

A BRIGHTER FUTURE IN RECOVERY

INSPIRING STORIES OF **CHANGE & CHALLENGE**

Unless otherwise noted,
the art used in this
booklet was done by
participants in WRAD's
Sliding Doors program.

A BRIGHTER FUTURE IN RECOVERY

IN 2021 WRAD INTRODUCED A SHORT STORY COMPETITION GIVING PEOPLE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE THEIR INSPIRING STORIES OF RECOVERY.

This year the competition followed the theme Change, Challenge and a Brighter Future in Recovery and again detailed often traumatic but ultimately stirring stories of redemption and a return to good health.

In many cases these are ongoing stories with more chapters to unfold. Not all of these chapters will be positive, but the journey is on an uphill trajectory.

The story competition is part of WRAD's ongoing commitment to helping people to turn their lives around, and to break down the stigma attached to substance misuse issues.

It is a way for people to express their gratitude, insights and pride in their recovery, and hopefully inspire others to follow in their footsteps. It's not always easy to put these feelings into words, but many of the writers said that documenting their stories helped in their ongoing recovery process.

A Brighter Future in Recovery contains 11 stories from those submitted to this year's competition. Many of the entrants wished to remain anonymous and so, apart from the main prize winner and the Paul Jennings prize winner, all other stories have been included without names and we respect their privacy.

All the stories submitted to this year's competition were heartfelt and emotional but with an ultimate feeling of hope and strength to find a different life.

Told with a personal insight, they reveal the despair and stress of being a carer or parent of a person confronting challenges, and provide examples of how some people hit rock bottom before seeking help as they strive to maintain a better life.

The stories show that treatment works and that recovery is possible.

The judges faced a difficult task - every entry could have won. Every entrant deserves praise for sharing their insights. These are stories still being lived today.

We hope you are both touched and inspired by these stories and we thank all writers for sharing.

Remember, help is there if you need it.

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Mural Images:

Front Cover Image - Warrnambool Whales by Marco Pennacchia

Page 4 Image - Indigenous Mural by Fiona Clarke

Back Cover Image - Black Cockatoo Mural by Jimmi Buscombe



ABOUT THE WINNERS



Winning Story:

First Light by Mark Gavin

Second Place:

Last Week - Anonymous

Paul Jennings Award:

Strength in Recovery
by Kayleearne Clyde

Third Place:

The Yellow Card - Anonymous

Please Note:

Apart from the winning entry and the Paul Jennings award winner, all entries have been included anonymously

Pictured (left to right): Short story competition winner Mark Gavin, Paul Jennings award winner Kayleearne Clyde with WRAD Director Geoff Soma and Patron Paul Jennings.



FIRST LIGHT

BY MARK GAVIN



Slowly the blurriness between sleep and waking flows through my body as I hear a small commotion at my bedroom door. I inhale a conscious breath and instinctively know that the wind is gentle and offshore. I hear a quite "dad" from the bedroom door. "Yes" I reply. "Come on we are doing a dawney" was the response.

Two of my boys had got up early to surf with me to celebrate my 50th birthday. I said "awesome, I will be down in a minute". I gave my partner a kiss on her forehead and said "see you in a few hours" I felt her gently squeeze my hand and heard a quiet "happy birthday handsome, have fun and be safe".

Standing on the beach with the first rays of light, I said to the boys "off you go, I need to fix my leg rope, I'll catch up". Truthfully, I just wanted a quiet minute to watch them paddle out, implanting proud and joyful memories into my mind. Standing there watching the reflections off the swell lines start to form, it created a reflection of my own life. My life was not always filled with such beautiful moments like this day had gifted me, in fact 10 years ago my story was very different.

I was living my life like it was an episode of Jackass. My existence and actions were executed by the mantra of 'if you are living on the edge, then you are taking up too much room'. I had sipped, sculled, smoked, snorted and swallowed all kinds of mind-altering substances in the fruitless pursuit of happiness, acceptance, approval and self-worth. I would wear my excessive use of drugs and alcohol like a badge of pride, thinking I was some sort of champion. Excuses as to why it was normal or even deserved behaviour would always flow from my mouth. All the time I was failing to see what wreckage and absolute carnage I was leaving in my wake of self-destruction. My path to a premature death lay before me and I had my foot firmly on the accelerator.

There are many steps on the road to recovery but the one step on my path which to this day is prominent in my mind is the bluestone step leading into a dimly lit hall. I remember pausing at this step and just looking at it, knowing this had to be a turning point. I crossed over this step alone and completely broken. Seeing MS take my mother's life over the first 11 years of my life had not broken me. Two failed marriages and several attempts on my own life had not broken me. Court appearances had not broken me and even barely seeing my own sons had not broken me. Finally, I just had no more bullshit sorry's left in me. It's the sorry that so many people who misuse substances know all too well. It's the genuine regret for your actions the night before. It's the 'I won't do it again'. It's the well-intentioned promises to be a better person. All of which ultimately fail as you end up in another filthy public toilet using or having another secret longneck. Back down the rabbit hole for another trip to sorry town.




IMAGE: Fire Rocks,
donated to WRAD by Portland artist Judy Antill

I don't have a specific date to refer to, but I do know that my recovery started the day I crossed that bluestone step and stopped using alcohol, drugs and cigarettes all on that day. It was a few days later that I saw the world come into high definition for me. All the colours of the world literally got brighter and like respawning on a computer game I got the chance to start over on this level of life. My recovery has not always been roses and fairy floss. Life still throws me some shitty situations but there is now a lack of drama and conflict. Funny how love has filled the void that was within me. I now feel it from those around me and radiating out from within. There is a beautiful peace and calmness within the bosom of recovery.

First light of the day used to highlight all the sordid little actions hidden in the darkness from the night before. Now standing here on the beach basking in the first light of the day watching two of my sons paddling out, it lights up endless possibilities, joy, gratitude and contentment. The golden hour glows upon me like a beacon to the future.

We are so very proud of her journey and who she has become. Complete and total Love, Trust, and Respect.



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STRENGTH IN RECOVERY

BY KAYLEEARNE CLYDE



*My name is Kayleearne
I was addicted to
methamphetamines for
five years. This October
I will be three years clean.
This is my story.*

To share my story, I must tell you about the lowest places my addiction took me to. Some of these things I am not proud of but I will share them with you so you can understand the depth and how addiction took over my life and slowly took control until the person I once was almost ceased to exist.

I have always been a strong independent woman. Before addiction I worked two jobs that I loved, attended school and TAFE and had great relationships. I was happy with the direction my life was heading until one day I met someone. Looking back now I can see the red flags and early warning signs of this relationship. He manipulated me in a way that I believed that I didn't have him, nobody would want me.

This was not a healthy relationship; there was a substantial amount of abuse physically and mentally, until one day he went too far that he broke my body, mind, soul and even my bones.

I'm not going to say this was the only significant event in my life that contributed to my using, but it is the event that pushed me into the darkness that I would soon feel like I was drowning in.

Soon my everyday life would be consumed with addiction. My day would consist of using, scoring, and selling. I stopped showing up for work and slowly lost everyone and everything I held close to my heart. But at this point I would not even notice or care because the only thought I had was using. I was in full addiction, and I felt I would never escape because the darkness had consumed me.

Over the five years of my addiction, I was in and out of jail until one day I met someone. This person would become the father of our child. When I found out I was pregnant it was like I could see the light in darkness, this child would be my escape. In a perfect world I would stop using and we would live happily ever after, but sadly this was not the case. Earlier I spoke of being a strong independent woman but during this part of my life, I was no longer that person and had handed my mind, body and soul over to my disease. Everyday my love for this child would grow as she grew inside me, but I would continue to use throughout my pregnancy and this perfect little girl would be ripped from my arms and put into Child Protection care.

You would think that this would be the light switch moment that I needed to get clean so our family could be whole again. But once again this is not what happened. I would struggle to go an hour without using because I felt that my pain was too great to face clean because losing my child felt like losing a part of myself.

I would continue to use and see my daughter three times a week for an hour until she turned three months old. This is the day that things would change because at 9.30am




IMAGE: Tears of Hope, by Brauer College student Zoe Edwards was the winner of the 2016-17 WRAD Art in Schools competition.

my house would be raided, and I would be imprisoned for five months. I had been in jail previously, but this time was different; the pain of being away from her was the motivation I needed to get myself clean. But I couldn't just do this for her, I had to want this for me, and I did. I wanted my family to be whole.

On the day I was released, I already had five months clean time and I would reach out for support from services offered in Warrnambool that would teach me the tools and strategies I needed to implement in my life to ensure that I could maintain sobriety. I would receive help for my previous trauma and support for my mental health.

So where am I now? In July my daughter has been in mine and my partner's (her Dad) care for two years; I hold a job; I am a mum; I have completed my Certificate IV in Child Youth and Family Intervention; am currently studying my Diploma in Community Services; and reconciled past friendships and formed

new friendships. I have been a guest speaker at different places to spread my message of hope to all individuals affected by this disease. These are just a small example of my achievements I have been able to succeed in since finding recovery. My recovery didn't come easy, but it came to me at the time when I was ready. Recovery is not something that happens overnight, it is a lifelong journey and something I will continue to work on. But it has been worth it.

If you are suffering from this disease my message to you, is you are not alone. If you are thinking about starting your recovery journey, then you have already taken the first step. If you have a friend or family member suffering just remind them that they are loved and no matter what happens they will never be alone. Simple things like this can spread a message of hope.

LAST WEEK



THE TEXT MESSAGE

Hey Mum, I don't know what to do about my mental health. I feel much the same as I have for years with small improvements and I feel worse now after going to therapy this year. It's hard to feel as if things are better or will be better when I don't have consistency. Like yes I feel better some days but I often feel depressed. I really want some good help but I don't know what to do. I feel as if I've got some complex issues and these health professionals aren't working hard enough with me to fix this. Also the medications that I've tried aren't working and I don't know what to do.

I feel like I'm kinda slipping and my thoughts have been pretty hard to deal with and also my hopefulness is kinda gone away.

THE SOBBING

I sob and I sob and I sob. The tears come in massive waves. I try to breathe, to have the strength to call him. The text had been sent around midnight. It's now morning. My mind fears the worst. It always does. Where is he now? Is he okay? Is he still alive?

He's in Melbourne. I'm in Warrnambool.

THE MESSAGES

I call him. He doesn't answer. I wait.

He texts.

I just finished work 😊

I called Beyond Blue and they have this community mental health thing that seems a bit more focused on holistic therapy so I think that's a good step. I have an intake call next week.

I'm on a roller coaster. It's always a roller coaster. On the good days the relief is palpable. I live for the good days. The days when he calls and he isn't crying. The days he goes to work. The days when I see the boy I used to know. The days when everything in life seems so much easier.

Good on you for ringing Beyond Blue.

That sounds like a great program.

Call me this arvo if you'd like to.

THE PHONE CALL

He calls.

We talk.

He tells me about the appointment with the new psychologist last week.

He's angry.

They can't see me because of my drug and alcohol history. I don't want to talk about drugs and alcohol. I want to talk about me. Why does everyone think they're the fucking problem? It's not all of who I am. I don't drink anymore. So what if I had problems with drinking in the past. Why do they always focus on it? I'm fucking sick of it. It's always the focus.

THE ARGUMENT

I ask him....

Do you still smoke weed though?

Yes, occasionally

How often is occasionally?

Three times a week.

In my head I double it. I'd say he's smoking daily.

He defends himself. He defends it.

He always does.

Why does everyone always focus on it? You can get it on prescription in St Kilda, I know people who do. It's been used for years. It's good for me. It works. It helps my mental health. It won't make any difference if I stop. I am so fucking sick of everyone focusing on it. I just want to talk about the other stuff.

So, you've tried everything to improve your mental health including exercise, giving up alcohol, therapy and medication, but the only thing you haven't changed is smoking weed. Don't you think it might be time to give that a go? To stop. It might be the one last thing that makes the difference. Don't you think that if all the people you have been seeing are saying the same thing, then they may be right?

Yeah, I suppose.

I HAVE actually decided to stop. I decided on Friday. (Three days ago)

I need to, for my new job.

THE RELIEF

Finally.

After all these years. After waiting and hoping.

Finally, the system has forced a reckoning. He acknowledges that it may be the one thing that can finally make the difference.

THE RESEARCH

I wonder who can help. Who can I turn to now?

I call Direct Line. I talk to a drug and alcohol counsellor. It helps.

I text him the number for Direct Line.

Ok thanks ☺

THE VISIT

He comes on the train for a visit.

The first time in six months.

He's happy. It's good to see his smiling face.

We walk in the cold windy weather.

We watch footy. We eat good food. We keep warm.

THE TALK

We cry. I listen to his anger, about the therapists and counsellors. About their methods. About how they don't get him. How they always focus on the same stuff. He gets it all out. I listen. I empathise. It's hard. His anger spills across the kitchen table. It's good.

THE PLAN

We make a plan for giving up the weed.

We talk about telling his friends and siblings.

We talk about cutting ties with dealers and people who he smokes with. We talk about keeping busy. We talk about what worked with the alcohol and the cigarettes. We talk about who to call when he feels temptation. We talk about drug and alcohol counselling. We talk a lot.

We cry some more.

THE THANKS

He thanks me for helping. For being there. For listening.

We eat an early lunch.

THE TRAIN

He sits on the train, ready to go back home.

He takes his shoes off. His socks are full of holes. He laughs. He didn't have any clean ones, without holes, to bring with him.

THE GOODBYE

We hug. I thank him for coming to visit. I tell him to come again soon.

THE LOVE

It's always been about loving unconditionally. Never giving up the hope for change. Never losing sight of the small things to be grateful for. The pain feels unrelenting. It's not the journey I thought I would travel with him. But it is. So I love and then I love some more. It's all I can do some days.

THE YELLOW CARD



There was only one thing in the pocket after all, and that was a small yellow card covered with printed words, and divided into paragraphs. For someone who had spent the last 25 years checking that pocket at least twice a day, it was at least mildly surprising that her father had only been looking at one item so simple and ordinary looking as that small yellow card.

Angela took the card and smoothed it out. It had been folded in the centre, probably by the original printer, and one paragraph was highlighted, circled and had some of its words underlined.

JUST FOR TODAY, the paragraph read, I will be agreeable, will look as well as I can, dress becomingly, talk low, act courteously, criticise not one bit, not find fault with anything and not try to improve or regulate anybody except myself. She remembered the year before he got that card – and the year after.

A year of struggle leading down and down and yet further down, then a year of struggle leading slowly but surely up and out again. None of those in the house today knew where he'd got it from, but what they all knew was that he had taken it out of the pocket at least twice a day, sheltered it – whatever it was, they didn't then know – sheltered it in the palm of his hand, while he steadily looked for some 20 or 30 seconds, and then put it back again.

They had all been worried when he started disappearing on the Sunday nights. Dad disappearing had, in the past, meant mum finding him in the furthest corner of the old milking shed, wrapped in a blanket and clutching a bottle of beer. His right arm would usually lean protectively on the other bottles that would, in the hours to come, bring him to tears.

But not these nights. He would disappear, but not to be found in the milking shed, the hay shelter, the toolhouse or even the little lean-to filled with firewood. He was just gone, and so was the work ute, only to reappear two hours later to quietly and happily rejoin them. How could he go, announce to no-one his return, and be happier? And the interesting path of events that followed puzzled everyone, friends and family alike, because the weeks got better and the months got better and the years got better; and all since the first time he came home with that little yellow card. He had died quietly last week, died well – at peace with the world and his maker.

Twenty-five years ago, those who really knew him expected he might not see out the decade. It did not show on the outside,





but he was in the kind of trouble that only those three or four friends who know a man properly can understand. And it was slowly sinking him. They were trying to help but really, it wasn't what your average bloke would have called 'good prospects of success'. It made Angela wonder what had really happened all those years ago when he began to improve, so slowly improve, by the week and the month and the year.

*** Peter got out and shivered, looking up at the sky frosted with stars and the outline of the old black gum. The ute door creaked as it closed, and the walk to the old meeting hall felt long and slow. He'd no idea what to expect here, no idea who he would see, no idea how he would feel in an hour's time when he walked out. An hour later he did walk out, confused, surprised at himself, and even more surprised at how happy he was. Being put on the spot wasn't expected to make someone happy, but somehow and for some reason, he was very happy. Maybe it was the recognition of a face or the sharing of stories, but in his deep insides Peter knew it was... what was it? Love, warmth, care or friendship? It was different anyway, whatever it was.

And he wanted more of it, and he was going to go back.

*** "We are gathered here today..." The priest was dressed neatly but casually, not in the formal robes she had expected. Even through her tears Angela could realise that. She looked slowly around at the family she loved, the family that had hurt and laughed and talked together over so many years. She thought of the dad who had been through all that and more. Hurt, laughter, talking. "We are gathered here today to mourn the passing of Peter, much loved wife of Jane, and father of Angela, Mark..." Angela smoothed out the yellow card again.

JUST FOR TODAY... her father had read. Every day, more than once, he had read those words. Well, she thought, dad had certainly changed from that time on. He really had started to be agreeable, to look as well as he could, to dress becomingly, to talk low, to act courteously, not to criticise or find fault with others. He was not all those things perfectly, and not all at once, and there were slips and faults and stumbles. But he had started to be different. The change had begun.

DEAR FRIEND



Dear Friend,
Classic Aussie white bread. That's how I grew up. With a large dose of strict Catholicism. So, it was natural for me to think that drinking alcohol was what you did with your life.

I started as soon as I turned 18 and it took me a long time to understand that you don't have to live with shame, guilt, angst, regret and rage, which are all too common when you choose to drink alcohol every day.

And if you know, you know what I'm talking about. The feelings that simmer deep in your depths. You'll do anything to not feel them including wipe yourself out on the regular. It was always a bottle of wine after 5 for me. More on the weekends and then some. Plus, I had kids so naturally I need a drink at the end of the day. "My reward." - insert eye roll here.

To be honest, I'm surprised I'm still alive after the way I used to drink. And on June 15, 2019 I did almost die. It was in that space that I knew I had to quit for good or I would die. This was the second-time-round sobering up. From 2013 I sobered up for almost four years. In amongst the mountain of healing I have done, I've often asked myself why I had to go back drinking again for another two years. The short of it is I didn't do the deep healing that was required the first-time round. The long of

it is I had to learn how to sit with my Self and love my Self enough to do the work.

The work is the self-authoring required, like processing generational trauma, childhood trauma, understanding my triggers, setting boundaries and allowing my Self to feel ALL the feelings. And believe me when I say, there are a thousand and one intense feelings that hit you all at once when you make the choice to acknowledge your timeline and accept a new way of alcohol-free living.

I don't hold with the thought that I'll never drink again as I find that quite detrimental. You see, there's a space that I lived in for a really long time. It's the space of not wanting to drink when all I was doing was drinking. If you're there and you are brave enough to acknowledge it, I encourage you to go to your doctor and have as much an honest conversation as you can about what you're doing to yourself. And if your doctor brushes you off, like my first one did, go and find one who does listen. Because you will need support on this journey. Whether it's a doctor, rehab or AA, there is help out there for you if you are strong enough to ask for it.

I had to walk through the space of NOT drinking when all I wanted to do was drink. I had to walk through that with an extremely low self-esteem and sense of self-worth. That's the kicker. How do you love your Self and believe in your Self when you've spent all of your life hating your Self and not believing your worth? Sometimes I cannot believe I'm still alive and able to enjoy life without alcohol. I'm very open with my four children about my alcohol addiction as I know that this can be passed on through the generations. Also, because their father has had his own addiction issues. I have studied a



lot about how the brain works and how you process/store trauma in your body which may determine whether you are more susceptible to having addiction issues. Doing the deep healing work that was required for me to become free from the chains of alcohol was beyond difficult. I broke the habit of being my Self and it hurt more than what I thought possible.

However, since putting into practice small, loving acts of kindness and compassion towards my Self, I have found joy simply in existing. That was something I never allowed my Self before. I struggled with depression and suicidal ideation, I denied my Self the right to exist. So now as I celebrate three years sober, I walk forward with love and creativity in my being. I make healthy choices each and every day and no longer fool my Self into thinking I can have "just one drink."

I spend more time living in the present moment and "love your Self enough to do the work" is my mantra. I share openly with others the struggles I faced in order to love my Self and live without alcohol.

I have beautiful, challenging conversations with others where great friendships are

formed and I am grateful to be able to share my story here with you. Thank you.

If you are struggling, I highly recommend the book, *Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself* by Dr Joe Dispenza. You see, 95% of your brain operates subconsciously, so just making the conscious (the other 5%) choice to quit drinking is not enough as you probably know if you've ever tried to quit before. It just keeps creeping back in. Be brave enough to ask for help and accept you want more from your Life. You're worth it, friend.



**LOVE YOURSELF
ENOUGH TO DO
THE WORK, IS
MY MANTRA.**



MELT



"A rainbow appears after the storm"

This saying I once heard is so true in relation to my son, Roy, and the battle he had that took him from his life controlling darkness into one which saw him bath in the sunshine. Roy's story is one of hope and inspiration. I like to think I played a very small hand in his turn around by the support and faith I showed.

Even when I looked into his eyes and he had that faraway look-I was confident he would turn it around

Even when he would yell and shout at me for no reason-I was confident he would turn it around

Even when things became broken by his hands-I was confident he would turn it around

Even when I saw the holes in walls and doors-I was confident he would turn it around

Even when he gave me a black eye-I was confident he would turn it around

Even when the police turned up at my door with a search warrant and were conducting their search -I was confident he would turn it around

One thing I was grateful was he never stole from me, like so many others in his situation would've done.

I believe the start of Roy's downfall was when there was a breakdown of the marriage between my wife [Roy's mother] and myself. It was a change he was ill equipped to deal with, so began his journey upon the road leading into his darkness.

Along the way family members who are supposed to stick by him- even when the

road was rocky, gave up on him, therefore they had nothing to do with him. This only strengthened my resolve to stick by him no matter how hard things became. I always thought if he saw that someone close to him stuck by him and had faith in him, then that would give him the best chance to turn life around.

I'd ignored the sly comments, the sarcastic remarks, the judgements and the voices that would say things like 'you've given him one too many chances, you need to let him go'. Another common one said to me was 'Cut him out of your life, it sounds harsh but in the end it will be the best thing for him'. Then they would go on to say 'He'll eventually come around when he realises there's no-one there. You have to be cruel to be kind'.

I thought this was the worst thing you can do; as I believed this could force him further into darkness. He needed to get rid of the demon that had attached itself to him and I shouldn't go and do something that would just drive him further into darkness. The darkness that became his world. I just did what I thought was right; to give Roy the best chance to climb out of his pit of despair.

On a personal note it's challenges like this that you find out who your true friends are.

He decided his life was spiralling out of control so he had to do something drastic to change his situation, go from a life in addiction to life where he lived in reality. Roy decided the best way for him was to just go cold turkey. He could've taken the easy path by keep doing what he was doing but this path would've ended up in his demise.

Going through cold turkey by yourself [as Roy did], must've been so tough for him. I can't imagine what he went through to rid himself of



his addiction. Exercising his demons this way just made me extra proud of him. I feel he has a certain amount of respect for me, especially because I believed in him and stuck by him during this dark period of his life.

Now things with Roy have improved, the family member that abandoned him when he needed them the most has now come back into his life. On one hand this is a good thing but in on the other hand I say to myself 'where were you when he needed you the most.

Where were you when the going was tough, I could've used a little help, he could've used a little reassurance, especially from those who are supposed to love you the most'. I think this is a wound that will take a long time to heal. You have to forgive so you can truly move on. You need to forgive to heal but in saying that, don't ever forget. I like to believe he adopted this philosophy and, in a very small way, played a part in his healing process.

There have been many speed bumps in the road that led him to the life he is living now. At first there were a couple of failed job interviews: one of which his past caught up with him. The job was his until his past came to light, which I thought was wrong, as sometimes people do change and all they need is to be given a chance. I'd just reassure him that there is an employer out there that will ignore your past and will give you that chance you need.

I feared that every day without a job he would slip into depression, start to question his self worth which would've increased the odds that he'll slip back into old habits. He didn't have to wait long for a job, to my relief, with an understanding employer, came along.

Over the next couple of years he was faced with the realities of life. A couple of changes in employment, being in a serious relationship and having the responsibilities of a family man, with child. All this has taught him new skills, just what he needed to plant his feet firmly on the ground, keeping him away from old habits. I often wonder if, deep down, he secretly yearned for a good job and child. Maybe it's the universe rewarding him. Maybe it's these things that saved his life.

At the moment Roy is going through a major challenge. His resurrection now sees him meeting these life challenges with calmness and maturity. In the past his decisions would've been made with a cloudy mind and by listening to the words a deluded mind spoke, making for a bad outcome. So therefore the hamster wheel, he was on when he was in the mist of his addiction, would continue to roll in circles.

The advice I gave to Roy when he was faced with this major challenges, I would also give to anyone who has beaten their demons and then faced this major life challenge, which is to use the same strength you used to beat your demons.

There are some people who think he will end up turning to old habits, and they're waiting for his downfall, but he is determined to prove them wrong. His attitude is that if he turns to old habits he will lose the life he built for himself since climbing out of the deep, dark pit.

He now rides the rainbow.





OUR MARY



Once upon a time there
was a little girl,
Who had a little curl,
right in the middle of her
forehead,
When she was good, she
was very, very good and
when she was bad,
She was horrid!

We used to say that our Mary had been mixed up with another baby in the hospital nursery as she was so different to the rest of the family. A small hurricane that created messes quicker than I could clean them up. A bright girl talented in music, languages and with good people skills.

That girl is still there, buried under addiction, hidden by years of abuse, shame and disease. Because addiction is a disease, just like heart disease, cancer and diabetes. Except no-one comes knocking with casseroles, chicken soup and sympathy for the disease of addiction!

It is hidden away, until some kind journalist repeats the name of your loved one, time and time again in the newspaper.

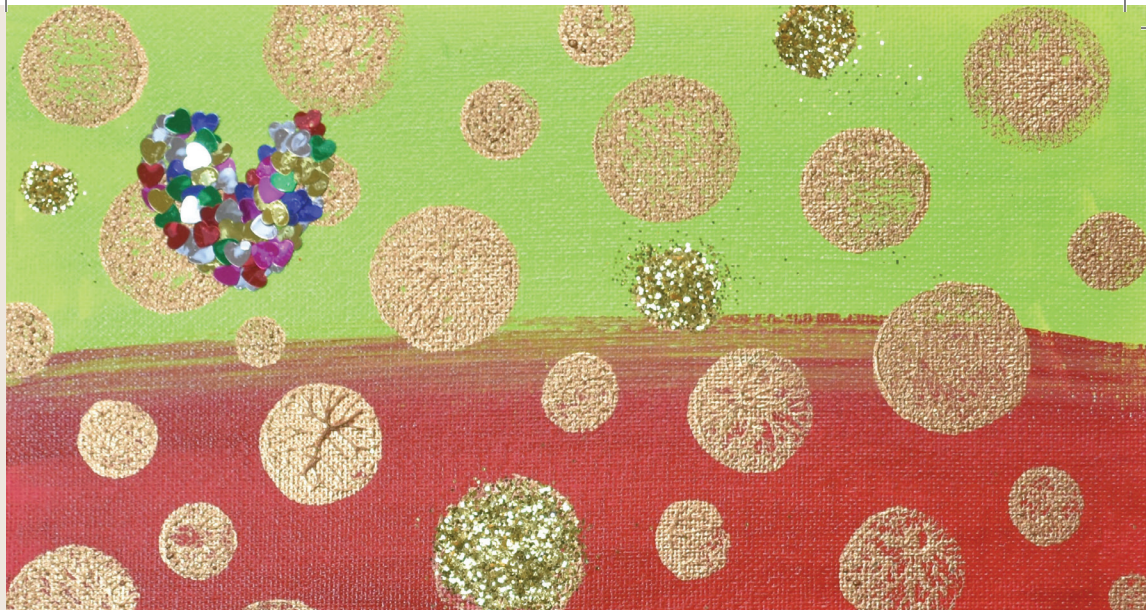
When our Mary came home and told us she was thirty-three days clean and going to Narcotics Anonymous, we couldn't really understand what she was talking about. Thirty-three days! That's barely a month and what was Narcotics Anonymous? Well,

Narcotics Anonymous was the 12-step program, based on Alcoholics Anonymous, that saved our Mary's life.

Unknown to us, Mary had been an addict for nearly 10 years. I was numb and went around in a daze. How could this have happened? Why didn't we realise what her life had been like?

Addiction is a terminal, cruel and cunning disease. The brain reacts differently to drugs – alcohol, prescribed and illicit drugs. Instead of having a feeling of euphoria, the brain goes into a super-sonic reaction and makes a person want more and more, until their life is driven by the ever-present craving for that drug. Nothing else matters. Not family, work, sport, talents or even life. It's a progressive disease so more and more drugs are needed to satisfy that craving until it kills you.

Going back to the big city with our daughter after her admission of addiction, was a very challenging time. I was invited to a Narcotics Anonymous meeting. Oh Boy! There were lots of scary things ahead but that first meeting was one of the scariest. A winter night, dark, drizzly rain. Down a lane to a dingy Church Hall. As we walked in, it was literally packed with young and not so young, more men than women. They were all dressed up! Best jeans, shiny boots, hair immaculate. Best warm jumpers, jackets and pretty scarves. Our Mary was greeted enthusiastically with long hugs from everyone she met. Cries of "Great to see you" "So glad you could make it" "Is this your Mum?" "Hello, I'm Suzy, Jane or Bob" I was stunned. I didn't know what to think. I'd never in my wildest dreams thought I would be in such a situation. I suppose I expected the room to be full of people seen in the gutter as addicts. Dirty, half asleep and mumbling. Society does addicts a great dis-service. No Casseroles!



Standing in a corner, madly texting my husband "Pray for me" A husband that doesn't believe in prayer. I was completely rattled. Here I was surrounded by people who had broken the law, been violent, were shunned, and I couldn't have felt safer. These people had been to hell and back many times. After listening to their life stories, all I could feel was "humble". Their struggle with the many "rock bottoms" in their lives was something I don't think many people could handle. It would be so easy to just give in to the addiction.

Family members don't often attend Narcotics Anonymous meetings, mostly because their loved one in addiction has treated them so badly. Stolen money and property, broken promises, told lies or been violent towards them. I was greeted so warmly by everyone because I had chosen to attend a Narcotics Anonymous meeting. So began my journey of recovery. The guest speaker, a larger-than-life young man, advised me after the meeting, to go home and seek out support for myself. I rang WRAD and joined their Family Support Group; a group of people who have saved my sanity and my life! That brave young man who encouraged me to seek help, is dead now. His poor body couldn't cope when he relapsed into addiction and just gave up. Our Mary and I held each other and cried when we heard the news of his passing. His death is one of many.

Educating myself on addiction has also helped with my new life. I attend Al-Anon, which is a support group for families and friends of addicts. Learning to change my attitude towards addicts has been a tremendous help. Overcoming guilt has been a big factor in my recovery, feeling that I was responsible for my daughter's addiction; thinking of what I should have done differently as a mother in the past and beating myself up. Knowing that I didn't cause addiction, can't control addiction, or cure it, is such a relief. Grief, screaming at me from every corner, at the loss of opportunities and a life of normality for our daughter, goes round and round in my head. I throw rocks from my garden at the fence when life gets hard for me. Talking to and caring for my chickens also helps. They don't judge, whinge or berate me when the rock throwing gets out of hand.

Our Mary came home to live a few years ago. Life is chaotic at times, but her recovery is good. What the future brings no-one knows. For now, it's One Day At A Time, or one hour at a time and even one minute at a time. One foot in front of the other. A life long struggle against the disease of addiction. Recovery skills have given me HOPE, which I had lost. Once upon a time.....

THE END

A BAG OF WEED TO A BAG OF WIND



To begin my story I will have to take you back to when I was younger, about 10 years ago now. Getting mixed up with the wrong people as a 17 year old not knowing the consequences that would affect me in the years to come.

What started as a 18th birthday party turned into a party that would last a couple of years, not literally but every night a group of friends and I would be hanging together smoking weed and drinking alcohol, how great it was, I was in love with the feeling of getting high and drunk with my mates, life was great. All that soon faded away, I then started smoking bongs alone, I would isolate at home and work on cars, motorbikes and projects. If I had a bag of weed I was happy and that's all I needed. Living a repetitive life I found myself going to work, coming home smoking a bowl of weed going to bed, waking up the next morning to do it all again, This routine turned into an addiction. I then would start drinking alcohol to boost the effects as just smoking didn't cut it for me, I had done it for so long, I didn't get high any more I was just doing it to feel normal. I didn't feel normal though, I was moody, lazy, unhappy, I would get nervous being seen in public or even just talking to the

people that would come into the workplace where I was working. Never had I experienced mental problems in my life, I didn't know what was happening to me, after some research I realised I had depression and anxiety.

At age 23 I was determined to get clean and turn my life around, I had to because life had become unbearable. A quick decision to go to Brophy in Warrnambool, I felt ashamed and worried at what I just got myself into. I walked in nervously and told the receptionist I needed some help. A social worker introduced herself and took me upstairs, this was the biggest step I had made in my life to get sober, I felt proud of myself for making that first step. After filling out some paperwork and talking to the social worker for over an hour I found myself walking out of the building with a smile and some hope things were going to get better. That decision of going to brophy was what I needed to keep my mind on the set task ahead, I didn't go to brophy for no reason, it made it all the more real. That night was the first night in years I hadn't smoked or drank. I pulled the blankets and pillow off my bed and went and laid on the couch, watching tv to all hours of the morning wide awake, nauseous and sweating I hadn't ever felt like this but knew it was a feeling

I would have to get used to. I was clean I was happy, I went to my workplace a new man, ready for a day's work and ready for what challenges would come my way. I took it a day at a time, an hour at a time, I knew every minute I was focused on something else the easier it would get, and sure enough a couple months later I had joined a local football team. Only knowing one person on the team I had for sure thrown myself into the deep





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end, socialising wasn't my thing. I stuck at it, I had made new friends and back playing a sport that I once loved, before I knew it I was on the footy field playing my first game since I was 11. We won the game, standing around in a huddle in the change room I was pushed into the middle with a couple of other players singing the club song, I nearly had tears of joy but held it back. The feeling of being apart of a team and feeling connected with people, it was a feeling I hadn't ever really experienced. Sitting down looking at the floor many emotions and thoughts come to mind knowing how far I had come, it was probably just another day for the players, but for me it was so much more. The year went on and the thoughts of getting high and drunk were not clouding my mind anymore, I had stayed sober for over a whole year.

A new year and footy pre-season had started and things were on track. I had got a message from a mate I hadn't seen in a long time. Only living around the corner from football I would call into his place on the way home

from footy training. Things lead to another and a joint was offered, yeah why not "I said" I think I deserve it, I will just have a bit and that will be it, I won't buy it and get back into old bad habits 'saying to myself', and so it begun. I soon found myself worse off than I was before, I had relapsed and was drinking and smoking more than ever. Two-and-a-bit years later I gained the courage to get help again. March of 2022 I saw a drug and alcohol councillor and explained what was going on as well as my past recovery efforts, telling her I didn't think I would find myself in this position again.

Just making an appointment and talking about it with someone gave me the courage to stay clean once again. The help is there for anyone experiencing addiction and mental health, it just takes the person experiencing it to make that first step. Not once did I feel weak for getting help, in fact it made me feel strong for opening up and taking my own health into consideration knowing if I can't help myself no one else can.



TRIAL AND ERROR



*I am 24 years old and
I am an addict.*

I began using drugs around the age of 13, first drinking with friends to the point of alcohol poisoning and hypothermia, then smoking cannabis for the first time at a party, then stealing my mother's little helpers and taking 9 of them on a school day.

I struggled to control my hedonistic tendencies for many years and would become addicted to many different drugs. Some early years were spent experimenting, while later ones are little more than a blur of drug abuse self-medication.

I was diagnosed with depression at 13, generalised anxiety disorder at 15. It's hard to say if I used drugs because of my mental health or my mental health was poor because I was using drugs, I would guess that it's both. I would not recommend self-medicating with anything, oftentimes drug use and the situations/states of mind that it can lead to can make your mental health much worse.

By the time I was 16 I was combining drugs and using painkillers whenever I could get them, within a year I was hooked. Most of the time when I combined several drugs it went well, except on occasion when I would obtain something that was not as advertised, or would combine drugs that have dangerous interactions with one another. This led to near-death experiences, overdoses and seizures.

At 18 I got a prescription for Suboxone through my GP which helped a lot with withdrawals, stability and finance. Also at 18 was the first time I attempted to use drugs

intravenously followed by my first detox, basically I missed a vein because I was so dehydrated from my habits and the poor self-care that resulted from them, it hurt a lot and a portion of my arm turned black-ish for about a month afterward. The detox was at a youth therapeutic detox in Geelong and was a great introduction to the world of recovery.

I detoxed at this facility three times over 18 months, relapsing each time I arrived home. This pattern continued as I did my first and subsequent medical detoxes over the following years and many doctors/counsellors gave up on me in that time. My mental health was shaky at times to say the least so I turned to benzos for comfort. Years went by like this - constantly trying to get clean and constantly failing, constantly blacking out for days at a time and injuring myself or saying/doing something irreparable.

Although it took a long time, I eventually got a new AoD worker that helped a lot. They showed me a great deal of respect and understanding as well as compassion and commitment to my recovery. They suggested a therapeutic detox I had never heard of before which sounded great. I completed all necessary paperwork to get an admission and when I arrived, I was ultimately sent home to do a medical detox before coming back the following week, as my drug use was so extreme the staff there believed I would die without medical intervention.

I did the medical detox, went back to the following week and spent Christmas 2020 in detox. This was a pivotal moment in my recovery as the staff and other clients were a joy to be around and I made the beginnings of some real, measurable progress, not only with my drug use but also with my mental/physical health.



I started to feel accepted when I met other young people like me. I slowly started exercising again, eating healthier, I developed a great rapport with the staff who were amazing.

Although I still lapsed after getting out, I didn't relapse. I went back about a month later, lapsed, stayed off drugs for two months afterwards, this repeated until I had been to that detox 6-7 times in 18 months and spent the majority of that time clean between lapses.

I sustained some injuries/health problems while in active addiction. In January 2021 I had a seizure in public due to xanax/alcohol withdrawals. I hit my head on commercial grade tile flooring, and was 100% concussed and unconscious for a solid couple of minutes.

A month or two later I had chest pain, was coughing up blood, had a CT scan and was diagnosed with Pulmonary Embolisms, blood clots in the lungs. I was a heavy smoker for almost 10 years at the time and was agoraphobic so no exercise for years as well, which messes up your lungs + circulatory system among other things, I was admitted to hospital for five days or so and had to be put on blood thinners for a year.

Things were starting to get better in the months following and were actually great most of the time, things only went bad when I would get triggered and lapse momentarily. Although I still had some way to go, my life was beginning to resemble something stable.

I got my medications/supplements balanced in late 2021, afterwards my anxiety + PTSD became quieter, in fact my mental health overall has improved greatly.

Eventually I was off drugs and just had to quit alcohol, I finished my last detox 2 months ago now and have not touched a drop of alcohol, a pill or powder since.

I'm extremely proud of my journey with all its bumps in the road and imperfections, because it all led me to where I am now.

I'm currently studying so I can one day hopefully help others who struggle with addiction and mental health.

What I learned in all those years is that recovery isn't linear, it's a process of trial and error, it could take months or years to figure out what works for you, sometimes it takes months or years to even realise you're an addict and learn to deal with that.

I would like to thank WRAD, and all the individuals/teams/organisations that helped me on my way to recovery for the support/assistance over the years and for never giving up on us.



SMOKE RINGS



When I watched my grandfather blow smoke rings from his wooden pipe as a kid, I thought he was capable of magic. He reminded me of a wizard. At the time, I had no idea what tobacco was and what it did to the body, but I knew I wanted to learn how to blow smoke rings.

Both of my grandparents were voracious smokers. Along with smoking pipes, they smoked upwards of thirty cigarettes daily. They would also participate in an almost ritualistic gathering that involved making cigarettes. With the help of a fancy little machine, they would produce a cigarette with the quick up and down motion of their hands. The day they asked me to help them, I jumped at the opportunity.

I still vividly remember the first time my grandfather asked me to sit beside him and help pull the tobacco apart so it could fit inside the machine. I thought this might be the time I learned to blow smoke rings, but to my surprise, my grandfather told me that I should never pick up smoking. He told me smoking was one of his only regrets; he was 60 then and had been smoking for nearly his whole life. I was 10.

So, I stopped fantasising about blowing smoke from my mouth for six years.

It wasn't until one night I was at a party someone passed me something called a spliff. He had just finished blowing giant smoke rings that caused multiple people to clap with amazement. When I reached over and grabbed the tiny thing from his hands, I experienced flashes of my grandparents. It was as if they were telling me from afar to pass the spliff along without puffing on it.

While I looked at the spliff inquisitively, I could hear people giggling; someone yelled out, "Hurry up, mate!"

I ended up doing what most people do in this position; I put the spliff between my lips and sucked on it.

That was the beginning of my daily 10-year cigarette addiction.

My understanding of my grandfather's regret for smoking didn't sink in until I was about nineteen, at least three years into smoking cigarettes.

I was living with my girlfriend and working in a low-paying job. I would've been smoking about fifteen cigarettes a day at the time. I didn't have a regular cannabis smoking habit, but I did smoke cannabis occasionally. My girlfriend at the time was not a smoker; she would constantly talk about me eventually quitting. My addiction was hurting us financially. So, I just stopped smoking both tobacco and cannabis altogether. I went cold turkey on both.

About a week passed, and I was sitting on the couch with one of the worst headaches I had ever experienced. My girlfriend burst through the door and threw a packet of cigarettes



at me. She was ready to kick me out on my ass. If I wasn't complaining about how shitty I felt, I was unreasonably complaining about everything else in the world. I turned into a real-life Grinch. I started smoking cigarettes again, but I dropped cannabis completely.

For the next six years, my days would start and end with a cigarette. I'd also developed the habit of smoking a cigarette after every meal. A meal wasn't complete without a cigarette.

I had tried to stop multiple times throughout these six years, but the battle with my mind and body was something out of this world. My conscious would constantly nag me to smoke. If it wasn't my consciousness attacking me, it was my body; night after night, I would wake up sweating profusely. And the headaches, the headaches were relentless.

One time, when I was in the middle of another attempt at quitting, my girlfriend had organised for one of her friends to visit with their new boyfriend. When they came, I was in bed sick as a dog. And I refused to get out. I was incredibly embarrassed. I couldn't understand why quitting was so hard.

The grip that cigarettes had on me was something else. I never realised just how far into the pits of addiction I had become. Sometimes I would push through for multiple weeks without smoking, then walk past someone in public who was smoking, and the smell in the air would send my senses into an overload, and I would find myself, once again, ordering a packet of cigarettes.

At the age of twenty-six, I was going through a breakup with my girlfriend of seven years. During this time, I was reading about other people's experiences with breakups on the Internet. I came across a woman who had quit cigarettes after a thirty-year addiction. Her journey reminded me a lot of my own. One thing that stuck out to me was her emphasis on her doctor; she stated that she could not have quit without her doctor's guidance.

I always felt that seeing a doctor over my cigarette habit made me a weak-minded person. I was convinced I could stop without help. But my track record was not excellent, so I said, "fuck it," and booked an appointment. In regards to my recovery, this is where everything fell into place.

My doctor informed me that nicotine was one of the most addictive substances on the planet, and my failed attempts were completely normal; I wasn't weak. This blew my mind! I thought he was lying when he started comparing nicotine with the likes of heroin and cocaine, but upon further research, he was right. He suggested that I slowly reduce how much I smoke, which I did; over the next few months, I worked my amount down to zero cigarettes a day! And it's remained at zero for nearly four years.

With the help of daily exercise and a newly formed habit of reading, I kicked my addiction.

During this whole time, I never learned to blow smoke rings. And I am proud to say I never will.



BEST THING I'VE DONE



I was 'never out of control' with drinking. I never drank in my room alone, and I can count on one hand the number of times I've drank until I was sick. But I went to an AA meeting, sat in that chair and said 'my name's Ali, and I'm an alcoholic'. And it was the best thing I've ever done.

Both my mum and dad are alcoholics. I grew up away from other family, so the only break from my mother's drinking was going to my father's house and experiencing his drinking. Due to that upbringing, the answer in my head for as long as I can remember when asked 'if you could have one wish, what would it be?' was that alcohol didn't exist. So why did I ever touch it?

Alcohol had brought me so much trauma. I hated the whole ideology of it, so when I started drinking, I consequently hated myself too. I was literally fuelling my body with the substance that had brought me so much pain, and expecting that it would be different.

I wanted to prove that I could drink in a 'healthy' way. And I didn't let alcohol control me in terms of abundance, but the fact that it was in my life at all is proof that I wasn't

in control. I wasn't strong enough alone to be free of it, and that's scary to think about. The thing I hate most in my life was able to infiltrate me.



DUE TO THAT UPBRINGING, THE ANSWER IN MY HEAD FOR AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER WHEN ASKED 'IF YOU COULD HAVE ONE WISH, WHAT WOULD IT BE?' WAS THAT ALCOHOL DIDN'T EXIST. SO WHY DID I EVER TOUCH IT?

LOVE DREAM HOPE

I imagine it's hard suffering with alcoholism, and I know it's hard growing up with an alcoholic - especially when it's someone who is meant to be taking care of you. No parent gives birth to a baby and envisions that they'll mistreat them- having an uncontrolled addiction takes that decision away from a parent.

I don't want my future daughter standing on her tippy-toes all night long, watching me drink through the back window. I don't want her picking me up off the ground, and picking up my life for me. I want this change to last a lifetime, and I need to do something different than all the other times that I've tried to go sober. I need to be honest and access support.

I want to understand how my mum did the things she did, and the impact that alcohol had on that. I need that for my own healing. Growing up, you lie to hide the things your parents do because you're embarrassed that

people will judge you in the same light. I wish I was honest growing up. Everyone would have gotten help sooner.

I wonder if anyone knew back then. I remember that no-one could find out. But now, that shame I piggy-backed for so long can be lifted.

So, I went to an AA meeting, listened to some of the most devastating and inspiring stories, had a cake for a man's 36th year of sobriety and got support like I had never experienced before.



This is a piece I wrote after my first Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in January, 2022. I was eighteen years old, and two months sober.

I am proud to write that with the supports from both Al-anon and Alcoholics Anonymous groups in our area, I am now seven months sober at nineteen.



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