

The Herrington Recovery

Alumni Association Newsletter



From the Desk of our President

Hello Alumni, Friends, and Supporters,

I hope that 2024 is off to a great start for all of you, and that you are enjoying all the benefits that recovery has to offer. What always helps to kick-start my year is the

HMAA Annual Winter Retreat held at the Redemptorist Retreat Center in Oconomowoc, WI. Ironically, I was very close to not attending the retreat this year. Even though I have attended the retreat almost every single year since my Herrington stay in 2006 (that's 18 retreats for those keeping track), I somehow got into a funk and just "didn't want to go." I think it was equal parts laziness, complacency, and frankly sitting in my "pity pot." Gratefully, when I mentioned this to my sponsee, Jeff, he rightfully and appropriately challenged me: "What do you mean you aren't going...Yes you are!" I realized he was right; I would have regretted the decision not to attend, and I probably would have had a terrible case of FOMO (fear of missing out). That is what I love about AA – when we are stuck or need encouragement, people in the program are there to give us a hug, share a similar challenge, or even call us on our BS. I am grateful to Jeff for challenging me in a loving way to take an action that I knew would be good for me.

So, suffice it to say, I did attend the 37th Annual HMAA Winter Retreat, and I was glad I did. The retreat was held January 3rd to the 5th, and we had about 48 core attendees with others coming and going throughout the weekend. Sixteen of those attendees were provided scholarships through the HMAA's Brian Kenevan Memorial Scholarship Fund. This fund is used to provide scholarships for the winter retreat and sober living for those in financial need and committed to working a recovery program. It's always awesome to arrive at the retreat and see a mix of familiar

faces, new faces, and faces of people I have not seen in a while. I get a charge out of first timers really enjoying the experience. There was a great line-up of diverse speakers and each of them did a terrific job telling their stories. I took something away from each of the speakers. As always, what I enjoyed the most is all the connection time in between the speakers – the meals, the ice cream social, and the games on Saturday night. This is when we can really enjoy each other, connect, and have some good hearty laughs. I'd like to give a big THANK YOU to Jim Dropik who leads the retreat with care and compassion. Jim pours himself into the retreat and makes everyone feel very welcome. I am very glad that I made the decision to go this year – it's what I needed for my recovery, and I left with some strong take-aways and things that I need to work on within my program. It's important that we all keep moving forward in our recovery journey.

I'd love to hear from you on what else our board can be doing to serve the needs of our alumni and HRC residents. I always welcome your feedback and ideas so please feel free to reach out to me using my contact information below. I look forward to staying connected with all of you and promoting the blessings of recovery.

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Increasing the Success of Your Journey

My story, like some others before me, includes a story of relapse. Prior to my relapse, I lived seven months of sobriety in a most difficult way. My journey first started with much hope, as I was rebuilding relationships and attending meetings. However, it didn't take very long for

my relapse behaviors to surface. In fact, my relapse happened within just weeks after I scaled back going to meetings. The offending reasons of isolating, self-pity, avoiding, and poor communication with my support people are all very obvious now, but at the time, they appeared slowly and were too challenging to recognize. After seven months of relapse behavior, it was just a matter of time for my substance to re-introduce itself and it did. In just three and half weeks those relationships were fully destroyed as well as my hopes and my family's future. I returned to Herrington with an immense amount of guilt and shame, as I had not taken responsibility for my addiction/alcoholism and found it very challenging to forgive myself for that and much more. I re-dedicated my program to do things differently. Relapse could not happen again. I told myself I wouldn't miss meetings, I would engage with the fellowship, I would actually "work" the steps, I would call my sponsor regularly, and most importantly I would no longer say "no" to anything positive to my recovery.

I was approached about a sober living option on the tenth day of my 38 days back at Herrington. Initially, I was filled with 1,000 reasons in my mind not to do it, but I only needed one to do it: I would not say "NO" to anything suggested. As Herrington helped me put the pieces of me back together, I began to plan my next step down. I dove much deeper into myself at Herrington to understand just how my use of substances was just another symptom of my thinking. I worked with the team at Herrington to find a sober living location that would suit me best. We landed on Denoon Recovery in Waukesha. The adjustment period was hard initially. I found it challenging to re-establish my daily schedule, which by now consisted of getting up early, exercising, journaling and self-care. I lived in a four-bedroom house with six other guys. At the house we were all responsible for cooking our own meals. Shopping runs were scheduled by the housing director. Once a week we would be given a ride to Walmart in a sprinter van. We would then have one hour to get groceries and personal items. This van was driven by a house manager, who is typically another alcoholic/addict with a considerable time of recovery.

The van would also give us rides to and from the Denoon Clinic where we would attend partial hospitalization programming. Denoon Recovery has three houses in total: two men's houses and one women's house, a total of twenty-four people. As time moved on, we were provided with additional freedoms. We were permitted to attend specific meetings of our choosing. We were allowed passes to return home and spend time with family and sponsor. The largest benefit I quickly experienced was the sober community within the sober living houses. We would spend the days together in group and then go to meetings together at night and socialize during the weekends together. We would frequently participate in the Phoenix Sober Community events in the Milwaukee area. Just as Herrington integrates you into local meetings, sober living does the same. I discovered several new meetings that I continue to go to today and enjoy additional fellowship. The support of my housemates helped ease the transition considerably, but there were constant reminders of the challenges out there. I would see several friends relapse; some of them would return after a short time and some would not return at all. House managers were the most vulnerable as the stress of managing housemates, handing out prescription medications, and driving took its toll. It was a constant reminder of how fragile your recovery is, and that it must be protected at all costs.

At the conclusion of my 5 weeks of living in the house, I was approached about staying on as a house manager. At the time being the house manager would work well for me as I didn't go back to work for another two weeks and doing so would help keep me busy until then. After getting settled, I quickly implemented my daily routine again as I was in a whole new house. The practice of re-implementing my daily schedule really helped ease my eventual transition home; when my schedule would be interrupted, I knew I could very easily get things back into place and not skip a beat. However, the role of a house manager proved to be far more than I was willing to do. I recognized early on that the added stress and responsibilities were not beneficial to my own recovery. I had set a boundary for myself prior to agreeing to do the role that my recovery must come first, and I stuck with that boundary. I notified the recovery center that I needed to step down from the role. Stepping down from Herrington to a sober living program allowed me to ease back into the regular stresses of work and life. Even when interrupted by change, I was also able to prove to myself that I can continue to build a healthy recovery program, one based on AA principles, step work, self-care, routines, healthy boundaries and communication.

~By Billy R.



1/11/25-85 Days and Counting

Coffee in hand and a fire burning as I reflect on the uplifting 37th HMAA Winter Retreat at the Redemptorist Retreat Center last weekend. I first heard about the retreat at the HRC pizza night last Fall. I was only a few weeks sober in November 2024 and thought, "Wow, how cool is that, a sober retreat in January 2025." I made retreat attendance a definitive goal to ring in the New Year sober and with this comforting community I had grown to love.

I grabbed a retreat flyer from Jim D. and was thrilled to find out that the retreat is on a lake nearby. Water has always been so healing for me, and that is the main reason I chose Rogers over other recovery programs. Sitting on piers, the walks, the views, and the overall calmness the lake gave me proved to be monumental in my growth and sobriety during my stay at HRC. I immediately noticed Brian Kenevan's name on the flyer and asked Jim if that was his son. He said no and asked if I needed any financial help. How immensely kind; however, I was asking as I wanted to help others attend the retreat. Jim explained how Rogers Hospital Foundation and donations to the Brian Kenevan Memorial Scholarship Fund work together to help others in recovery attend. How amazing, and this year the Foundation and Scholarship were able to sponsor 16 people to attend the retreat. Well done everyone!

The retreat was so peaceful with the lake, the speakers, and the food (including a soft serve custard machine - I was definitely in Wisconsin!). As a bonus, I was able to attend the 5 pm mass Saturday night with my sponsor Jenny and sober sister Christa (pictured above). The keynote speaker, Michelle S., recounted her powerful journey to sobriety. She is a true warrior and survivor, and we were all inspired by her long-term sobriety. Michelle, thank you for sharing your moving story with all of us. Also thank you to all the speakers for sharing your individual sobriety stories. We attendees took home bits and pieces that will help us on our own sobriety journeys. The camaraderie felt during the weekend made me want to deepen my connections with others attending. I was so happy to see my fellow HRC pals and re-bond with them over the weekend. Johnny the Greek won the Trivial Pursuit contest this year...or was it Johnny the German?

Blessings and sobriety in this New 2025 Year for all HMAA Alumni.

~EME

My Spirituality

I was out walking today. Walking allows me to shut down and listen to my spiritual thoughts. I could never hear these thoughts when I was drinking, but I find that I can really connect with them now. It can be truly remarkable at times.

During the walk I encountered two fawns on the trail. I stopped to admire them, and they paused to look at me. I tried to call them and made a clicking noise with my tongue. This in no way assured them and they scattered off into the brush. Their mother was near, and I saw her as well. She kept a wary eye on me until I moved on.



These are the types of things that I love so much that I did not take time to notice in my drinking life. I never had time to pause, always too busy to stop and enjoy life. My thoughts were always a jumble and never clear, not even for a moment. I was always looking forward to my next drink and drinking took up a lot of my time. My friends and family always commented on how much patience I had, but in my mind, I understood it was all a lie and that I had little to no patience at all.

I was not raised with any sort of formal religion. My parents took me to church when I was very young, and then my brothers came along and that was the end of church. Later, I had absolutely no interest in attending and finding out what it was all about. Friends offered and I always declined, always too busy or self-absorbed. I declared myself to be a true agnostic and that was the path I stayed on for a very long time.

I was eventually forced to confront my drinking problem. While I was not in danger of losing my job, I could easily find that danger. I was also stressing out my wife and while she supported me, it hurt me to feel that this support might not last forever. There was also the impact drinking was having on my health to consider. I ended up at Herrington and it was the best thing that ever happened to me. This is where I came to truly understand AA and the impact it would have on my life going forward.

I need to fast forward a bit. Not long but just a bit. I am now attending AA meetings regularly. I read the promises at the meetings every chance I get. My thoughts are becoming clearer and my focus on life is really coming into view. I often feel that I am being guided along my path. Are my spiritual thoughts awakening? How could this be as I have no interest in religion. Eventually I have come to realize that spiritual thoughts are not necessarily religious thoughts. I have never really prayed in my entire life, and yet I still feel I am being spiritually guided. And I am listening.

It was hard to listen at first, but as my mind becomes clearer my thoughts of spirituality are intensifying. I am beginning to really

enjoy life and how my life impacts and is impacted by nature. I found these to be very thrilling feelings, and I follow them eagerly, relishing every moment.

My family is gone now. My parents were heavy drinkers, much like me, and my brothers had serious addiction issues that eventually led to their early deaths. I find that my dreams often include one of my brothers. I was not particularly close to either of my brothers, so why only one of them visits me in my dreams is a mystery to me. I was much closer to my father so why my brother? I do find comfort in these dreams, and I believe it is my spiritual awareness that is driving them. I also find comfort in the idea of church. Will I be able to further connect to my spirituality if I decide to attend? That is to be determined.

So, I will continue to walk and take in the things and feelings that life is all about. I truly want to believe that all the misery I felt while I was drinking is behind me. And I plan to expand my spirituality.

Thank you for listening.

~By Rik K.

The Germans vs. The Greeks

“Over a Quarter Century of Challenge”

By: Johnny the German

Those having attended the Winter Retreat for the first time, or those who will be attending the Summer Reunion in June, may not be aware of the history of “Trivial Pursuit” among the alumni of Herrington McBride, and others who have joined us over the years.

It all began over quarter century ago, when as a former resident at Herrington Recovery Center, I began bringing Trivial Pursuit to the annual retreat, and later to the summer reunion. Later, when I retired as a high school guidance counselor and began working as a recovery support specialist at Herrington, I would play the game there around the dining room table. However, I was admonished by management at that time that I could no longer play the game with the residents, as it had become too rowdy! (Spoil-sports!!!) Despite this, the game playing continued at the Retreats and Reunions.

Johnny the Greek, now one of my closest friends, and I had known each other since our late teens, meeting at the university we both attended over half a century ago. Later, we found each other again as two past residents of Herrington. We became very competitive as he spoke about his ancestral Greeks as the saviors of civilization (Socrates who???). Hmmm, my heritage is German, and I would consider the great artists, philosophers (including my great-grandfather’s brother who was a professor in metaphysics) and scientists like Einstein. The competitiveness between us regarding our heritages eventually continued into

Trivial Pursuit. The two teams that developed became tradition: Johnny the German’s team vs. Johnny the Greek’s team. Now when the game begins, it’s “Go for the Jugular!”

During the last game at the Winter Retreat, the game went on for near three hours. Finally, and I admit this begrudgingly, Johnny the Greek’s team won, and both sides were exhausted.

There is only one trophy, THE LOSERS’S TROPHY – an ugly statue of a dumb elf admitting defeat. It was graciously (I think) taken home by one of the members of my group, who promised to hide it in his closet until the June reunion!

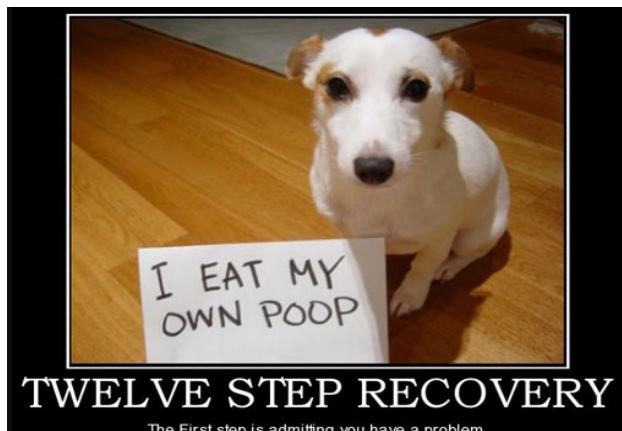
Der Führer is not happy with me! The call goes out, “GERMANS (or wannabe Germans) UNITE!” Please get your hands on as many versions of Trivial Pursuit as you can and memorize the answers to all the questions. It has been a tactic the Greeks have used far too long! Join The German’s Team for the June Picnic Reunion’s Showdown!



Save the Dates

40th Annual Summer Picnic
June 21, 2025

38th Annual Winter Retreat
January 2-4th, 2026



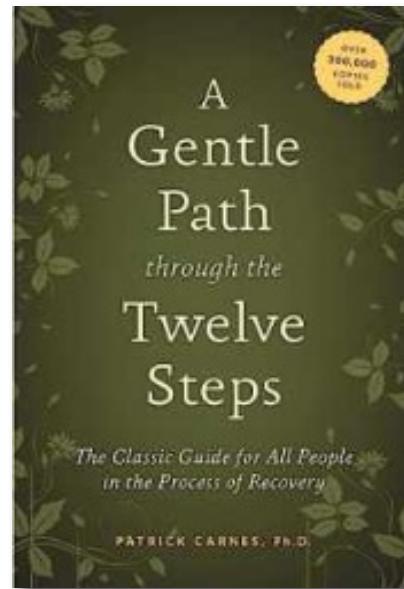


Editor's Entry

Greetings! I also attended the January retreat (pictured above with my sponsor Elizabeth and friend Mac). I would like to recognize Jim Dropik (pictured below with his sons Jason and Dillon) for his devotion to making the retreat a special event each year. The theme of the retreat was spirituality/spiritual fitness, and I was privileged to serve on a discussion panel with Jason and Mac. The founders of AA appreciated the spirituality of recovery; by working the Twelve Steps, members find that they have “tapped an unsuspected inner resource...a Power greater than themselves...and realize that they have undergone a profound alteration in reaction to life” (Big Book, pg. 567-568).

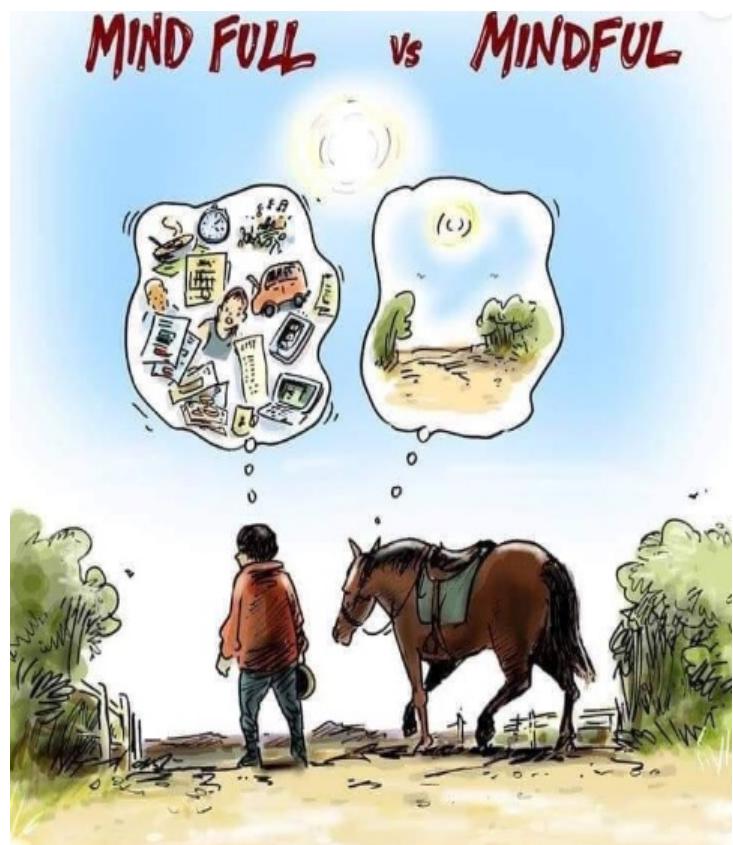
I pray that we all continue to grow in our spiritual journeys, one day at a time.

~ Michelle V.



Recovery Tools

A Gentle Path Through the Twelve Steps, by Patrick Carnes, Ph.D, is a workbook designed to help people with different types of addictions, as well as their co-addicted loved ones. This book provides a unique set of structured forms and exercises to help recovering people integrate the Twelve Steps into their lives.



LEARN TO BE PRESENT AND ENJOY THE MOMENT

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 AA 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



To find local AA meetings download Meeting Guide app:

To find local NA meetings visit: <https://usa-na.org/find-na/>

To find local Al-Anon meetings visit: <https://al-anon.org/al-anon-meetings/find-an-al-anon-meeting/>

To find local Families Anonymous meetings/resources visit: <https://familiesanonymous.org/>

Visit the international **Online Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous (OIAA)** for virtual AA meetings at:
<https://aa-intergroup.org/meetings/>

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

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

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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:

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