



# Spiritual Recovery

By Paul Sager

I recently heard a speaker who shared a very powerful message. This speaker's story was like the stories of many addicts and alcoholics: the spiraling downfall into addiction, the struggles with self will as a solution, the deepening lows, feeling terminally unique, being beaten, realizing that a mind-altering chemical was the master, and finally getting sober. The speaker then went on to talk about struggling to believe that having fun in a sober life was possible. I totally related.

I vividly remember the hole that I felt in my gut when I arrived at Herrington and realized that my drinking had brought me to the brink of death. Even though I wanted to live, my mind told me that all the fun in life was tied to chemicals. I didn't know if I wanted to live a life without the extreme chaos of drinking and drugging, what I, at the time, thought was "fun."

Thankfully, as I honestly shared my fears with others in the program, I came to believe that fun just might be possible again. I crossed paths with many recovering addicts and alcoholics that not only told me they were finally enjoying life sober and having real fun, they showed me. I went to concerts with them, dinners, bowling, campfires and so much more. Normally our sober group was the rowdiest! This fellowship has taught me that my perception of fun became warped by my alcoholism and drug use.

Essentially, these individuals showed me that I needed to find a new way to live; I needed to cultivate a new perception of fun. I had to open my mind to the possibility that fun wasn't synonymous with alcohol and drugs.

Eventually (after quite a few meetings, discussions and social events), I could see that fun wasn't the alternate reality of a high or drunk. It may have started out as innocent fun when I first drank and used, but it sure didn't turn out that way. In the darkness of the end, there was no more fun. All I could do was find the oblivion I needed to block out the horrible reality of my problems, and in a bigger sense, my existence.

When I look back on my drinking and using experience with sober eyes, I can easily see how my life became totally unmanageable. Yet it took some time for me to finally see how my disease had warped my perception and confused my unmanageability with fun.

Today, my idea of fun is tied into forgetting my ego, accepting the present moment, facing my fears, and feeling the true energy and vitality that life has to offer in all situations, people and encounters.

Okay, I know what you're thinking, "Yeah, but what about when life hands you something horrible: a breakup or divorce, the death of a loved one, a lost job, a flat tire...?"

Well, I know that stuff is never fun. I've had to deal with some bad things since "graduating" from Herrington. Each time something bad (or more clearly, bad from my perspective) has happened to me, I've had a chance to see how solid my program actually is. Early on, I talked a good game, but I worked a thin program. When something happened in my life that was bad enough, I went back to numbness, back to the bottle and back to drugs. Thankfully, each time I made it back to the tables and opened my mind a bit further. Today, I believe that working a strong program means surrounding myself with others of a similar mind: those interested in spiritual growth, those interested in staying sober at any cost,

those "trudging this road of happy destiny", those who realize that the difficult times in life can be the springboards for rapid spiritual growth.

The last time something "bad" happened to me, I did what had been suggested to me so many times; I reached out to others in the program and to my Higher Power, and they propped me up. I can't fully express how fun it is to realize that with the help of others and my Higher Power, I can live life on life's terms, no matter what happens.

In many ways, I completely related to much of what this speaker shared. Yet one sentence in this speaker's message has stuck with me since. He closed with the following statement: "Nothing justifies a drink for an alcoholic."

I couldn't agree more. The only way for me to live a happy life is to accept my alcoholism and addiction, banish my fears, and take life one day at a time with the help of the fellowship. Today, I truly believe that life can be fun again! It already is, provided I work The Steps.

However, this isn't always easy, but the easy thing to do and the right thing to do are rarely ever the same. My perception is constantly changing for the better, as long as I'm not trying to control the uncontrollable.

I feel greatly honored to have been able to share my story at the Herrington/McBride Summer Reunion and Picnic this year. It was an amazing day that again confirmed for me that fun in sobriety is not only possible, it's guaranteed! The Promises do become a reality, as long as I work for them

## 22nd Annual Winter Retreat

Mark your calendar now -- January 2-4, 2009 -- for a spiritually uplifting experience. The theme will be The Promises: They Will Always Materialize....

Br. Gerry Patton will be the keynote speaker. Many of you know Br. Gerry who is on the staff at the Redemptorist Retreat Center where the retreat will be held.

This is a great way to begin the new year.

More information and registration form will be in the winter issue of this newsletter.

As in the past, scholarships will be available.

## HMAA Board Changes

At the annual HMAA membership meeting held during the reunion/picnic, three alums were nominated and accepted as members of the board of the association. They are Becky Heins, Michael Hedrick and Scott Elston. They replace Ron Ragotsky, Walt Baranowski and Harold Peterson. Thanks for all of the work done by the retiring board members and welcome to the new members.

In the next issue of the newsletter, an introduction of each board member will be included.

Alums are invited to attend board meetings which are usually held the 1st Tuesday every other month at 6PM at Rogers Memorial Hospital--West Allis. Confirm the date and time with any board member.

# A Counselor's Perspective

By: Deb Adamus

I was at the Alumni picnic on June 29th and saw many familiar faces that warmed my heart. With the rate of recidivism in addiction, it is always important for me to see people staying clean & sober and enjoying the fruits of their labor in recovery. As a counselor, I especially appreciate seeing former residents of Herrington and their families come together for an event such as the picnic, and watch recovery in action. I never tire of it.. Watching people rebuilding their lives and relationships, finding peace and joy, and having fun... so b e r! What a concept.

As I watched others at the picnic I reflected on my own journey of recovery. I was in my early 20s when I became clean and sober. Soon after, I was on a mission and wanted to save addicts and alcoholics. I know, rather naive thinking, not to mention grandiose. Go figure. I have since been humbled. Back in the day of intensive boot-camp counselor training programs, I found myself in a situation that cut my ego down to size rather abruptly. I was told that if I thought for a minute that I was going to "save" people, I better be prepared to take responsibility for when they die too. Well, I learned long ago that I could not take responsibility for either. I am not nearly that powerful. I was also told that I had "better be damn good and ready" to look at myself and my own issues if I was going to be working with other people's lives." Those words have resonated with me throughout the years. I shuddered in my shoes then, and continue to appreciate the wisdom in those words today.

A big part of training was not only didactic learning, it was about "personal growth". In fact, we had our weekly group meeting that was referred to as "Growth Group". Sounds rather menacing doesn't it? In some ways it was, but that's a story for another time. As a recovering person, and as a counselor, it's important for me to continue to go to meetings and work my own program. I must say that I fall short of my ideals more often than I care to admit. However, I have learned to live life on life's terms. Sometimes with Grace, and sometimes... not so much. But all in all sobriety has been very good to me. All the promises have come true, but not without painstaking effort at times. That's why in the beginning of recovery the Big Book says "We trudge the road of happy destiny." But may I add, not only in the beginning do we "trudge", there are times throughout life where we have to do just that, but that's life, and it is worth it by far. I continue to be passionate about recovery and have found that life in sobriety is just plain good.

I have learned much in 28 years of working as a counselor in this field. I have seen a lot. I have learned that it is both challenging and rewarding. I am given the opportunity to engage with patients in a way that connects with their heart and speaks to their soul. As alcoholics and addicts, we are not warm and fuzzy. When we arrive at Herrington, we are anything but. We are sick, scared, sad, ashamed, and often, mad as hell! We are resentful, defensive, stubborn, self centered, manipulative, and dishonest. We recoil at the thought that we can not drink or use drugs in a socially respectable manner, as we proceed time and again to try and prove that we are NOT, heaven forbid, one of those! Eventually, hopefully, we raise the white flag and surrender. We attempt to turn our Will and our lives over to the care of treatment professionals, and hope like hell that they can help.

continued....

## Activities & Events

### WINTER RETREAT

January 2-4, 2009

Redemptorist Retreat Center

Info and registration in winter newsletter

### ANNUAL REUNION/PICNIC

June 2009

Date in the Winter issue

Information in the Spring issue

### RAP WITH PERSONS JUST ENTERING RECOVERY

Oconomowoc campus on Tuesdays at 6:00PM

West Allis campus at various days/times

(Individuals must be pre-approved for doing rap session)

### PIZZA WITH HERRINGTON RESIDENTS

September 2, 2008 and March 2009

If you are interested in attending, call a board member

### 12 STEP MEETINGS

AA

Oconomowoc campus

Monday-7PM

Wednesday-7PM

Friday-3PM

(Separate meetings for men and women)

Saturday-7:04AM

Sunday-8:30AM

West Allis campus

Sunday-6PM

Tuesday-7:30PM

Saturday-9AM

NA

West Allis campus

Thursday-7:15PM

### Keynote Speaker's Talk

If you would like a copy of the talk given at the reunion/picnic by Paul Sager, copies are available. Send your request and Five Dollars to the address for the newsletter included in this issue or contact one of the board members.