



AIMS

Little Book
of Recovery

VOLUME I
2024

CONTRIBUTIONS BY
AIMS STUDENTS & EMPLOYEES

A DEDICATION



To those who have faced the chains of addiction, you are warriors in a battle that many cannot comprehend. Your strength, resilience, and the courage to confront your demons inspire us all.

To the unsung heroes who stood by their loved ones, offering unwavering support through the tumultuous journey of addiction and recovery, your compassion and dedication have not gone unnoticed.

To the precious souls who, in the grip of addiction, lost their lives too soon, your struggle was real, your pain profound, and your absence is keenly felt. May these pages stand as a testament to the urgency of understanding and addressing the complexities of addiction.

May this book serve as a reminder that no one walks the road to recovery alone, and that together, we can light the way towards a brighter, healthier future.

WITH LOVE



Dear Contributors,

Thank you for sharing your stories and artwork for the *Aims Little Book of Recovery*. The vulnerability you all show is a source of inspiration, understanding, and solidarity. Your courage to speak out is the heart and soul of this project, reflecting the diverse paths of recovery with depth and richness, showing recovery is multifaceted yet deeply empowering. These narratives serve as guiding lights, fostering understanding and support within our community. Your bravery empowers others on their journeys, providing that recovery is both attainable and achievable. By showcasing your experiences, we collectively work towards breaking the stigma associated with recovery, dispelling misconceptions, and educating the public about the reality of the battle.

With heartfelt appreciation,

Danielle Irwin

Kawelo

Resilience is the will to thrive in adversity. A seed is resilient. It may travel in the intestines of an animal, subject itself to the harsh environments of the digestive system, exit the animal's body to find its way to soil, germinate, reach sunlight, and grow into a beautiful plant. I am this seed.

I journeyed through the harsh digestive system as a **teenager with drug addiction**, but at the time, I failed to recognize that I was this seed, that metamorphosis would occur. This stemmed from unresolved trauma that consumed me. I did not know what a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) was, or how it would change my family dynamic, but I quickly learned that we would never be the same.

I am a nine-year-old child with the pulse of a sound wave coursing through me as I turn to see my younger brother, Randy, laying motionless under a fallen tree limb on the elementary school basketball court. He is my idol. Seeing him learn to speak again, walk again, count again, and struggle with his TBI is a terrifying blessing: he is alive. He is still the same Randy he was before the accident; however, the TBI and his fight to learn how to process emotions after the accident changed him. I could feel our family dynamic transforming. I could see my relationship with my brother crashing. The enzymes of debilitating trauma engulfed me. I was being swallowed.

My father dealt with Randy aggressively, abusively, and physically, because my father was abused. I had to learn how to process my own emotions in this new family dynamic, learn how to process Randy's accident, and to accept that what I witnessed was out of my control. In navigating my own emotions, I lashed out, and my father dealt with me aggressively, abusively, and physically, like he did with Randy. Unresolved childhood trauma became my threshold into the dark digestive system of addiction. My high school years were filled with changing schools, bullying, child welfare investigations of my father, and above all, endless fear.

Somehow I managed to graduate high school, but graduating never changed the way I felt. I felt as though no one, especially my mother, could protect me from my father, from myself, and from all the vicious cycles of abuse that were a constant in my life. I needed to go to college, not to receive an education, but to escape reality and my father. I was accepted to the University of Northern Colorado, and I knew this was my opportunity to escape.

By November of 2015, after my first year at the University of Northern Colorado, I was placed on academic probation as well as misdemeanor probation in the legal system. My father feared I would not be able to stay out of jail and finish school on my own, so he forced me to return home to attend the University of Hawai'i, Maui College, under his

supervision. Fear consumed me again. After one semester at the University of Hawai'i, I moved back to Colorado in August of 2016 to attend Aims Community College. My goal was to eventually return to the University of Northern Colorado.

As a student at Aims, I registered for EGG 151, Experimental Design, a rewarding experience through which I was able to participate in the Colorado Space Grant Consortium, testing piezoelectric material in lower-density atmospheres, learning about electromechanical engineering, computer programming, and computer-aided design, which was an incredible educational opportunity that I didn't quite understand. Being part of this opportunity, engaging in this team, and having the guidance of Professor McMains, I was able to achieve academic success for the first time in years, success that I credit to Professor McMains and the feeling of purpose I had while working on this project with the team. Around this time, my mother filed for divorce. My family had fallen apart. I was stealing food and selling prescription medications to maintain some form of income. I felt overwhelming guilt. In the throes of drug addiction, I left Aims in the middle of the following semester, resulting in substandard grades in every class. I began working at Subaru as a Lot Technician, eventually becoming a car detailer. As my addiction grew, my goal to return to the University became impossible.

My addiction and my subsequent actions led me to several incarcerations. At times, I wondered whether I would wake

up in the morning, or if I would stop breathing at some point in the night. My friends, family, and coworkers could not bear to be with me. Addiction was a high point as I sought instant gratification: to feel good, to escape trauma, and to do well in school and at work. However, quite the opposite happened. I was hallucinating, isolating, and attending class and work intoxicated, all wrought with sheer anxiety. I barely survived, leaving in the middle of a professor's sentence and failing to return without ever formally withdrawing. In veering so far from the path of academics, I spiraled into my repressed trauma, depression, and addiction. One very cold winter day, I finally was willing to leave work in the middle of a work day, packing only my essentials, and drive out of town on I-25 in the midst of a blizzard. I left because I knew my problem was urgent, and I could not fight it alone, a decision that became my radical.

The path was one I had neglected for nearly ten years. I needed a paradigm shift. I needed professional help. I needed to understand why I remained in the digestive system.

I am a Native Hawaiian by federal recognition and blood quantum. My ancestors traveled to the soil of the Hawaiian archipelago to create a fruit-bearing environment. Today, Hawaiians face socioeconomic plight, as well as high rates of suicide, incarceration, and drug addiction. We are a dying breed with fewer than several hundred thousand people left. I learned that my plight wasn't unique to Native Hawaiians.

I needed to understand why my father was the way he was and what I needed to do to break the cycle. I needed to find my way to the soil and take the unconventional and non-traditional path, and ultimately, I left school for two years.

My two years in rehabilitation were the hardest part of my journey to the soil. I turned 23. At times, I wept uncontrollably as I learned to embrace the support of people around me. In order to survive, I had to break my seed coat and become vulnerable. Connecting with and embracing people through revealing trauma, and then learning of their deaths due to overdose, while in the program, taught me how precious relationships are. These experiences forced me to reevaluate my own identity. These people saved my life, and yet, I could not save theirs. In these moments, I realized that **these relationships are the nutrients that sustain life** and help it thrive, and in this flood of emotion, through vulnerability, imbibition occurred within me.

In slowly integrating back into society, I found passion caring for animals at Newport Center Animal Hospital & Pet Hotel Suites as an Animal Caretaker. I began scuba training under the Professional Association for Diving Instructors (PADI). Yet, when I felt I was finally germinating, the Covid-19 Pandemic rattled the world. I was blindsided, thrust in a new digestive system of intrapsychic conflict and real world turmoil. Everything around me shut down. I shut down. But I knew the animals at the hospital still needed care. I knew that life still teemed in the ocean. Being in these environments

reinvigorated my passion for learning and being of service, sharing my passion for the natural world, as well as my Native Hawaiian culture, with those around me.

I needed to take the unconventional path to return to the enrichment of academia, finally germinating and finding sunlight. Education, connection, and vulnerability forge my sunlit path and provide that opportunity to make a difference. My passion for learning has brought me to depths and heights of which I only dreamed, from training as a PADI divemaster and exploring shipwrecks on the ocean floor to training as a private pilot and soaring over the Pacific Coast. I am grateful I was able to share my newfound passions and knowledge with new divers and young aviators, assisting in underwater tours, educating people on both local Hawai'i and Southern California marine ecology, and showing children at the Long Beach Aviation Summer Camp what is possible if they follow their own passions and continue to learn. I have returned with a commitment to education.

When I enrolled at Orange Coast College (OCC) in California, I felt apprehensive because of my past academic performance. It was the first time I attended a class without a substance in my system since I was 14. I took preparation for General Chemistry, easing my way back into academia, learning in a post-Covid-19 format in partial lockdown where education was entirely remote. Around this time, my younger sister, Nani, graduated with her bachelor's degree. She inspired me to continue with education. Randy graduated

from Ivy Street School for adolescents with neurological challenges. My family was rebuilding.

I connected with the people around me more than ever, becoming a part of the STEM Academy, the Puente Project, and the CLEEO Project at OCC, where I contributed to a beautiful support system and culturally diverse academic environment. Learning to accept loss and grief made me grateful for the present, and I grew, wanting the support of my peers. Most importantly, I felt the support they wanted to give me. I realized that the way I experienced education, work, and relationships depended on what I was willing to give. My cumulative GPA was a 1.76 from the previous three institutions I attended, and in spite of this, from the Spring of 2021 to the Spring of 2023, I attained an overall institution GPA of 3.80, landing me on the OCC President's List and in honor societies like Phi Theta Kappa.

Being a member of Phi Theta Kappa has provided me with a breadth of experience where previously, I never imagined I would have the opportunity to learn and grow. I participated in the Phi Theta Kappa Honors In Action Project during the Fall of 2022, through which I learned about International Humanitarian Law. I studied the nature of children's play during armed conflict and why it is so beneficial for kids to have normalcy and positive stimulation throughout their cognitive development. My peers and I wanted to be the change, to create awareness regarding the suffering that people face in ways that I never experienced. This

opportunity brought me to conferences with the Red Cross and interviews with a former child refugee, allowing me to give back by sharing their stories with the people around me.

Since I returned to school, I was able to complete two associate degrees: one in liberal arts, and the other in natural science. I do not know what the future holds for me, but as of now, I am continuing my education at Columbia University, School of General Studies.

For a long time, I felt disconnected from the world, rejected, ostracized by my mind, and the further I distanced myself, the more I became magnetized by negative emotion, feeling as though I was not human. I feared that people could see these faults, and that I could not address this feeling or why I felt this way, a thought that debilitated me. In rehabilitation and in college, I met other seeds who were journeying through a similar digestive system, and in connecting with these people, I gained back the world, a fruit-bearing, nutrient-rich biosphere.

I embraced the digestion, my path through the soil, **finally finding light**. Moreover, by embracing my path, I gained equanimity. My name is Kawelo No'eau Kanoholani Wong.

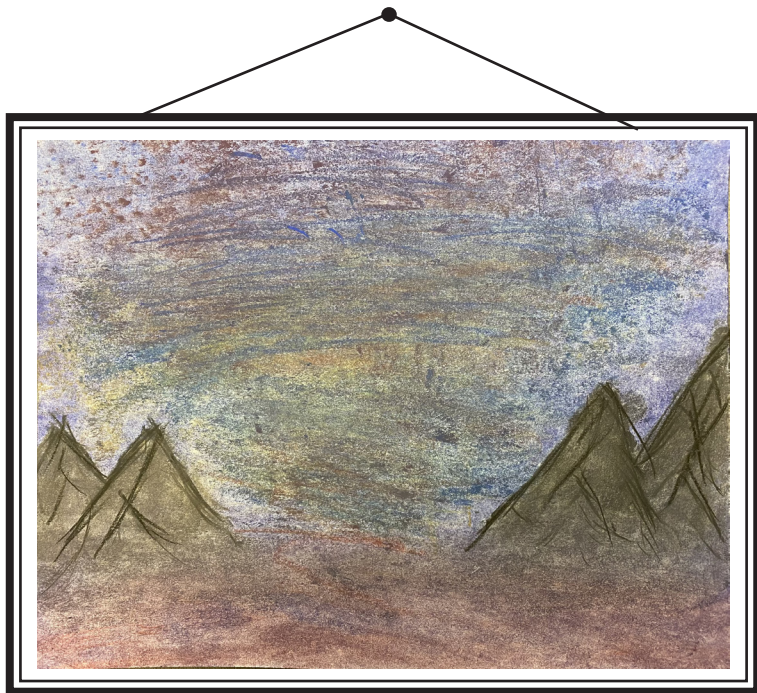
I am resilient.

D.

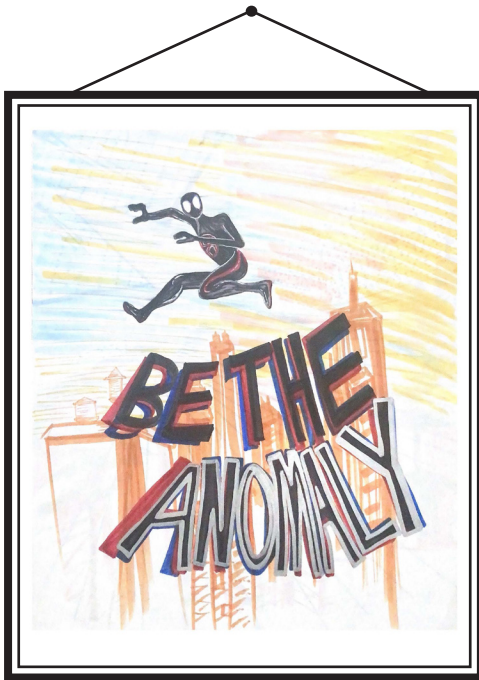
If recovery wasn't awesome, none of us would stay here!

Highs & Lows

Anonymous



Anonymous



Being an anomaly is going against all odds to do what's right, which in this case is healing without substances, even if you compositionally think you're meant to fail. You are not alone, in fact in our loneliest of times is when we can relate to each other the

most! **We are human**, so don't waste any more time feeling the sludge of guilt or shame, that's the past holding on, not the future in which you can and will become what you need and want to be. Trust and respect the process, results are never overnight. So breathe; you're literally resetting your nervous system by doing so, then it will be alright.

Janea

I was a medical assistant for 15 years and a nursing assistant for 18 years with dreams of becoming a nurse. What I didn't realize was that I was a functioning alcoholic since I was a teenager. ***I pretty much drank every other day for about 17 years.*** In the spring of 2016 my roommate came home and told me his paycheck was being garnished because of a business his family had put in his name as a child but never paid taxes on. Earlier that day another friend had contacted me in search of somewhere to live. When I put two and two together we had the perfect plan to let the friend pay us cash upfront to move into our empty basement! Problem solved, or so we thought.

Unbeknownst to us, our new roommate had a girlfriend that was dealing drugs pretty heavily. This girlfriend had gone on vacation and brought back Mexican tequila. I found the tequila and drank 3 bottles in a week. She found out and demanded the money, \$100 per bottle. I borrowed the money to pay her and called her to tell her but she asked me to deposit the money to her bank instead. I didn't particularly want to do this but I wanted the debt paid so I agreed. I walked into Chase bank and asked to make a deposit, gave my ID card and got the receipt. What I didn't know was her account was flagged for drug dealing and I was now attached to it.

On May 5th, 2016 the Weld County Task Force raided our home and arrested me, my friend who leased the property and our other friend in the basement. Apparently the police believed this was a drug house of the girlfriend. It most definitely was not but it's hard for the police to fess up to wrongdoing so ultimately I plead guilty to felony money laundering for a connection to a girl I knew for 7 weeks. I went to prison for a year even though my sentence was 2-6 years and I now have this felony on my record so gone are the nursing dreams but after the year (in prison) of soul searching, I came to the conclusion that ALCOHOL was the cause of one too many problems in my life!

I can now say I am 100% alcohol free and have been since discharging my one year prison sentence and one and a half year parole term back in 2020. I am a better person and member of society without alcohol and encourage others to consider abstaining from alcohol and substances alike to see the positive changes your life can make!

Dr. Leah L. Bornstein

No shame. No Blame. Remember your light!

Anonymous

In fifteen months, I'll turn 45 years old. To say that I haven't ***spent nearly my entire life in the grips of some kind of chemical dependency*** would simply be untrue. I have known addiction quite well since childhood. I could really dig deep and talk about the influence of the 70's and my parents and stories from as young as 8. But we're going to pick up where things really kick up to a breakneck pace overnight. A hot Summer night in Mesquite, TX and a bunch of kids doing something so typical that I really couldn't give you the exact date. I've never truly kept up with the date. A bunch of kids are drinking beer in a hotel room like any other Summer Saturday. More than anything I will tell you about it being the night I was nearly murdered. But we're not here to glorify the horror and violence of it all, only its lasting impressions on a child.

There was a fight. Later agreed upon by me and the only other person nearly-mortally wounded, to be a complete waste of time. I'll never forget shaking that guy's hand and sharing that Newport across the street. If you ask me his wounds were much more severe and all that much luckier for him to have survived. They told me a 6-inch blade came within a single centimeter in either direction and nearly took my life. Three people were stabbed that night. Two of us almost lost our lives. You know that feeling you have right

before you know you're about to have a car accident and there's no getting around it? Fights can happen in a blink of an eye or slowly simmer to the top and erupt.

Parkland hospital would receive a teenage boy near death. My Mother was there to see me. I'm told she fainted, and my Stepdad had to catch her. Seven days I would spend recovering in the hospital and these doctors pity the child dying in front of them. They offer a supply of morphine to soothe the trauma of being the victim of a crime. Time slows to a crawl and I'm learning to live again. I'm often too reluctant to speak about how bleeding out in a motel room felt more peaceful than anything else this boy had ever experienced. Prior to that night, not much is clear; it seems I really don't remember hardly anything before age 8. I've blocked it all out. Only fragments here and there. Some good; some are really not good. I coped by growing up faster than I should. A child making adult decisions. I was primed long before Parkland; a product of generational instinct and trauma. I would leave the hospital effectively a morphine addict. They sent me home with a single bottle of hydrocodone and one monster habit. Within a year of discharge from the hospital, I was a full IV heroin addict, using twice a day or as frequently as possible. I was not quite sixteen years old when I first shot dope. You could say I was in the perfect place at the perfect time. The high-quality black tar heroin near my part of town was perfect to cut and

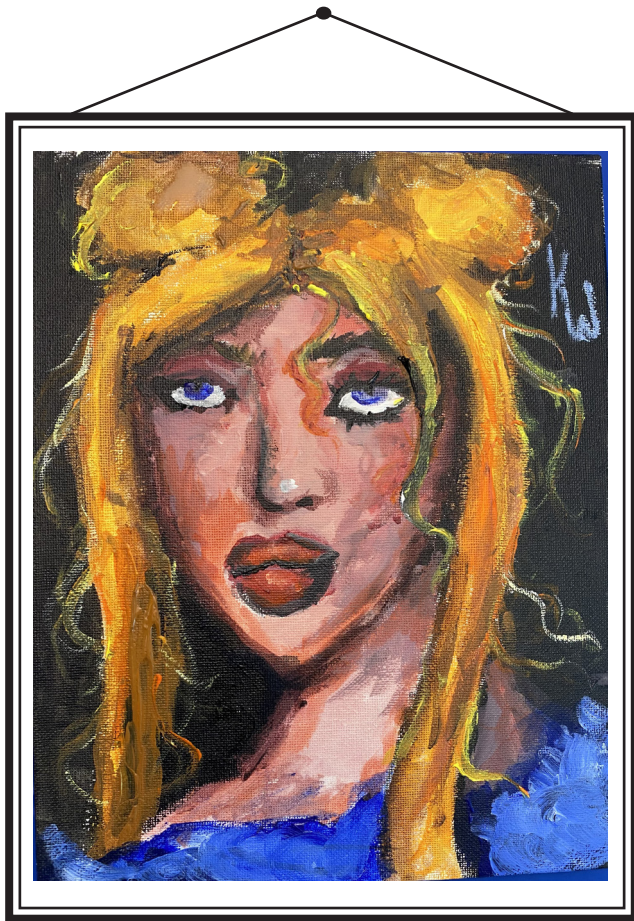
sell up north to the more affluent, largely white teenagers in the outer suburbs like Plano. Maybe you heard about it, they made an MTV movie about Plano in the 90's. Some friends and I, as young as me, teenage High School students, are responsible for at least a portion of that plague that swept through North Texas. I taught many other children how to inject themselves in the anticipation they would purchase heroin from me. I pushed the plunger on a few. I ruined a lot of these kids' lives and some are no longer with us or lost forever to prison.

This burden I would carry along for years. Years and relationships lost to what ultimately amounted to a cPTSD diagnosis along with a handful of other explanations about a childhood gone severely wrong. These years would later lose their attachment to opiate dependency and be soaked in booze. I would learn to hide from even heroin in the bottom of a bottle. That bottle kept me from having to face the physical wreckage in my wake. Today, I'm a two-time felon. I've been to prison once. I gave the State of Texas almost my entire 30's by being in and out of incarceration. I would get a 2nd DWI conviction at the age of 30 and this would spiral into the quicksand of the justice system and the entanglements that even a very privileged individual like me will encounter. I got off probation for the real deal after time away and the halfway house and the sober house; in the Summer of 2018. Three months before marrying my Wife. My life was starting over, and I was living in gratitude though I knew I had been

holding back.

After nearly 5 years of sobriety, the explanation turned out to be cPTSD and this is a mental health condition that ultimately must be faced head on. But first; **a relapse** and the return of heroin and opiate dependency and then a new charge and the ultimate disappointment for my Wife. I continue on today each day, and I know 24 more hours of sobriety isn't guaranteed. I can only pray for another day. I found my solution in my relationship with my Creator. Through prayer and meditation and attempts to remain in constant contact with God, I have found purpose in all this struggle. **There's a purpose for each new day.** I give my life meaning because this gift of Life is snuffed out so easily like a candle extinguished abruptly. I lost three friends this year to Fentanyl and suicide. Drug addiction is literally taking your life into your hands these days. It's not like when I was really at my peak. Today, I'm tapering off Suboxone with Sublocade. My plan is to be off all mood-altering substances by my 45th birthday.

That's my gift to myself; to experience complete and total sobriety, absent everything that I have ever taken to cope with my existence. I don't use drugs and I don't drink today. I only take the medication prescribed to me in the prescribed doses but I want to experience life 100% free and on that birthday, **I will celebrate the conclusion of a 30-year habit** and the second half of my life.



Behind the Eyes

Anonymous

Shiloh

“A”

I had a best friend growing up. We did everything together. We were girls together. We drifted a bit when we started high school. She had an awful home life with lots of back and forth with her biological mom, who was a meth user. I heard she was using cocaine our sophomore year and my heart dropped. I didn't want her to be risking her life and creating an addiction. She apparently left home and started using other drugs. I would see her from time to time and she'd look awful and strung out. I was heartbroken. She moved to the Midwest and I didn't hear from her for a year.

I recently reconnected with her. **She is clean and sober for a little over a year.** She works at a nature school for kids. I can't explain how proud I am that she's clean.

I'm so glad she is alive. Even if I don't hear from her or see her everyday, it helps to know she is in the world at the same time as me.

D.

I am a person who has lived experience with substance abuse.

I am currently in recovery and have been since 2019. In

2011, when I first began my journey into college, I was heavily involved in my addiction. I attended my first semester, but I failed to return to take any of my finals. I failed my classes, felt hopeless/alone, and was unable to continue attending college due to my substance use. I could not balance the two and my addiction took the front row. I left school and fell hard into that lifestyle.

During that time, I was extremely depressed, suicidal, and devastatingly lost. I hung out with the wrong crowd and was eventually arrested. However, due to having no previous offenses I was released on a PR bond. This event caused a chain reaction that would change my life and spark my path to recovery. After we were all released, the people I was with decided that they could not afford to get into any more trouble in Colorado, so we decided to leave the state.

Drug-fueled decision making landed me stranded in New Mexico for two weeks after my car was totaled. We drove all night long and shortly after we arrived, the person I let drive, drove my car off the side of a mountain. I was severely injured and my car was completely wrecked. Honestly, we were lucky to have walked away. I was taken to the nearest hospital, but I refused medical care. I left without signing the release waivers

and limped around New Mexico for the next two weeks.

We slept in ditches, stairwells, and a booth at a Denny's in Raton. I eventually made my way back to Colorado after a week of panhandling and the help of my acquaintance's uncle. This experience was my first wake up call. I knew I had to start making a change. It did not happen right away and I continued to use for quite some time. I even got to the point of injecting myself to increase the sensation. I continued to put myself in dangerous situations and live a life driven by addiction. However, after many obstacles and ***eleven years of active addiction*** I decided I needed to continue my education. In 2019, I worked to get clean and I re-enrolled at Aims.

From that point on, higher education has been my saving grace. Through the community at Aims, I have grown and developed as an individual. I have learned leadership skills and the necessary attributes to better advocate on behalf of the students in my community. Education has been my shining star in the night sky, and I do not know what my life would be like without all the support I have received from those in education. Aims welcomed me with open arms, despite my past, and allowed me to flourish in an environment I felt I didn't belong.

I am a better person because of the connections I have found and I am thriving. Aims has instilled in me a confidence that I can use to help better the futures of others who have felt as hopeless as I have and I hope to continue the work that I have been so inspired by.

Kyra

I'm Kyra. I'm an addict and I ***started using drugs when I was twelve years old***. I do believe that my childhood trauma led me to begin experimenting with ways to numb my feelings, and drugs were effective at doing so. I ***continued this lifestyle for thirteen years***, and towards the end of my active addiction, I found myself hopeless and lost. I never imagined that recovery was possible.

I was first introduced to recovery when my parents took me to treatment at age 20. This was a foreign concept to me, as I really didn't know anyone who was addicted at the level I was and had managed to get clean. For the remaining five years of my active addiction, I was a chronic relapser who could never manage to get more than a couple months of consecutive clean time. No matter how hard I tried to get and stay clean, that old desire for self-destruction always overpowered me.

In my (hopefully) final relapse, it became evident to me that I would need to re-construct most of my basic beliefs about myself and the world around me if I wanted to maintain my recovery. In returning to the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous, I was welcomed with open arms, introduced to a program for real change, and given the chance to grow in a fellowship of people like myself. NA is really the first place I ever felt fully accepted for who I was, not who I pretended to be. I

was able to get honest with the people there, and from that honesty I was able to seek help from those who were living the life I desired. I admitted that I couldn't control my drug use no matter how hard I tried and that my entire life was in chaos. That first step set the foundation for me to surrender to a new way of life. Over time, I have been able to evaluate my beliefs and behaviors and choose which ones should stay or be replaced. I am cultivating a new self, and with that has come remarkable changes that I could never have dreamed of before. I am repairing my relationships little by little, and my own personal healing has provided me relief from my pain. I now have a large support system of people who don't have to use drugs anymore and can show me how to live this way.

At the time of writing this, I now have just over **16 months of freedom** from active addiction, the longest I've ever gone. I am about to graduate college here at Aims. I sponsor others in recovery through Narcotics Anonymous and have found peace with myself and my past. **It's not always easy, but it is always worth it.** I've even begun to find a little gratitude for my past because it has given me wisdom that I can share with others who have similar struggles. As long as I can use the wreckage of my history as a message of hope for those who follow suit, maybe it wasn't all bad in the end.

Someone You May Know

My son's journey is a powerful testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the transformative power of love, connection, and hope. In the face of adversity, he not only overcame addiction but also built a life filled with purpose, love, and stability.

The story begins with the all-too-common scenario of a young individual succumbing to the clutches of addiction due to the over prescription of pain pills. However, my son's resilience and determination shone through as he navigated the challenging path to recovery, seeking help in inpatient rehab multiple times.

The turning point came when he met a woman during his last inpatient treatment, a connection that would prove to be a guiding light in his recovery journey. Despite conventional wisdom suggesting that early recovery might not be the best time for a relationship, the bond they formed became a source of strength and support for both of them. The challenges they faced together, from homelessness to unemployment, only strengthened their resolve. Their commitment to each other became a beacon of hope, and when they welcomed their son into the world, it added a new layer of purpose to their lives.

Against all odds, they defied the statistics and societal expectations. My son and his now-wife not only found

stability in their careers and education but also expanded their family, creating a loving home on five acres filled with joy and laughter.

The moral of this inspiring story is a profound reminder that the journey to recovery is deeply personal. **There is no one-size-fits-all solution**, and each individual may find their unique pathway to healing. Through love, connection, and an unwavering belief in the possibility of a brighter future, **my son and his family crafted a narrative of triumph over adversity**, proving that, indeed, there are many ways to find one's way to a substance-free and fulfilling life.

Signed,
A Grateful Mom!



Hideo Kojima

“Find something to believe in, and find it for yourself.
When you do, pass it on to the future.”

Sam

I am a recovering alcoholic and will have been **sober for three years** on December 1st, 2023. ***I am 28 years old and had been drinking since I was 14.*** One thing about my alcoholism is that I stayed functioning the whole time. I went to work and maintained relationships which when I did quit led people to believe that I was being overly dramatic about my relationship with alcohol because they didn't see the stereotypical rock bottom that so much pop culture portrays. I didn't lose everything around me but I was losing all of myself in the bottles. Their opinion of the matter shouldn't have mattered but it did make me worry I was faking a problem for the longest time. It made me feel as though since I didn't have it as bad as others I didn't deserve the resources available to me. Because of that, **I felt like I had to struggle with getting sober alone.**

To be honest, I still constantly want to drink but as more days get added to my sobriety tally the cravings are farther between and more manageable. The way I look at my addiction is the same way I look at my depression and anxiety; they're all a part of me. None of them are something I can get rid of entirely but they are all things I must learn to live with in order to maintain some semblance of peace. I have heard it described as a dance. It is not a dance I knew well at all in the beginning. I was initially messing up all the

moves, tripping over myself, and cursing myself with every mistake. I was too hard on myself and I was trying to rid myself of it completely instead of trying to learn to live with it. Eventually I learned that the addiction will always ebb and flow throughout the rest of my life. I learned to be more patient with myself, I learned the dance, to live parallel to this part of myself.

Accepting that I need to live with it and not against it has been the single most helpful thing on my journey. I hope this story helps you too.

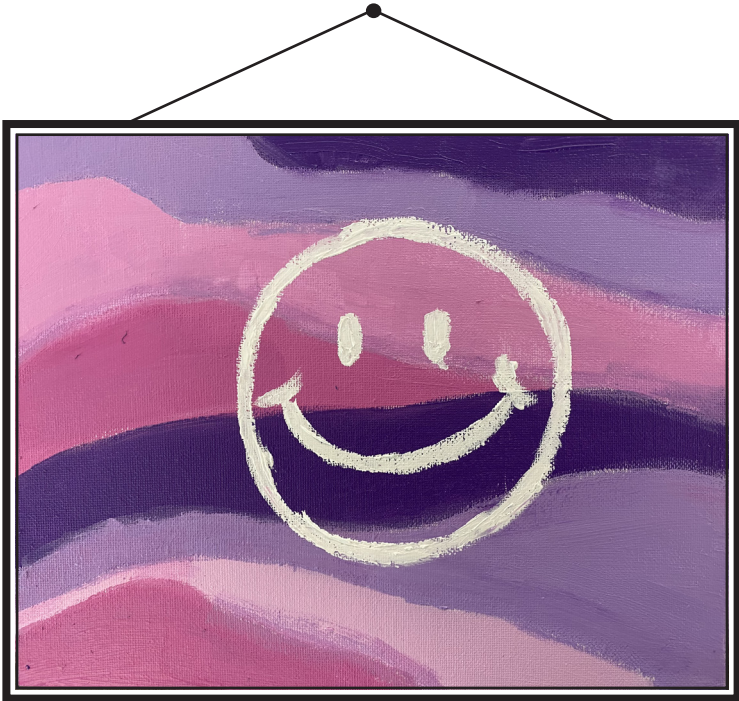
Anonymous

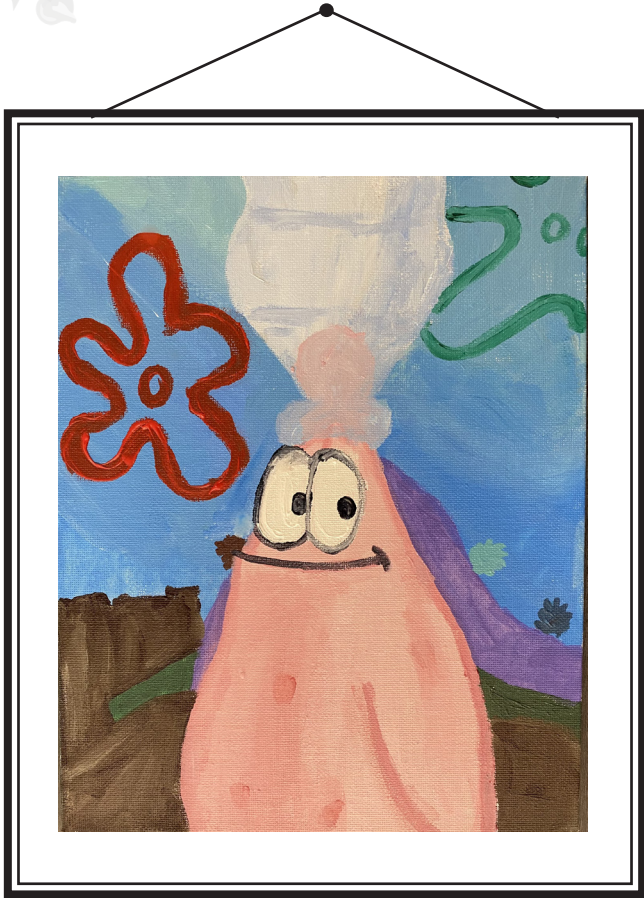
“Healing is not linear. Progression over perfection.”



Face It

Anonymous





Hitting (Bikini) Bottom

Anonymous

Anonymous

First cigarette at 17 in Italy, first hookah hit in elementary school, I also had my medical [marijuana] card twice and there was nothing like smoking to take the pain away. Always was a social drinker and/or smoker, that was the way. Just anything to feel something. But was I feeling nothing... or everything? I was taken advantage of, a couple times physically, and many mentally; but I also took advantage of people I took for granted. I burned so many bridges, I no longer recognized where my feet were planted.

Most medication made me feel further from myself, I even tried almost a month of clinical ketamine to treat my fibro and PTSD. That made me so dissociated I could barely talk, I was trapped until I did edibles until the mania recurred. The truth is, to heal trauma correctly, you have to be clean. It's totally viable to respond any way that feels natural, but in order to truly feel, you must wean. I have been down right mean, insane, selfish, blind, arrogant, and so many other things that have made me uncomfortable in my own skin. But that was the mania talking, that was the psychosis talking, that was the trauma-induced survival-mode talking, that was nowhere near the character I am from within.

Three years have passed since the psychosis episode, two years since the ketamine treatment, and **I just completed my first year in a long time weed and nicotine free.** I took

a couple years off school because of all of this, but now I'm healthy aligned with who I want to be, distractions free (good luck with ADHD!) Mentally, I didn't think I was at the mental capacity to achieve again after the grey matter in my brain depleted from all of this, but I passed my classes in the summer with A's and the fall I got a B and C in classes I didn't even need towards my CSU Apparel Product Development BA I found out halfway through.

Pursue and trudge through, **you are more resilient than you know.**



Amber

This is my story. My name is Amber. I was addicted to Meth. Meth is the devil's drug for sure. What got me started on meth was my boyfriend at the time and peer pressure. I finally got tired of being pushed and bugged that I took my first hit. I was hooked from that moment on. The meth was laced in heroin, which made the addiction stick.

Before I started doing Meth, I worked for the oil fields, had a good job and had zero struggles and a great future ahead. Once I picked up the pipe, I lost it all. I lost my job, my home, my family, and my friends (my real non-drug related friends.) With my last check from work, I decided to buy a lot of dope with it and slang it to make money. For a while, I was doing great until the person I thought was my best friend set me up to be robbed. I had a gun to the back of my head, to the side of my head and one in my mouth. They took all of my dope, my money, and everything I owned from me that day. But on that day, I had no clue that my fake friend set me up, they played it cool and treated her like me so I wouldn't know.

I was beat, and raped, and robbed more times than I can count on my hands. I lost everything and had nobody to cry on or get comfort from or to even tell me that everything will be ok. I was 100% alone out in the world. I stayed high just so I could be numb and not see how bad my life was. I used to beg for money at the corner, or even people walking by. When the

flood hit in 2013, I was sleeping in the park. Literally watching my life wash away with everything in the flood. That same winter we got a blizzard with snow almost to your knees. I was on the streets in that as well. Hiding in the covered slides trying to defrost from being frozen.

Begging people for food and showers. I was lucky if I got a shower once a month. I was dirty and, being high, I didn't care because I was numb. I couldn't feel the burden that I was on myself and others. I had no feelings. Most days I felt like I had no soul and was just stuck here. ***I was hard-core high for 2 years.*** To some that doesn't seem long, but when your days run together because you hardly sleep, it feels like eternity.

Towards the end of my journey of no life, I got to the point that I couldn't get high anymore. My next option was to go to a different drug, or shoot up and I made a promise to myself that if I was going to shoot up, I was going to end my life doing it. On November 26, 2014 I was with my so-called best friend and her friend. We were driving around in my car smoking dope, going through so many drive thru car washes just to smoke more. No matter how much I smoked I didn't feel high anymore.

I gave up on God when he took my daughter from me. The night I got clean, I spoke to God and asked him: "God if you are real and you give second chances to low-life people like me, where do I go from here? What do I do now? God the plan is to go back to her friend's house and shoot up, I don't want to but

I need to be numb. God is this the path you want me on? Am I supposed to do this? God if you are real show me a sign and let me know where to go!!!”

Not even ten minutes later after I talked to God, I saw red and blue flashing lights behind me. I pulled over and we all got pulled out of my car. Both the girls blamed everything on me (all the drugs and paraphernalia). One of the girls threw her dope and stuff on the floor of my car and they said it was all mine. I was honest and told them I was high but it’s not mine. My so-called friend got to walk home. Her friend and I went to jail for possession. I got charged for two reasons: 1. Because they both said it was mine and 2. Because it was my car. Because she had it in my car and I didn’t search her before allowing her in my car, I got charged and lost at trial because of that.

God is real. He saved my life. I was on my way to do a suicidal injection in my veins and just before I prayed and he answered faster than I have ever got an answer from God. That night I got a second chance at life. I got the chance to improve myself and be somebody. That night was also thanksgiving eve, so I ended up spending thanksgiving in jail and that gave me time to think about what was going to be next in my life.

Getting clean was the best thing that has happened to me. I have a great relationship now with God, I have my rainbow baby who is now almost 8 years old. I got my GED and am now in college. I have a good job and am able to support

myself and my family. I am able to talk about what I have gone through in the past. I have a roof over my head, running water to shower, cook, and clean, I have food on the table and I have my family and my son. My son is my biggest supporter and I am so blessed and so grateful.

I am almost **9 years clean** next month, and sobriety has been the best choice I have made. Once you get to the bottom, the only way is up from there. For some, sobriety is hard, I see it every day with family members. For others, it's easier because they are ready and want change. Sobriety is mind set. If your mind is stuck on drugs and the friends you had while you were high, sobriety is going to be difficult for you. When you change your mindset and way of thinking, life becomes better and becomes what you want it to be. Remove all the negative people out of your life and the ones who are associated with your drug life and you will see a difference in your life. When the people you hung out with on drugs see that you are getting clean and changing your life, 98% of the time they see you as being better than them, so they want to bring you down. Get away from them all. Change everything in your life that you are used to and your life will change for the better.

There is always HOPE for SOBRIETY. Make that choice today. It is never too late to change.

Thank you for reading the short story of my addiction. There is always someone who has been in your shoes. It is ok to ask for help. It is ok to make mistakes. Learn from them and keep moving forward. **You are not alone.**

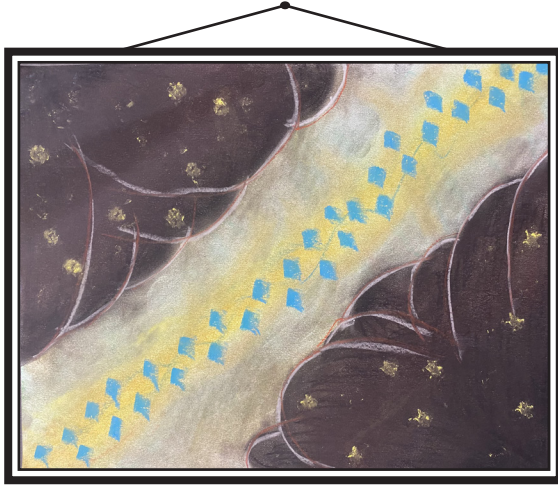
Below Paradise

Anonymous



My Father's Will

Anonymous



The Darkness is the toxin
and the light inside is an imitation
to my fathers will.

The light line with blue
is my father's last fighting will.

The Darkness is trying to
trick the will to believe
it's part of it, to let it
in and take over.

My father didn't let it in.
He's **7 years sober** now. Keep Fighting!

E.

My daughter is now two years in recovery - a success story, but just barely. She was addicted to fentanyl in high school, her senior year.

I had dealt with other kinds of addiction in the lives of people around me - family and friends - but was not prepared to fight this battle. I did not know how to help her fight something she didn't want to fight, which could end her life without warning the next time she used it. I needed help, knowledge, tools, and miracles.

Keeping this hidden, as if it was a shameful thing, was not going to get her out of this dark place, so I reached out to everyone, anyone, for ideas, success stories, failure stories, resources, psychological or physiological methods to reach her, and for my own grief. There was a point when I had to face that she might not make it. She was standing right in front of me and I was mourning her death. She had already overdosed two times to my knowledge; if she hadn't been taken to the hospital in time she would have died - which is the heartbreaking result for so many in the same situation.

By talking to anyone and everyone, I realized that addiction is everywhere. Everyone is touched by it. **Addiction isn't something we fall into because we are weak, or bad;** it is part of a larger issue in society and certainly not something to be hidden and ignored, but understood and supported.

We can't pretend it is something that only happens to people who make bad choices, who don't have the moral fortitude to just say no (ridiculous!). Realizing that we are all a part of the same community of issues, that we all can recognize the struggle that pulls people away from themselves, will help us all to reduce the stigma and allow those who need support to find it faster, easier, and without the crippling shame that goes along with the addiction.



Swedish Proverb

Joy shared is joy multiplied.
Sorrow shared is sorrow divided.

Kodee

Let us go back in time to a younger me still living at home. My father was an emotionally abusive alcoholic, who also happened to abuse drugs. Fast forward 20 years and he's finally clean so at least there is a happy ending there.

The emotional abuse that ensued, however, was forever lasting. ***I promised myself after all that I went through that I would never fall in love with someone who had an addiction problem.*** Never say never though. In March of 2021, I swiped right on a man that changed my life forever. One that does not have the happiest of endings. We went on our first date a few days later, and the next thing we knew one turned in dozens, and a few weeks later he asked me to be his girlfriend. Of course, I said yes because I had already fallen pretty hard for him but he had too so it felt safe. Things seemed pretty perfect but what I didn't know was that he was keeping a pretty big secret. A week before we were supposed to move in together in September of 2021 he dropped a bombshell, he's an alcoholic pretty deep in.

My mind had the hardest of times figuring out what I was supposed to do. On one hand, I had made a promise to myself so long ago that I would never put myself into a situation like that but on the other, he never treated me the way my father had. He was sweet, kind, caring, and pushed me to be the best version of myself I could be. He loved

me the way I always believed I deserved to be loved. So I made the decision to stay and I am so grateful that I did. He proposed a few months later and yet again, of course, I said yes. 2022 was a very hard year for us, medical issues kept arising for him and we were going to the hospital for what felt like at least once a month until we finally got our answer, chronic heart failure. His heart was only working at an 18% capacity. The doctors said we could make it through this if he got clean, took some meds, and had a pacemaker put in within the next few years.

In August of 2022, he finally went to rehab. Things were finally changing. He was doing better than he had ever done so we decided on December 21, 2022, to finally tie the knot. The day before we got married he admitted to relapsing. There were so many emotions but I knew loving someone who struggled with substance addiction wouldn't be easy. I knew it wouldn't be easy but it was the most rewarding thing I had ever done in my life so I decided that if this was how he was going to handle relapsing I could do it, and we still got married. To this day, despite how this story ends I am so glad I took the leap with him and got the chance to love and be loved by someone as amazing as him. This is where things take a dark turn, though.

I am not sure when but he relapsed again in January of 2023, except this time he didn't come clean. I could see all of the signs though so I poked and prodded but he just wouldn't

tell me the truth. We continued, fight after fight, until finally, I decided it was time to stop the arguments because I didn't know how much time I had left with him. I wanted to make the best of it and love him with all that I could until he left me.

On April 28th, 2023 I came home from work and found him unresponsive. The paramedics came but there was nothing they could do, he was gone. That is where his story physically ends, but it's not over even by a long shot. The way he came into my life by storm has forever changed me and has given me a purpose in life. For the longest time I have felt like I was wandering through life with no purpose, until him. One day, when I finally have my degree **I wanna help people struggling like he did and hopefully give them a better ending than we had.**

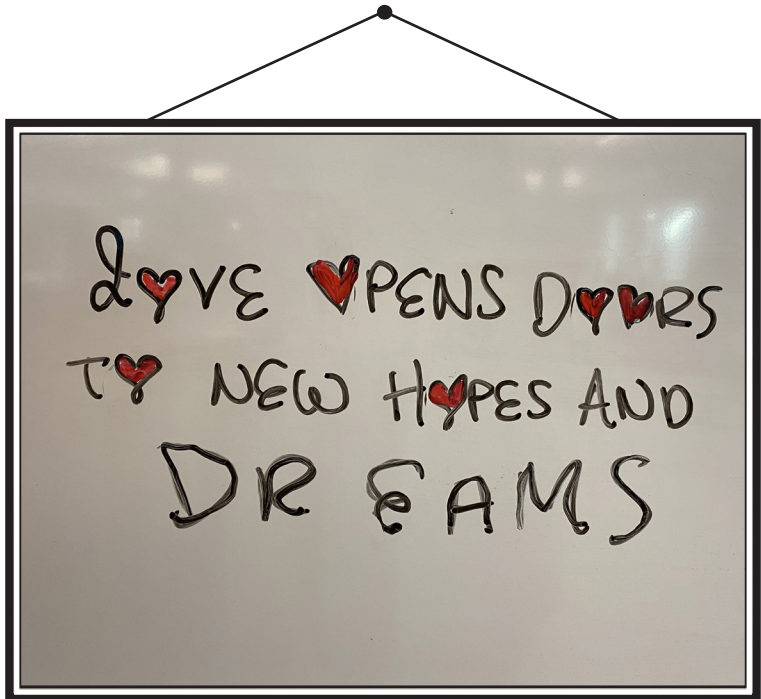


Anonymous

Addiction is giving up everything for one thing.
Sobriety is giving up one thing for everything.

Fighting for Love

Anonymous



Anonymous

I came to Aims when I was ten months sober, after my sponsor said to me “What are you going to do now?” I said “I have always wanted to go to college.” She said “Well you’re sober now, and you can do anything you want, so go.” And I did...I walked into Aims Community College and my new life began. It has been everything I dreamed of and better than anything I could have ever imagined! I felt like I belonged in the world, and that I have something to offer that no one else could. I discovered my passion. I healed and I grew. I found out I can do hard things! I watched myself transform into the woman I always wanted to be! **“If you are not changing you are not growing.” -Tony Robbins** My whole perception of the world changed along with my heart.

“The highest result of education is tolerance.” -Helen Keller I discovered that for me that learning is living. Now, I have the tools to take what happens to me and use it for the greater good. Aims gave me the gift of tying together my recovery with my education. They are inextricably linked. Literally the lights came on and everywhere I looked I saw opportunity not dead ends. Aims Community College gave me the tools to build a future and to take what I had been so freely given to me, and pass it on to others. **“As long as you live, keep learning how to live.” -Seneca**

And I have never looked back ...and so far I have never had to pick up another drink or drug to feel comfortable in my own skin. **“Simple but not easy.” -Dr. Bob**

So many times in recovery I have not been able to see in myself what others see in me...only to find out that I am not the only one who experiences this. It has been going on for hundreds of years. **“Aye to have the gift to give us, to see ourselves as others see us -Richard Burn**

Sobriety date: 9/19/2013 and grateful beyond words.



Carl Jung

“The privilege of a lifetime is to become who you truly are.”





“You’ve always had the power my dear,
you just had to learn it for yourself.”

-Glinda the Good Witch
Wizard of Oz (1939)



STUDENT LIFE

COMPILED BY DANIELLE IRWIN
DESIGN BY LOGAN FITZGERALD