sunday@gmail.com

Calix Society: A group of Catholic Recovering Alcoholics and their family/significant others who desire to strengthen their spiritual growth, meets the 3rd Sun. of the month at Cathedral of St. Paul. Mass at 8am., breakfast/speaker meeting at 9am. Call Jim B. at 651-779-6828.

Deep-Healing Prayer Group: Discover how God provides healing of memories, emotions, and the body at St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Sundays, 7-9:30pm, www.Door2Hope.org. 612-874-1033.

Eating Disorders Anonymous: 5-6:30pm in Eden Prairie at Wooddale Church, 6630 Shady Oak Road, 55344. Room 291. Contact Nikki: nikkihaven@gmail.com or call 612-227-4079.

Opiates Anonymous: Sunday Evenings at 7 pm at Unity of the Valley Spiritual Center, 4011 West Hwy 13, Savage, MN. OA is the first 12-step-based group in the state of Minnesota offering help and support for anyone with a desire to stop using opiates and all other mind altering substances. If you think that you may have a problem with opiates or other mind altering substances, attending one of our meetings may help you decide if you are an addict. If you want to tap into help and support from people and a program with proven success, this is the place for you. No sign up or registration is needed. Just show up at 7 pm on Sunday evenings. If questions contact Ron Benner at 952-657-9119

ABOUT THE LISTINGS

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the support groups on this page. However, we recommend that you contact the group before attending. If you have a listing and need to make a change OR you would like your group included (and on our website), please reach out to us at phoenix@thephoenixspirit.com. Thank you.

**In all things,
it is better to hope
than to despair.**



from page 9

These are exactly the people you should warm up to. One of the best ways of “courting” friends is to introduce yourself to them, say something about yourself, see if they ask you any questions about yourself and ask them about themselves and consider asking them to go to coffee with you if their response to your questions is positive. People in 12 Step Programs are often good candidates for friends. Check out other people in your life who intrigue you and seem to be unlikely friends. Have the courage to take risks.

4. Take a personal inventory of yourself and own your good qualities. Write down these good qualities and carry them around with you. Read your list before you take risks to make friends. There are likely a lot more items you could put on your list than you realize. Use your new friends to find new strengths in yourself. People will tell you what you mean to them, often by non-verbal expressions. Be sure to express your non-verbal expressions to possible new friends. Eye contact, a friendly sincere smile and a warm handshake or hug will do the trick. Listen more and talk less.

5. Make a list of your prejudices towards others that may block your ever giving others a chance. Perhaps you can't stand rich people, or people of color, or people from foreign countries, or white people or successful people. Realize these are your prejudices—they are judgments you make about other people while distancing

from them, usually without evidence for why you are doing so. Personally, I'm not a big fan of arrogant, elitist, or suspicious people. We all have our prejudices, aimed at protecting ourselves, towards others. Be aware of your prejudices and consider throwing them away unless you have clear evidence that they are dangerous to you. You may be surprised to find a good friend among people who generally turn you off. Always stay clear of people who actually hurt you and show no remorse.

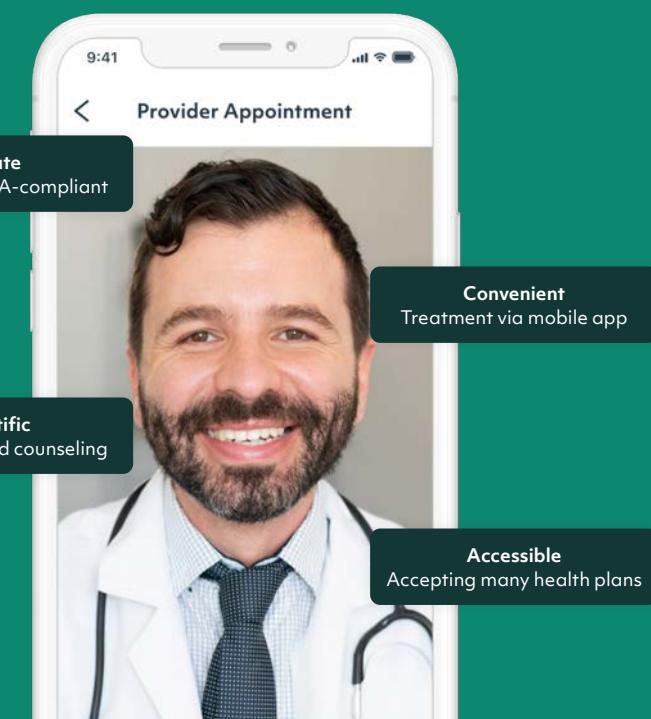
6. Be open to the possibility that many people would like to be your friend and vice-versa. If you sincerely try to make friends you may surprise yourself. You can go from famine to feast. The most likely reason that others will want to be your friend is they see you are making the effort to get close to them. Be sure to learn to say “No” to people when you need distance from them. You are not responsible for their feelings of rejection. Good luck in your efforts.

*John H. Driggs, LICSW, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in private practice in St. Paul and co-author of *Intimacy Between Men* (Penguin Books, 1990). He can be reached at 651-699-4573.*

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Freedom from addiction starts here.

Threshold to 2022

by Mary Lou Logsdon

"Thresholds are dangerous places, neither here nor there, and walking across one is like stepping off the edge of a cliff in the naive faith that you'll sprout wings halfway down. You can't hesitate, or doubt. You can't fear the in-between." — ALIX E. HARROW, AUTHOR

We are once again on the threshold of a new year, bidding adieu to the old one with its joys and sorrows and welcoming a new one that is ill-defined, open-ended and questionable. What will this year look like? What will it bring?

I had not planned that we would still be wrestling with new variants of COVID-19 at the close of 2021. I thought we would be able to put that behind us. We are weary. The grief continues. The sorrows mount up. The losses are many. The end is beyond our sight.

I suppose every year is full of unknowns, but somehow this year they seem larger, hazier, and darker. *How do I enter this new year with so much unresolved?*

We are in a great in-between. We don't know how long it will last or where it will take us. We hope to survive it.

A new year reminds us of the cyclic rhythms of life. Endings make way for beginnings. Over and over. Yet, each time we come to a new year we are different, the world is different, our hopes and dreams are different.

The back entry of the house where I grew up was a threshold into the rest of the house. It was the entry we always used. Maybe once or twice a year, some stranger came in the front door, but rarely. All our friends and family knew that the way to come in was through the narrow entry that opened to the kitchen where all of life happened. It was where we transitioned from the outside world to the inside one.

In that entry was a small closet for jackets and a cardboard box crammed with winter boots, muddy shoes and whatever messiness had to be left at the door. My father was in construction and he was often caked with mud and layered with dust. The door to the basement came right off the entry and when you were really dirty, you went downstairs and left your clothes there.

The entryway held all the mess. No matter how often we cleaned it, it was soon in disarray. That is what entryways are. They are messy. They are the place to leave where we have been to enter where we will soon be. The question is: How long, how far, how dark is that entry?

Thresholds and entries are places of transition. William Bridges, author of *Transitions and Managing Transitions* describes transitions, whether they are personal or organizational, in three stages: Endings, neutral zone, new beginnings. The neutral zone is the time between when we have let go of the old and before we have fully entered the new. We have been occupying that neutral zone for almost two years. When will this be over? When will life return to normal? What is normal?

The neutral zone is uncomfortable, disquieting, agitating. We are all residing here. We don't know when it will end and we don't know what the new beginnings will look like. We are on hold, impatient, eager to get somewhere but not sure where that is.

The neutral zone is also the seedbed for new beginnings. We are in a threshold between life before COVID-19 and life after. This is the seedbed of what will be.

So it is with the new year, we are not quite finished exploring the past year and all that it held before we are thrust into the new one. If these past two years have taught us nothing else, they have taught us that the future is not clear and when it comes, we will have to adjust, readjust, and adjust again.

How do we make room for what is to come? How do we let go of the old so we can be open to the new? How do we plant seeds for the future when we don't yet know what it will look like?

I have three things to suggest: Unpack our burdens, forgive ourselves, turn toward what we really want.

Camels entering the ancient city of Jerusalem came loaded with household belongings that made them too wide to go through the narrow city gate. Nomadic people carried everything with them. To pass through the city gate (which was a threshold), the traveler had to unload the burdens from the camel, bring the camel through the gate, and repack the load. What are the burdens we carry with us? What burdens can we unpack and leave behind as we enter this new year? What might lighten the load? What are we not quite ready to let go? What am I still hanging on to like a favorite pair of pants two sizes too small or magazines with last year's news or broken memorabilia I have yet to fix? They only get in the way of what needs to come next. Make a list of burdens and choose which can be left outside the city gate.

Secondly, I can forgive myself. Forgiveness is a way to clean things out. It is so easy to hang on to the self-flogging for mistakes we have made, shame for people we have hurt, embarrassment for inappropriate things we've done. We could write a letter to ourselves asking for forgiveness: *Dear me, I am sorry for hurting you, embarrassing you, being afraid. Please forgive me. I love you.*

It is hard to forgive others when we have not yet forgiven ourselves. Similarly, it is hard to show compassion to others if we cannot show compassion to ourselves. Let go of those old stories. We cannot change the beginning of our stories, but we can write a new ending.

Finally, what is it I really want? When I peer into 2022, what calls to me? Is there something, someone, a way of life that draws me? Maybe I want to simplify my life, or bring more purpose, or more people, or less people, or more quiet, or less busyness. Am I living the life I want or the life someone else wants for me? Have a visit with the "you" that you are now and ask: *What is it you want going forward?* Then set your internal GPS to get you there.

Embrace the threshold, accept its messiness, don't be afraid. Know that it leads us from what was to what can be.

Happy New Year!

Mary Lou Logsdon provides Spiritual Direction in the Twin Cities. She is an instructor in The Sacred Ground Spiritual Direction Formation Program. She can be reached at logsdon.marylou@gmail.com.

