



Growing Pains

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Ellen Blathers

Recently, I had a conversation with my 13-year-old grandson that reminded me of where Serenity Inns is in its organizational development. He complained to me about the constant pain in his hips and legs. I told him about when his father was 13 years old and complained of the same pain. At that time, the doctor said his pain was “growing pains.” You ask, “What do growing pains have to do with Serenity Inns?”

Since the inception of Serenity Inns, the mission has been (and always will be) to help men who struggle with alcohol and drug addictions choose recovery for their lives. We have served 450 men over the last 12 years with residential and outpatient/day treatment services. This mission has presented staff and the board with pleasant challenges and minimal angst associated with the organization’s growth over the years--until the recent expansion of programming to include independent living.

In June, the Board of Directors voted to purchase an apartment building. Methodical thought, extensive feedback from alumni and former residents, and good stewardship practices went into the decision-making process. Since June, I have watched the hand of God perform miracle after miracle at the Alumni House. I have watched volunteers anxiously await their turn to help with cleanup and renovations, I have watched men light up with the prospect of getting their own apartment, and I have listened as Jonathan (our first resident) shared the life-long benefits of living in the Alumni House. Even though it seems that everything is coming up rosy, we have experienced growing pains--defined as difficulties experienced during the early stages of growth.

I have always spent a great deal of time encouraging the men to fight through their pain. Lately, I needed to remind myself that growing pains are natural. In spite of the slow occupancy rate at Alumni House, the stigma associated with addictions, and other complications, I must remember God is in charge and that I need to focus on what is in front of me. Every day I get to witness the beauty of growing pains in the life of the men as they struggle to break free of addiction.

I told my grandson that in a couple of years he would not remember the pain that he was experiencing as his body was forming into an awesome young man. Likewise, I believe that the Alumni House will become a wonderful independent living community full of beauty and hope. Growing pains do not last forever. They are just another part of a day at Serenity Inns.

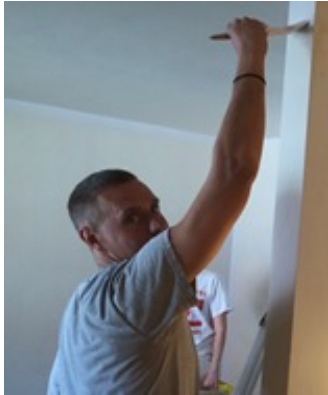


Alumni House

Jonathan Kowalczyk, First Alumni House Resident

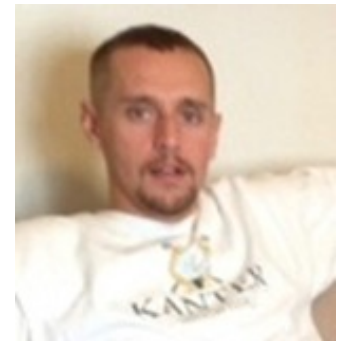
What did it mean to Jonathan to be the first Serenity Inns graduate to move into Alumni House?

Jonathan: "It was huge. I love where I live...and staying connected to Serenity Inn, not isolating. Moving to Alumni House meant retaining structure along with a good amount of freedom. It's a safe place and gives me a great feeling to come in, lock the door, and know it will be safe."



About a Saturday morning NA/AA meeting he had just attended, Jonathan said it was "excellent" because he's been working out of town and here were "familiar faces, the chance to reconnect with people who helped me when I was so desperate for help, and now I can help them." (Earlier that morning he had picked up 2 current SI residents and taken them to breakfast and then to the meeting.) Of course, Jonathan says, "I am still working on me, living it [recovery] and taking one day at a time."

Jonathan painting the apartment with volunteers before moving in



Jonathan's good news/bad news is that the job he loves (electrical work) will take him to Colorado for 3-4 months which means he will have to give up his apartment at Alumni House. His boss (4 years in recovery) is giving Jonathan every incentive to get his GED and to become a journeyman apprentice, about which Jonathan is very committed and excited.

We wish Jonathan well and will welcome him to the Celebration of Recovery on April 27 which he says he will not miss; last year he attended as a new resident, this year as a graduate who will have celebrated one year clean on April 11!

Celebrate with us! Join us for the Celebration of Recovery on April 27. See this issue's last page.



What Does Recovery Look Like?

By Lorraine Buehler

Walter White and Lee Lewis, both graduates of the Serenity Inn program, have 20 years clean time between them; Walter has 13+ years, Lee has 7+. Both credit Serenity Inns with giving them the tools to find and stay in recovery. They agreed to be interviewed recently.

Their original stories appeared in this newsletter in September 2010 and December 2011.

What is your secret for staying in recovery?

Lee: "Keeping busy and minding my own business." Lee works at Step Industries and as a part-time innkeeper at SI, enjoys time at home, visits his mom on a regular basis and stays away "from people, places and things" that were part of his life as an alcoholic. After all those years of drinking, Lee "got sick and tired of being sick and tired!"

Article continued on the next page

What Does Recovery Look Like? (Continued)

What is your secret for staying in recovery?

Walter: Remembering his past with the resolve never to repeat it is Walter's "secret." He feels that God chose him for a life in recovery after 30 years of getting high, and he will not go back. "*Why purchase pain?*" he asks. Pure abstinence has worked for him.

What are the biggest challenges to your recovery?

Lee: Recovery is no longer a big challenge for him. Lee feels he had "*been through death*" in his alcoholism. Why would he choose that again?

Walter: Recovery is not a challenge any more; he now knows what he has to do and what he can't do, and "knowledge is power." He recalls a time in 2005 when he was a resident at the Inn, and things were different. He packed up his things and was going to leave, but then asked himself, "*Where am I going to go?*" Realizing his mistake, he unpacked and completed the program, staying almost 9 months. Walter concludes, "*You've got to want it [recovery].*"

What advice do you share with addicts/alcoholics who are new to recovery?

Lee: "*Give it a chance, get healthy again. Remember that you're doing this for you, not for others.*"

Walter: "*If you come here, you are looking for help. There will be some things you don't like, but give your chance a chance! How many years have you been getting high? Give yourself a year. Thirty or 60 or 90 days is 'microwave recovery,' like putting a band aid on a bullet wound.*"

Have you ever relapsed? How close have you come?

Lee: Taking a drink has "*crossed my mind in the last 7 years, but I have never acted on it. I try to do the right thing, and I feel good about myself.*" In his role as a part-time innkeeper for the last 5 ½ years, Lee "*feels good about helping others*".

Walter: "*I don't entertain the thought*" of getting high.

Final Thoughts:

Walter: "*Coming to Serenity Inn gave me time to find myself. Things I learned here have helped me to this day. I can't put a monetary value on that. I listened to staff and learned structure, financial stability, and to clean up after myself.*" Today, Walter is a self-proclaimed entrepreneur and financially secure.

Lee: *My goals are to stay clean, keep healthy, and work at Step as long as health allows.*



Walter White and Lee Lewis at the Inn after our interview.

7th Annual Celebration of Recovery

When we gather for our 7th Annual Celebration of Recovery on Thursday, April 27 at the Italian Community Center in Milwaukee's Third Ward, we will be beginning our 13th year of serving men who choose recovery for their lives. According to the Medical Examiner's Office, more than 300 people died from drug overdoses in Milwaukee County in 2016, exceeding the record of 2015 when 255 died. The need is greater than ever to support programs that give those in recovery the tools to find new paths in life.

You can support Serenity Inns by joining us on April 27 for a great evening of food, fellowship and festivities during which we will hear a brief keynote from the City of Milwaukee Health Commissioner, Mr. Bevan K. Baker, as well as brief messages from a resident and a graduate of the Serenity Inns program. We will also recognize a community partner, and our guests will have the opportunity to bid on wonderful silent auction items.

Consider sponsoring a table of 8 for \$1,000 or donating a silent auction item. Possible donations include a theme basket, tickets for a major sporting event, a "treasure" you have but do not use, a craft item, a gift card from a restaurant or other place of business—or consider approaching a business you frequent for a donation. Or simply join us for the evening. Dinner tickets are \$75, a major portion of which is tax deductible. Contact Lorraine Buehler if you are interested in any of these options: 414-964-8933, lcbuehler@cs.com.

Photos from the 2016 Celebration of Recovery



Mission statement

To provide structured housing and rehabilitative services in an environment of support and accountability that will give addicted men the opportunity to rebuild their lives.

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