



### President's Letter

## SMART Recovery® is a Unique Collaborative Effort

SMART Recovery® is a unique collaborative effort between participants, a wide range of volunteers, and a small cadre of dedicated employees. Each group plays a vital role in helping SMART Recovery® flourish. Although helping participants gain independence from addictive behavior is the reason the organization exists, participants also contribute to SMART Recovery®. Participants engage in numerous acts of support and leadership during meetings and online, make donations during the pass-the-hat component of meetings, and at other times, by word of mouth enhance the reputation of organization.

Our deeply committed staff devotes time and effort well beyond the modest salaries they earn.

The backbone of the SMART Recovery® organization is participants who become volunteers (and who may also continue as participants). These participant volunteers comprise the majority of meeting facilitators and the vast majority of online volunteers. Participant volunteers also serve the organization in a wide range of other roles. SMART Recovery® appears likely to expand primarily by the efforts of participant volunteers.

Health and behavioral health professionals are another major group of volunteers. Volunteer professionals keep the SMART Recovery® program current with recent scientific findings, provide training and support for participant volunteers, and may facilitate meetings or take other roles in the organization. The International Advisory Council, composed of prestigious professionals, provides guidance to the organization as a whole.

Other groups of volunteers also exist. Non-participant, non-professional community members provide community service through SMART Recovery®. Students in behavioral health graduate programs facilitate meetings as a training experience. Participants who become volunteers may obtain further education

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## The SMART Recovery® 4-Point Program<sup>SM</sup>

The SMART Recovery® (Self-Management And Recovery Training) program helps individuals gain independence from addictive behavior.

*Our efforts are based on scientific knowledge and evolve as scientific knowledge evolves.*

### The program offers specific tools and techniques for each of the program points:

- Point #1:** Enhancing and maintaining motivation to abstain
- Point #2:** Coping with urges
- Point #3:** Managing thoughts, feelings and behavior (problem-solving)
- Point #4:** Balancing momentary and enduring satisfactions (lifestyle balance)

and become professional volunteers. Professionals may begin as participants and then become professional volunteers. Participants from other support groups may become SMART Recovery® volunteers.

The underlying theme to the diversity of SMART Recovery® volunteers is that anyone, regardless of background or status, is welcome as a volunteer. Volunteering at SMART Recovery® is not about who you are or who you have been, but about what you do. Similarly, our meetings do not require participants to label themselves in any way. Our meetings are not about who a participant is or was, but about what the participant is doing (establishing and maintaining abstinence).

Since about 2005, the international SMART Recovery® Board of Directors has been composed of approximately half participant volunteers, and half professional volunteers. In time we expect to see directors with other backgrounds as well.

There are many ways to be involved with and support SMART Recovery®. This article highlights the contributions of participants, volunteers and staff. There are also many individuals and institutions outside the organization whose support is substantial. We believe that SMART Recovery® has gathered and maintained our extended community because self-empowerment is a widely shared ideal. For individuals within the SMART Recovery® organization, our meetings and related activities provide an opportunity to connect with and support fellow human beings in ways one might rarely experience in other settings. SMART Recovery® is a deeply meaningful form of community service (a way to pay back or “pay it

forward”), and as needed a way to fortify personal freedom from addictions.

SMART Recovery® believes the diversity of its supporters adds strength to our organization and our services. The respect and mutual appreciation afforded to individuals from varying recovery backgrounds and involvements with the organization allows us better to accomplish our core mission of helping participants gain independence from addictive behavior.

*Tom Howath*



## Let's Get Together in Person!

**What?** The SMART Recovery® Annual Gathering—A gathering and networking opportunity for all who are involved with SMART Recovery®, or those who want to learn more about the program's tools and techniques.

**When?** October 15–17, 2010

**Where?** Humphrey's Half Moon Inn & Suites, San Diego, CA

**Who?** SMART Recovery® volunteers, face-to-face meeting and online participants, members of the Board of Directors, and friends of SMART Recovery®.

## Agenda:

### Friday, October 15th:

**2:00 – 5:30 p.m. *Optional Harbor Cruise Registration*** – (Meet in hotel lobby by 2:00 p.m.) Hornblower's San Diego adventures combine sightseeing and wildlife watching for a narrated, family-friendly, two-tours-in-one experience. View natural wildlife and world-renowned landmarks such as the Star of India, the Midway, and Cabrillo National Monument. Price: \$25

**7:00 – 9:00 p.m. *Meet & Greet Welcoming Reception/Dinner*** – An opportunity to meet other SMART Recovery® volunteers and participants, along with a fun game of SMART Jeopardy! Includes Pizza Dinner.

### Saturday, October 16th:

**6:30 – 7:30 a.m. *Optional "Start Your Morning Right with Yoga!"***

**8:00 – 9:00 a.m. *Continental Breakfast & Registration***

**9:00 – 9:15 a.m. *Strategic Planning Update*** – Led by Shari Allwood

- Fundraising
- Materials Review
- Growing More Meetings
- Website Improvements

**9:15 – 9:45 a.m. *Tools for Change: How the Stages of Change relates to SMART Recovery®*** – led by Brett Saarela

**9:45 – 10:15 a.m. *Hierarchy of Values and DISARM*** – led by Dr. Joe Gerstein

**10:15 – 10:45 a.m. *Dissertation Results of Doug Anderson, Doctoral Candidate*** – Doug interviewed 10 participants in depth, and summarized the themes that carried across most of these interviews (self-reliance, internal locus of control).

**10:45 – 11:15 a.m. *Break***

**11:15 – 11:45 a.m. *Presenting SMART Recovery® to Treatment Facilities: My Experience*** – Led by Curtis Boudreau, SMART Recovery® Calgary

**11:45 – 12:15 a.m. SMART Recovery® Online Update** – Led by Hammer and online volunteers and participants

**12:15 – 1:15 p.m. Lunch**

**1:15 – 2:15 p.m. What Elements of DBT Would Work Well in a Self-Help Group?**  
– Presented by Milton Brown, Ph.D.

**2:15 – 3:00 p.m. Feedback from Participants regarding SMART Recovery®'s Most Pressing Challenges and Solutions Needed**  
Led by Tom Horvath

**3:00 – 3:30 p.m. Break**

**3:30 – 4:30 p.m. Breakout Groups to Address Potential Solutions for Pressing Challenges**

**4:30 – 5:00 p.m. Reports from Breakout Groups**

**6:00 – 8:30 p.m. Dinner on the Beach** – Join us for dinner on the beach across from the hotel

**Sunday October 17th:**

**8:30 – 9:30 a.m. Continental Breakfast**

**9:30 – 10:00 a.m. Using Social Networking and Other Media To Increase Meeting Attendance, Enhance Awareness, Widen Outreach – Who has tried it, and what works?** – Led by Shari Allwood

**10:00 – 10:15 a.m. San Diego SMART Recovery® – An Organized Team Effort** – Led by Julie Myers

**10:15 – 10:30 a.m. Break**

**10:30 a.m.–12:00 noon Breakout Role Play Groups** – Participants will break into smaller groups to practice role playing a SMART Recovery® meeting

**12:00 noon Collection of Evaluation Forms & Departure**

Visit our website <http://www.smartrecovery.org/sandiego2010/index.html> for registration, housing and scholarship information.

We look forward to your participation!

## **SMART Recovery® Online Update**

by Jonathan von Breton, Director, SMART Recovery® Online

I thought I might use this column to explain some of the differences between SMART Recovery® Online (SROL) and face-to-face. That includes challenges that are unique to an online environment.

The online environment is very different from the face-to-face world in many respects. Behavior easily negotiated and controlled in a face-to-face meeting can escalate out of control online very rapidly.

Online is anonymous. People do not have to use their whole name, real name, or anything that identifies them. By itself, this can result in people acting in ways they would never even consider acting in the physical presence of others.

There are no visual social cues online. Behavior that might be stopped by the fact that others give the person a wordless look of disapproval is not stopped online. Voice tone is equally irrelevant, except in voice meetings.

Then, there are the numbers of people involved. We have hundreds of people using various components of SROL every month. Some of those people use SROL daily. Face-to-face meetings take place once a week and do not have anywhere near the numbers SROL has.

Face-to-face meetings tend to have an average of six or seven attendees per meeting. Although occasionally, there can be as many as 25.

The average number of attendees at a text based (typed) online meeting is 32. That is only because we set the room limit at 35. Many meetings do reach that room limit. Online voice meeting tend to be smaller, but not by much. The average for voice meetings is 18. Having as many as 26 attendees at a voice

meeting is not unusual. Check-ins alone can take over 30 minutes.

Two venues at SROL do not exist in face-to-face. SROL has a Message Board and a text-based chat room. Both are available 24 hours a day.

First, there is SMART Chat. Chat takes place in real time. I type something. You see it immediately and type something back. Chat is open 24/7, and there are people who enjoy spending a lot of time there. This gives people plenty of time to rub each other the wrong way. This venue is the hardest to monitor and usually has the most problems of disruptive behavior. However, the vast majority of SMART Chat users participate appropriately and, dare I say it, SMARTly.

Then there is the SMART Message Board. Like chat, the Message Board is available 24/7. The difference is that it does not take place in real time. You type something and post it. Minutes or hours later, I see what you posted, and I post a response.

Message boards of any kind, including ours, have occasional “flame wars.” A flame war is a discussion that deteriorates into name-calling, sarcasm, and insults. Posts discussing 12-Step programs, pro or con, invariably become flame wars. Because of that, they are not allowed.

Message boards in general also attract “trolls.” Trolls are people who entertain themselves by posting deliberately argumentative, sarcastic, insulting, off-topic, and other kinds of disruptive material. The intent is to create chaos. Trolls love to start flame wars. Some trolls even register with two names and have Multiple Personality Disorder arguments with themselves, encouraging others to take sides. That is one reason we only allow one username/registration at

SROL. Like SMART Chat, the overwhelming majority of posters on our Message Board are polite, supportive, and SMART!

There is almost certainly more acting out and disruptive behavior at SROL than at face-to-face meetings. That is a function of the medium. The anonymity of cyberspace seems to allow, even encourage, bad behavior that you might not see as much in a face-to-face medium.

Because the online environment is so different and has the potential for problems not seen in face-to-face, how do we address those concerns? For one thing, we have a much greater number of volunteers than in the face-to-face world. We also have different kinds of volunteers.

Like face-to-face meetings, online meetings have a Facilitator to keep the discussion on track. Online Facilitators are strongly encouraged to attend the SMART Distance Training Program for all Facilitators. They are required to complete a 12-week program of on-the-job training with an experienced Facilitator.

Unlike the face-to-face environment, we have Message Board and Chat Room volunteers. These folks keep an eye on things, encourage conversations and

posts to be SMART, and are supportive and helpful in many ways. They let the Admin and me know if there is a concern, such as some of the things mentioned earlier.

All online volunteers go through a simple application and selection process. We have some other systems in place to ensure things run smoothly. There is a “Help” button in chat where people can report concerns. On our Message Board, there is a “Report Post” button. Disruptive behavior is identified quickly and dealt with.

Those safety features and our well-trained, caring volunteers make using SROL as pleasant and safe as humanly possible. In fact, given the large numbers of people we have in the three areas of SROL, Meetings, Message Board and Chat—many hundreds of people use SROL every day—we have remarkably few discipline problems.

### **A Warm Welcome to Claire Saenz, New SMART Recovery® Board of Directors Member!**

SMART Recovery® is pleased to announce the appointment of Claire Saenz to the Board of Directors. Claire is in long-term Recovery® and felt attracted to the SMART Recovery® program




because it emphasizes choice in Recovery and uses evidence-based Recovery tools. Claire has been an online SMART Recovery® participant for three years, and she took the Distance Facilitator Training to start a new meeting in her community. Her skills as an attorney are a welcome added benefit for the Board of Directors.

Claire notes: “I think it’s important that people know about variety of self-help programs that exist, and then can choose the program that best matches their personal needs and beliefs. SMART Recovery® has been very beneficial to me personally, and I am delighted to be able to participate in a helpful manner by serving on the Board of Directors.”

Welcome aboard, Claire, and thank you for volunteering!


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## International Development

### SMART Recovery® Australia Update<sup>1</sup>

by Jim Villamor, SMART Recovery® AU Coordinator



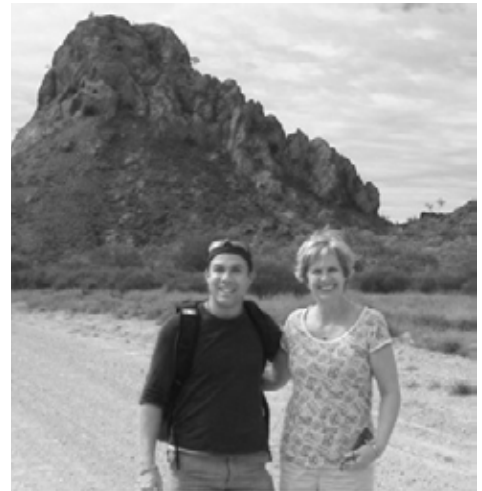
Greetings from Alice Springs, Central Australia! We—Josette and Jim—have spent the last week working with Tracey Spencer, the Director of The Safe and Sober Grog Mob in Central Australia, which is part of “Congress.” Unlike what appears to be true of the U. S. Congress,

our Congress does an excellent job as the lead agency for Health in Central Australia. The Safe and Sober Program is the Drug and Alcohol sector of Congress, and it collaborates with SMART Recovery® Australia to start SMART Recovery® groups in Alice Springs and some of the remote communities.<sup>2</sup> Tracey invited us to train 40 Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers as facilitators. As new facilitators, they will be starting SMART groups in their communities.

Our four days in Alice Springs allowed both of us an opportunity to network with over eight Indigenous organizations and help them adapt the SMART program. To do so, they are using more pictures and diagrams designed the many different languages and tribes in these remote areas.

We aim to continue to develop ongoing networking with these organizations. They want to establish continuity with their drug and alcohol programs throughout this region.

We were invited to the town of Hermannsburg, which is 90 minutes from Alice Springs. Hermannsburg is a “dry” community, which means (1) no alcohol is allowed in this town of 800



Jim and Josette in the Bush



An Indigenous grandmother with her granddaughter

<sup>1</sup> Editor’s Note: Debbie Joffe Ellis, Albert Ellis’s widow and a licensed psychologist in Australia, plans to network with Jim and Josette on her next visit to family in Australia.

<sup>2</sup> Editor’s Note: Alice Springs is not remote. OK.

## SMART Recovery® Program Tools & Techniques

The SMART Recovery® 4-Point Program<sup>SM</sup> employs a variety of tools and techniques to help individuals gain independence from addictive behavior.

**These tools include:**

- Change Plan Worksheet
- Cost/Benefit Analysis
- ABCs of REBT (Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy) for Urge Coping
- ABCs of REBT for Emotional Upsets
- DISARM (Destructive Images Self-talk Awareness and Refusal Method)
- Brainstorming
- Role-playing and Rehearsing

Participants are encouraged to learn how to use each tool and to practice the tools and techniques as they progress toward Point 4 of the program—achieving lifestyle balance and leading a fulfilling and healthy life.

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Historical Hermannsburg



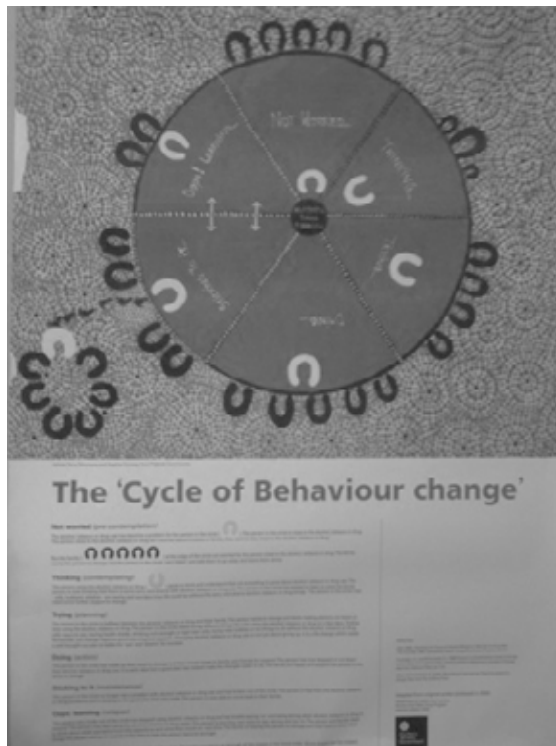
One of the old school rooms in Hermannsburg



Tracey Spencer, as she works with the new SMART Recovery® facilitators and develops ways they can launch SMART Recovery® in their communities.

Indigenous people from a variety of different tribes, and (2) many alcohol and other drug problems continue to exist. We spent the day at this “mission” meeting with mental health workers, nurses, doctors and community workers, and brainstorming ways they can implement SMART Recovery® with their existing groups. They were quite receptive to our contributions and suggestions, and we will continue to work with them in the coming months.

Indigenous Stages of Change Model. This shows a way to revamp elements of SMART Recovery® for Indigenous people.



## SMART Recovery® Gains a Foothold in England

by Nick Heather, Member, SMART Recovery® International Advisory Council and Liz Ainsworth, Alcohol Concern

A project has just been completed that has made a start to establishing SMART Recovery® in England and laid the foundations for a wider dissemination throughout the country in the years ahead. This was a two-year pilot project funded by the government Department of Health and managed by the national charity, *Alcohol Concern*. Nick Heather was Chair of the Steering Committee for the project and Liz Ainsworth was the full-time Project Coordinator.

The idea for the project arose during a sabbatical Professor Keith Humphreys spent with Nick Heather at Northumbria University during 2006. Nick had been very impressed with Keith's work on mutual aid groups and, especially, his book *Circles of Recovery*® which demonstrated the enormous potential of mutual aid in the fight against alcohol-related harm and suffering. The two agreed Alcoholics Anonymous might be doing much in the UK, but it failed to suit a large number of people with drinking problems. Something else was needed. This seemed especially so, given that the UK was becoming increasingly secular. Clearly, that “something else” was SMART Recovery®. The latter had had for many years a strong base in Inverness in the north of Scotland, but so far south of the border in England? Nada.

Nick and Keith began drafting a proposal to the Department of Health for funding under a plan to promote developments to reduce alcohol-related harm in the non-statutory sector in England. (The Department of Health in London is responsible only for health

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policy and services in England, the other parts of the UK dealing with health under their devolved governments.)

They then approached Alcohol Concern to collaborate in this bid and the charity agreed to administer and house the project. After one unsuccessful attempt in 2007, because the specific fund in question had run out of money, the grant was awarded in 2008 for a two-year period. A representative of the Department of Health, Don Lavoie, became part of the Steering Committee and Alcohol Concern was represented by Nicolay Sorenson, Director of Policy and Communications.

The stated aims of the project were:

- to establish six new sites where SMART Recovery® could flourish and become self-sustaining;
- to develop training, manuals and resources to enable local champions to develop and promote new groups;
- to establish standard referral protocols in line with government policy from all tiers of treatment to newly-established SMART Recovery® groups;
- to facilitate a national debut of SMART Recovery® groups throughout England after the project had ended.

The first step was to advertise the project widely and invite applications to become pilot sites from non-statutory agencies. Encouragingly, we received 33 applications and chose six sites. We based choices on indications of commitment, available resources to support meetings, and to have a geographical spread with a mix of urban and rural. One selected site withdrew from the project because it insisted that only professionals could facilitate meetings, a view unacceptable to the Steering Committee.

At the remaining sites, two kinds of training were provided: (1) A two-day training course for volunteers interested in becoming SMART Recovery® meeting facilitators; and (2) a one-day course for staff at the service championing SMART Recovery® in their area.

Fraser Ross provided the training for this event. Fraser is the pioneer of SMART Recovery® in the UK and someone with great experience in giving this training. Despite having to travel from his home in Inverness, Fraser was indefatigable on behalf of the project and he played a crucial role in the project's success. He was assisted in providing training by several volunteers with experience in facilitating meetings. Two of them, Kevin Malthouse and Daniel Davidson, together with Fraser, joined the Steering Committee.

In addition to this training, the Project Coordinator kept in close touch with the pilot sites by phone, email, and personal visits, and was always available to provide advice and support. There were also two national networking meetings for those involved in the project in Manchester and London.

A project of this kind could not be completed without problems. In addition to the issue mentioned above of the site that withdrew from the project, regular meetings failed to get off the ground at two of the pilot sites. This was mainly because of changes in personnel able to facilitate meetings, difficulties in finding suitable venues for meetings and, it must be said, lack of support from those we hoped would be local champions. However, at the other four pilot sites 14 regular SMART Recovery® groups were running at the end of the project (around Sheffield, Birmingham, Cumbria and South London). At each of these sites,

enthusiastic volunteers, as well as committed clinicians and counselors, recommend groups to suitable clients and remain available for support to them.

In addition to setting up these meetings, the project also produced documents that will assist the effort to establish SMART Recovery® more widely in England. The chief of these was *Developing Choice in Peer-Support: How Alcohol Services Can Support SMART Recovery®*. As the title implies, this is a guide for treatment commissioners and providers to how they can make best use of the benefits SMART Recovery® offers for helping people with alcohol problems and reducing alcohol-related harm in their localities. It is available on the Alcohol Concern website <http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/>. The project also produced a *Peer-Support Briefing* that explains what is meant by peer-support, reviews evidence of its effectiveness in reducing substance use disorders, and discusses ways in which treatment providers and commissioners can encourage the development of groups in their areas.

As part of its funding, the Department of Health commissioned a formal and independent evaluation of the project. Professor Susanne MacGregor and Dr. Rachel Herring of Middlesex University carried this out. They used a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods in a process evaluation. Professor MacGregor was an observer at the meetings of the project Steering Committee, and she attended many of the training and networking events associated with the project. The headline findings of the evaluation were that the project had raised the profile of SMART Recovery® in England and that a national debut of SMART Recovery® as a peer support option would be feasible and acceptable.

Evidence from the pilot project showed that it would be possible to introduce SMART Recovery® groups by recruiting enthusiastic facilitators and other group members and by providing experienced training and sensitive and informed support from local agencies. Evidence from the project also showed that people recovering from addictions like SMART Recovery® groups. The main reasons for this are that its meetings are non-hierarchical, peer-led and focused around a structured agenda and use of tools.

The key components needed to introduce and expand SMART Recovery® meetings appear to be these:

- proactive development activities, such as the provision of training and start-up resources;
- a supportive environment in local agencies, involving an agreed approach to mutual aid, with peer support and knowledge about SMART Recovery®;
- a national infrastructure with a clear identity and a strong and stable central office able to provide support with communications, networking, and encouragement.

An Executive Summary of the evaluation report will shortly be available on both the Alcohol Concern <http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/> and the Department of Health <http://www.dh.gov.uk/> websites, as will a copy of the full 72-page report, upon request.

Toward the end of the project, there was a one-day conference in London this year on March 9, at a venue very close to the Houses of Parliament. Its purpose was to disseminate learning from the project and provide guidance to those who wished to expand peer-support options in their localities. The Keynote

Speaker at the conference was Dr. Joe Gerstein, Founding President of SMART Recovery® in the USA. He provided a history of the organization, explained its methods, and summarized its scientific underpinnings. Other presentations included accounts of personal experiences of the project from volunteers and treatment providers, as well as presentations from members of the Steering Committee and SMART Recovery UK®. The conference was a great success. It included a stimulating exchange of views on the future direction that SMART Recovery® should take in the UK. It also resulted in two useful pieces of publicity: an interview with Joe Gerstein in the quality national newspaper *The Guardian* and an article in the magazine *Addiction Today*.

Following the end of our project, SMART Recovery UK® has commissioned a consultation exercise that aims to capture the views of a wide range of stakeholders on how the organization should develop over the next few years. The consultation document setting out the “thinking so far” of the SMART Recovery UK® Board begins by stating, “the Board believes that the heart and soul of SMART Recovery® is the peer-facilitated meeting,” but also proposes a partnership with the professional treatment sector. This is because, in order to grow the organization, “there is an urgent need for more training capacity, stronger central administration, investment in materials, . . . capacity to liaise with national bodies,” and money to cover the costs this will incur. It will be fascinating to see the response to these ideas from the consultation.

While there may be uncertainties about the best way forward, we are confident that there is now a sufficient “head of steam” to ensure the future survival of

SMART Recovery® in this country and we also believe that the Alcohol Concern project has played no small part in this achievement. The prospects for SMART Recovery® in England and the UK are bright. We sincerely thank all the members of the Steering Committee and all the volunteers and professionals who gave their valuable time and energy to making the project a success.

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## SMART Recovery® Alberta Update

by Curtis Boudreau, President, SMART Recovery® Alberta

Hey there, fellow SMART folk,

SMART Recovery® is just rockin' along here in Alberta! Since my last update, I'm ecstatic to let you know that we have expanded our weekly meetings by 33%! Another way to put it would be to say we have gone to four meetings per week from three. Our attendance has been solid since I re-vamped the format for the Monday and Wednesday meetings. We now spend a solid 45 minutes going over one of the five tools (USA & UOA are done together). This time includes an in-depth discussion about how to use the tool, as well as how individual members are applying the tool to their recovery. The Monday and Wednesday meetings were getting stale for regular members. After the change,

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those meetings, which used to draw mainly new members, have far more people who attend regularly.

Great news is that there has been a ton of interest in starting up an Edmonton meeting. I now have four different people that I will be connecting together who are interested in starting up a meeting. Stay tuned for future updates.

There has been one new meeting started up in British Columbia. I am happy to report that the meeting has regular attendance, and it has been able to place a book order for its members.

I hope there will be soon be a meeting in Whitehorse, NWT. The person interested in starting a meeting had been out of town, but he's back and pumped up to bring SMART to Whitehorse. Stay tuned for more info. A footnote is that Lethbridge is still waiting for someone to re-start a meeting there.

Our regular presentations at five different recovery centres have continued to keep the new people flowing into our meetings. Great news is that Aventa, a women's only treatment center, has had a number of their members regularly attend our Wednesday meeting. Because of the positive feedback about how amazing SMART

Recovery® is, Aventa asked me to do a monthly presentation for all of its residents! As with the Salvation Army, this will be a mandatory meeting for all resident members.

SMART Recovery® has continued to work wonders in both my life and my Recovery®. I celebrated my five-year "birthday" a couple of weeks ago! After five years clean, my life has never been better. I know that I would not have got to where I am without this amazing program. This truly wonderful program allows me to wake up every day and look in the mirror for a solution!

That's all from Alberta for this quarter.

*Editor's Note: Hey, Curtis, keep up the good work and congrats on your anniversary. Your enthusiasm is contagious. Question: How far does one have to travel from Whitehorse to be "out of town"?*



## SMART Ideas

### Recovery Month

by Hugh Delaney, Facilitator, Columbia, MD

As September quickly approaches, so does the list of planned Recovery Month events. The celebrations of people in recovery include walks, conferences, festivals, bike rides, and many interesting events across the United States. SMART Recovery® asks you to help by making more people aware of Recovery Month and encourage your colleagues to participate. The many, many ways to participate can be found in a free kit now available.

The kit is huge! Similar to the SMART Recovery® Facilitators Manual, this kit will help with media, outreach, and resource information. The kit is free and you can order it by going to the SMART Recovery® website ([www.smartrecovery.org](http://www.smartrecovery.org)). As you scroll down, look on the left panel for the Recovery Month logo. Clicking on that logo will take you to the Recovery Month website. On the left panel click on the Order it Today logo. Don't forget to use this website to list and find Recovery Month events.

We all know the two struggles of participating in public events: (1) the stigma of "coming out of the closet," and (2) the overwhelming dominance of the traditional participants. Even under the theme of "Join the Voices for Recovery-Now More than Ever," there are many messages that Recovery Month is trying to convey. The most important I



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have found promotes that “recovery from substance abuse in all its forms is possible.”

Whatever ways we can find to participate in Recovery Month will show many different ways toward recovery ARE possible and SMART Recovery® is one of those ways. Get active with events in your area and overcome both struggles. Maybe you will even choose to wear our SMART t-shirts and hats. 😊

## How Can Someone . . .

by rbnkrb, SMART Recovery® Message Board Volunteer

**How can people who do not have an addiction to drugs, alcohol, gambling, etc. relate to people who do? How can they facilitate a SMART Recovery® meeting?**

These are the thoughts that went through my head after I found out that a meeting was starting up near my hometown. At that time, I had been aware of SMART Recovery® for about two years, but only had about four months alcohol free. I had already spent a lot of time on SMART Recovery® online, posted, chatted, and even became a message board volunteer.

A few years ago I had almost 11 years sober, eight of those years attending AA meetings. AA was all about one alcoholic helping another. So the idea of a person being able to help without having experienced an addiction seemed really foreign to me.

I was excited to find out about the face-to-face meeting, but then let down when I discovered it wasn't “another addict” running the meeting. I had mixed feelings about it. I didn't attend that night I learned of the meeting, even though there was a meeting that night.

Then I spoke with a friend about it and she said, “You see a therapist right? And he or she isn't having a substance

abuse problem that you are aware of, so how is this any different?”

Hmm....I never thought of it that way. So I went to the meeting and I loved it! The facilitator was there to show us the tools and how to use them. We (the attendees) talk amongst ourselves to help each other. The facilitator just did what he was supposed to do, *facilitate* the meeting—sharing the tools, keeping us on track, following the agenda, etc. And guess what? I just agreed to be the co-facilitator for the meeting! I am honored to do so, and feel that my facilitator and I will make a great team.

I am also happy to report that I have recently celebrated a year of sobriety and have been continuing with the meetings! If you are reading this article and have reservations about seeking a SMART Recovery® meeting offered by a non-recovering facilitator, please don't let that stop you! Also, if you are reading this and you don't claim to be “in recovery,” perhaps you'd like to consider starting a meeting to help people in your community to overcome addictive behaviors. There are many people who would benefit from your help!

*Editor's Note: A study cited in the first edition of Motivational Interviewing slightly bears on this subject. Never addicted versus “in recovery” people—neither group were pre-existing counselors—learned and applied a counseling method in working with addicted people. The former were better. As the years passed, however, and the formerly addicted put more and more distance between their past and present, they rose up to the level of the never addicted people. Yes, SMART Recovery® is not counseling. Then again, we all implicitly or explicitly believe it works and that facilitators do something—not*

*counseling—that proves helpful. Help me out here, researchers. It's such a juicy, important topic there must be many studies bearing on it.*

## Starting a New Meeting—and a New Life

by Joe Krieger, Facilitator, Denver, CO  
(email: sicredseed@hotmail.com)

Salutations! Seeing how writing is one of my passions, I am thrilled to be writing an article for SMART Recovery®! I'm going to try to focus on two things here: The wonderful rewards of starting a meeting, and secondly (actually, in no order of importance) the satisfaction of gaining freedom from addiction... As well as what both mean to me.

Our group just had its six-month anniversary! Since December 2, we've met every Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. in one location or another. Currently, we're meeting at an IHOP—people seem to enjoy the variety of beverages, and often food! I also recommend a public place for two other reasons: First, security-safety in numbers. Also, the atmosphere makes it seem more like a fun outing.

Oh, field trips can be great, too! That is, if you have a relatively small group and everyone can agree on something... one week, we had our meeting at a bowling alley! Think of it as an “exercise” in having fun sober!

I consider the people who've been coming for a while to be friends, and I always like meeting new people...we're all on the same page. When I quit IV drugs (heroin, cocaine, five-year habit—bad stuff), it was tough, but easy enough to find a new life. With alcohol, it's so acceptable and everywhere; I didn't know anyone who didn't drink... And there was no group in the area...

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So, now there is! The whole distance facilitator training process played a big role in my recovery from alcohol, so I can't stress enough: If you're looking for a meeting in your area, along with a new life, it may be closer than you think! Look into becoming a facilitator! It's fairly easy, and ultimately rewarding!

In closing, I'd like to share a something about what sobriety means to me. This is a poem from my upcoming book (my dream!), but I wrote it for this article, originally:

For me, this is what being sober means:

**“Control of my life,  
and accomplishing my dreams.  
Through the years,  
You wouldn't believe some of the things I've seen...  
And how drastically different life seems,  
Now that I am finally clean.  
If anything in my past had changed,  
My dreams would not remain the same.  
But that's part of what makes us who we are...  
Our battles, our triumphs, and even our scars.”**

*Editor's Note: Well put and heart-warming. If I can get published, you can, too, Joe. It takes the same perseverance you've already shown.*

## There's Something about Blogging

by Sum Zero

I started attending SMART Recovery® meetings in Manhattan back in July of last year. I'd decided that enough was enough, and it was clear that my own attempts to moderate my drinking weren't working. I also had a nagging suspicion that “moderation” wasn't in my vocabulary, if I were to be honest with myself. So, I needed help. I'd never heard of SMART Recovery®, but I knew that AA wasn't for me. So I googled “alternatives to AA,” and up came

SMART Recovery®. I attended my first meeting that night.

I've had periods of great success, and a few lapses, but at every step along the way, I've learned more about myself, and more about the tools that will help me lead a life of sobriety. Very early on, I wanted to share my experiences with others—both the success and the missteps, and with complete honesty. Frankly, I wanted to add a SMART blog to the many, many AA blogs that are out there. So I started blogging: <http://sum-zero.blogspot.com/>

This blog has served me well, but I also hoped that others would find it, learn about SMART Recovery®, and benefit from it the way I have. This is a recent post, and if you read the third comment, you'll find a very inspiring story of someone who's changed their life, set

new goals, and achieved some very impressive ones. It's a great SMART Recovery® success story.

### There's Something about Friday

Reprinted with permission from <http://sum-zero.blogspot.com/2010/04/theres-something-about-friday.html>

A huge part of SMART Recovery®, and I'd imagine most recovery programs, is learning to list your triggers. What events, conditions, states of mind, activities, people, places, and so on are associated with urges to drink? Over the past several months, I've managed to compile a huge list of triggers. (Sometimes I wonder whether it would have been easier to list non-triggers; the list could be shorter.) Among my triggers, in a very abridged list, are:

anxiety	bars (duh)
boredom	confessional booths (just kidding)
relaxation	thinking about possible failures in the future
socializing	thinking about possible successes in the future
eating out	thinking about possible successes in the future
eating in	thinking about possible successes in the future
too much caffeine	thinking about possible successes in the future
tweaky medications	Fridays

I can't say that I've tackled any of these triggers completely. It may well be the case that I'll never tackle them completely. I have to be aware of them, and act in a way that lessens the risk. Go to a restaurant that doesn't have a liquor license. Put off dinners with friends for a little longer, until I have some more time under my belt. Avoid coffee and certain allergy medication. Find alternative ways of calming down when I'm worried about something, which is a common state of mind for me.

The one thing on that list that I really can't avoid is something that rolls around once a week: Friday. Some of the reasons why Friday triggers the urge to drink are obvious. It's the end of the workweek, so time to kick back and relax. It feels natural for me to want to “reward” myself for making it through another workweek, and drinking is often my reward of choice. (But that seems ridiculous when I write it. Reward myself for staying alive another seven days?) I don't have to get up early the next day, so hey, why not?

Other reasons are a little less obvious. I think Friday also marks the uneasy transition from the structure and routine of the week to the lack of structure of a weekend. It's not that I don't have *plenty* of things I could be doing when I'm not

working, it's just that the options overwhelm me a bit, and rather than wanting to make a decision, I have an instinct to retreat into that "safe zone" of not having to make a decision. I like to get drunk, in other words. In a sense, that assures a routine: progression from (false) relaxation and (false) contentedness, at about two or three glasses, to silliness and possibly embarrassing behavior, at about five glasses, to slurring and eventually passing out (at x number of glasses.)

And I even get a second day of routine for one evening of effort! Saturday's routine will include waking up with a headache, not being able to put together a sentence, having only fuzzy thoughts, and lying on the couch for most of the day. Bonus! And the power ball number is dry heaving!

I joke, but in a twisted way, all of these obviously unpleasant aftereffects offer me benefits. They take away the possibility of being productive—going to the gym, working on a paper, cleaning the apartment. I don't have to decide whether to do them, or (in a really unhealthy way) feel guilty about not doing them. As well, hungover means I'm in no physical condition to tackle any of them, so none of it is an option. Everything is already decided.

All of that is really bizarre and unhealthy thinking, but during my time with SMART Recovery®, I've learned to pull triggers apart, and ask myself what I'm really telling myself about drinking and its consequences. Because I'm not insane, I do things, even with unpleasant consequences, for reasons that (seem to) benefit me. The initial benefits of drinking are clear enough, that feeling of levity, the goofy happiness, the ability to forget stress and anxiety. But even some of the unpleasant consequences are in

fact benefits for me. Not benefits in any real sense—they don't serve my long term goals, and they certainly don't get me any closer to, say, finishing my degree—but I get something even out of lying on the couch with a headache and a cognitively impaired mind.

So, there really is something about Friday. I felt it for a short while yesterday, right before 5:00, that nagging tug, that feeling of expectation, that rush of getting ready to let go. But, I understood it all, too, and was able to take a rational perspective. So, no bottle, no wine, no drinking. A quick nap to settle down, then dinner, and then a movie with my partner and our dog. Which means I don't have an excuse not to be productive on Saturday, but I can handle that.

*<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note: OK, I've got two out of three. Maybe I should take up drinking and then stop, and then I'd want to clean my apartment?*

## **Good Servant, Poor Master**

by Hank Robb, PhD, ABPP

Someone once offered me the following piece of wisdom, "The mind makes a good servant and a poor master." I've forgotten both the source and the person who passed it on to me. Even so, it stands alone. The mind does make a good servant and a poor master. Wise, foolish, or mysterious as this phrase might seem, what's it got to do with SMART Recovery®? Well, I'll tell you.

It has a great deal to do with why Point Four, building a lifestyle based on long- and short-term satisfactions, serves as the rudder that the other three points can serve. If the first three points of SR led to short and long-term misery, what would be the point of following them? If they led only to a life of short and long-term neutrality, again – what would be

the point of following them? If they led only to short-term satisfactions, but not long-term ones, or vice versa, would you really sign up to build and maintain motivation to abstain from your addictive behavior, cope with urges and deal with emotional and practical problems? I doubt it.

Yet, we can't "think" our way into what we actually enjoy in either the short or long term. We have to "sense" it. Yes, we can readily think our way into what we "should" enjoy. The problem is that what we should enjoy and what we actually enjoy are often not the same thing. The fact that they often are not can lead to going after a "chicken dinner" and getting only a "mouth full of feathers"—it just doesn't satisfy, even though it "should."

However, one of the biggest difficulties with addictive behavior is that we lose contact with our ability to enjoy much of anything. Most folks first show up at meetings with no agenda other than, "Just make the pain of a life dominated by addictive behavior stop!"

OK, stopping the pain by building motivations to abstain is a good place to start but it won't be enough to maintain motivation to abstain. If you get rid of all the negatives in life, then you have a life lived at zero. That's called "surviving," not "living." Positives. They are what move us from merely surviving to actively living. Using your early abstinence to get your "what-do-I-actually-give-a-crap-about" abilities working again will be key to maintaining abstinence over time. Those abilities may take more time to revive, the longer they have been gathering dust. That's one of the main problems with addictive behavior. It tends to squeeze out not only the stuff you actually give a crap about,

but even your ability to think, “Yes, I actually do give a crap about this” or “No, I don’t.”

Once your “rudder” is operating, your mind will be a marvelous instrument for devising an almost limitless array of ways to build and maintain abstinence, cope with urges, and deal with emotional and practical problems by using the ABCs of REBT. Why? Because your “rudder” provides a point to doing so. Making direct contact with what you want in life rather than mental contact with what “should,” will allow all your mental assets to serve, rather than dominate and you will be one the road to building a life you actually experience as one worth living both in the moment and over time.

## Wausau SMART Recovery® Group Hosts “Teen Awareness Night”

by Christopher Wilke, Facilitator, Wausau, WI

On Tuesday, April 20, 2010, the Wausau, Wisconsin SMART Recovery® group members dedicated their meeting to helping teens with their addictions and self-destructive behaviors.



From left to right: Robert Brown, Henry Steinberger, Shelly (future Teen Facilitator) and Chris Wilke

The evening included real-life testimonials by two local teens, a mother telling of her pain and concerns in dealing with her teen’s addictions, and an AODA counselor going into detail on how perceptions and choices can lead

to additions, behaviors, and dysfunctional thinking.

It concluded with Dr. Henry Steinberger speaking on how the SMART Recovery® program works, and what it can do for people who want to change.

The night was well attended by teens, parents, and group members. We are planning to start a weekly teen night meeting with a facilitator, and this fall we will go directly to our local high schools to talk to teens about SMART Recovery®.

If your group is interested in hosting a “Teen Awareness Night,” please feel free to contact me at [Chris.Wilke1@yahoo.com](mailto:Chris.Wilke1@yahoo.com).

## How To Curb Combined Substance-Abuse Procrastination Habits

by Dr. Bill Knaus, author of five books on procrastination including *End Procrastination Now* (McGraw-Hill 2010).

Long-term SMART Recovery® participants will likely remember the section on procrastination in Knaus, W (1992–2000) *SMART Recovery®: A Quick Start Primer*. Here are some additional ideas.

Let’s start with a definition. Procrastination is an automatic, negative, problem habit of needlessly postponing and delaying a timely and relevant activity until another day or time. It always involves a negative emotion that ranges from a whisper of affect to panic. The process always includes a diversionary activity. It practically always involves procrastination thinking, such as “I’ll fix the problem later.”

This complex, automatic, problem habit typically coexists with other negative states, such as anxiety, depression, impulse control challenges, organizational challenges, distractibility, substance abuse, self-doubts,

perfectionism, indecisiveness, and other. When procrastination co-occurs with other conditions, it is a complex form of procrastination.

Because procrastination is normally a habit, when this process coexists with conditions, such as a negative mood, you may frustratingly repeat procrastination patterns despite your heartfelt wishes to change for the better and to avoid the hassles associated with those habit(s).

Procrastination is one reason why smart people repeat self-defeating patterns. Another is in not recognizing the procrastination habit and its complexities. Time management is repeatedly offered as a solution for procrastination. Although time-management can be part of a process for addressing deadline forms of procrastination, procrastination is rarely an exclusive time management issue. However, non-psychologically trained management consultants have made fortunes selling organizations on the idea that time management corrects for procrastination. Would time-management correct for a substance abuse-procrastination connection?

How do you resolve a co-occurring procrastination-anxiety mood-linked substance-abuse process through time management? Can you address procrastination “later is better” *procrastination thinking* through creating schedules that you probably won’t follow?

Although time management solutions, such as setting priorities and scheduling is sometimes part of the solution for addressing deadline forms of simple procrastination, procrastination typically has more to do with addressing unpleasant feelings associated with a task, habitual behavioral diversions, and mental deflections that sidetrack from productive pursuits.

Curbing procrastination is a byproduct of doing something else first. Preliminary steps include taking cognitive, emotive, and behavioral change steps to interfere with the course of the habit. This three-pronged approach is an area where SMART has an edge over other abstinence programs. Cognitive (rational), emotive, and behavioral strategies to curb substance abuse apply to procrastination, and vice versa.

The emotive component may be a central area to work on to build tolerance and emotional resilience. Both procrastination and substance abuse involve some level of low tension-tolerance and discomfort dodging activities, such as following a path of least resistance. Procrastination is easy and you can slide into an illusion trap by telling yourself you'll build tolerance later, or you NEED to use right now because you had a bad day, or you can't stand the tension of not drinking or using. This vicious procrastination-substance abuse circle includes a specious reward in the form of an immediate relief from tension. That relief just rewards these two self-defeating problem habits, thus increasing their chances for reoccurrence.

Effectively curbing dual procrastination-substance abuse habits normally involves a comprehensive plan, tools to execute the plan, and a deliberate exercise of free-will, or the ability to choose a productive path when you could have yielded to irrational drinking thinking beliefs and impulse. Attending SMART meetings and using SMART educational materials can be a central part of the plan.

By simultaneously refusing to capitulate to procrastination and substance abuse urges, you act to shape your life direction by executing rational choices. Through exercising these choices, you

avoid hassles associated with drinking or using. You gain productive advantages. This learning, experimenting, and progressive mastery approach marks a path with greater promise for positive change than a vague hope, such as "I need to do better later." This hope is an illusion than moves in tandem with procrastination.

When it comes to coping with procrastination or substance abuse habits, I know of no quick fix. Quick fix techniques may create an illusion of progress that is rarely more than a placebo effect that soon wears out, leaving you frustrated and discouraged. Paradoxically, if you choose a challenging "long-term gain" path, and act to stay on it, you will have simplified your life, have less reason to feel stressed, and have more reason to experience a higher level of self-efficacy. This is a belief that you can organize, regulate, and direct your actions productively.

Relapse prevention for procrastination is part of this self-efficacy process. But that is a plus. When you get to the point where you concern yourself about relapse prevention, you have made progress.

A key relapse prevention approach involves completing a weekly cognitive (rational), emotive, and behavioral checklist without procrastinating! For example, (1) Do I experience drinking thinking and act to debunk it? (2) Am I accepting that I'll have cravings and feel tempted to drink/use, and allow myself to live through them without acting on them? (3) Do I take problem-solving actions to contain and control drinking behaviors, such as buying or using addictive substances?

You may stay sober and clean forever. However, when it comes to procrastination there are so many nooks and

crannies in life where procrastination urges lead to procrastination diversions it is impossible to be perfectly consistent and never procrastinate again. Nevertheless, productive gains in major life zones where procrastination recurs can feel like paradise compared to the alternative that comes with (1) a sense of lack of control and feeling overwhelmed by things left un-started or undone, (2) diversions along troublesome pathways that keep leading to the same dead-end results, (3) false promises to do better, handicapping yourself by giving yourself reasons why you expect failure, and making up excuses to explain away negative results so as to avoid blame.

By jointly addressing common components in both procrastination and substance abuse, you can accelerate and strengthen your self-help efforts. As a byproduct, the outcome is likely to prove productive and satisfying.

A lifetime life-style change process of stretching your resources to actualize them is neither simple nor easy in the beginning. It becomes less difficult in the long run compared to seeking easy paths to meet complex challenges.

Procrastination starts as a handicap. Corrective actions toward progressively mastering procrastination accelerate a lifestyle change to increase your chances for health, happiness, and accomplishment. The extra steps you take to work toward such results are radically different from the extra steps it takes to stay on a procrastination pathway. Persistence in learning and applying counter-procrastination measures is a more sure-footed way to move yourself in the direction of self-command and to grow your ability to command the controllable events that take place around you.

I've just started a blog for *Psychology Today*. This blog is for you if you are truly interested in ending the hassles that go with procrastination, and simultaneously addressing substance abuse urges.

In the first series of blogs, I address multiple dimensions of procrastination. I give you some basic counter-procrastination ideas and strategies. I point to additional references you can access if you want to learn more about one of the dimensions of procrastination that you think applies to you. For example, I've made some podcasts with procrastination researcher, Tim Pychyl. I give you the links when the podcast expands on the territory covered in the blog. I will soon have a personal website where I'll publish comprehensive articles for addressing complex and other forms of procrastination. The first article is titled *Stop Procrastinating and Overcome your Anxieties and Fears*. When the site is ready, I'll announce it on the blog.

Here is how you can get to the blog and learn more about procrastination and what you can do to write entries into your autobiography that make for productive reading. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/science-and-sensibility/>

### Articles are Welcome!

If you have a story or information you would like to see published in the *News & Views*, please feel free to submit a copy to Emmett Velten, Editor, via e-mail: [ev.verb@gmail.com](mailto:ev.verb@gmail.com). Unsolicited material is most welcome!

## People Power



### Three Years ALREADY?

by Nanaroo, SMART Recovery® Online Chat Volunteer

This week (I'm not sure of the exact date, I just remember late March) I honor three years of my life I have lived without alcohol.

I was home and a little bored. Mr. Roo was having some wine while plonking on the computer. I snuck to the basement and stole a gulp from a bottle of ancient bourbon he had in his brewery (how I deal with that is another tale). As I felt it burning down, I was thinking, "What did I do that for? I didn't want to do that!" and realized that I didn't want to live my life regretting so much. So I got on my X-C skis and headed out into the sleet.

The little pellets stung my cheeks and I felt alive. The sleet was like ball bearings, and I had a smooth easy glide down the street, accompanied by a beautiful shushing noise. "OK" I told myself. "Here I am, feeling all this, seeing all this, really BEING here. And that's where I want to be, always." It wasn't so much giving the alcohol up as leaving it behind- I do believe I outgrew it.

In the time since then, three of my husband's parents (he has steps) have passed away. I've been able to love him, hold him, and support him as he deals with these losses (yes, they are mine, too).

My mother was diagnosed with lung cancer, had surgery, and is now two years cancer free. I was able to go to

doctor visits, talk to her, encourage her, change bandages (ick).

Hubby had a bike accident and ravaged his rotator cuff – I was able to get myself to the hospital (I was paddling on the river at the time) without freaking out, packed up the condo and took us home and unpacked, help him do stuff one-handed, then aided him before, during and after the repair surgery.

There was good stuff, too, plenty of it – focus at work and excellent performance reviews and I just launched a brand-new product to great fanfare. I can advocate for myself and for my loved ones. I'm more social (not a butterfly by any stretch, but not a hermit either). My kitties are cared for and ever-so-lovable. Mr. Roo has some big responsibilities in his volunteer work and I am available (and interested, too) in helping with that. I take yoga classes (I celebrated 2 years alcohol-free on a yoga retreat in Costa Rica) and work out some.

Thanks to the tools, I can dispute some of the crappy thinking I learned growing up. And practice boundary-setting and maintenance. I can help my mom tidy now and then, but I cannot make her happy (this was a hard one, but probably the most valuable).

Lots to learn, still, and I will be here for it. So onward into much brighter future.

*Note: Three years ago, I would not have dreamt of posting this (too self-promoting). Today, well, it might light a little spark in someone.*

### Honoring Sobriety

by a7u, SMART Recovery® Chat Volunteer

Nanaroo made a post in which she mentioned "honoring her sober years." That struck a chord with me. My post here is somewhat disjointed and rambling, somewhat stream-of-consciousness.

I sobered up 4 years ago after being a daily drunk for 25 years. I didn't have a

lot of trouble sobering up largely because I was super-motivated. My health took a bad turn. I realized all of a sudden in a blinding cold way that I was going to die of drinking. So I got busy and I got sober. It was nasty and scary but I did it. I went through many bitter, lonesome nights crying for no reason except dumb animal fear but I persevered and came out the other side.

People who are struggling must plunge ahead with their hard work sobering up believing that life can be good and not a series of struggles, chaotic stumbles from one crisis to another. You can get stability and clarity and put down a solid foundation.

As I said, I didn't have a lot of trouble sobering up. However, halfway into year two of sobriety I began to feel uneasy. I had no urges, no cravings, no trouble with alcohol. I had whipped my drinking problem. I whipped it without mercy until every shred of alcohol's dregs and effects were banished from the bottom of my heart and soul. Sobriety agreed with me 100%. So why was I uneasy? I learned that what gets you sober is not what will keep you sober. You need a different outlook, a different focus. I had not integrated sobriety and my new life and my old life – they were all fragmented pieces – intellectual facts existing “out there,” not the continuous living experiences of a single person.

So I have been working on that. It takes the form of a final step of forgiving me for what I did to myself all those years of drinking. I had accepted the waste, damage, loss, and grief but I had not forgiven myself for all that. I accepted it all as fact but I burned with self-loathing and guilt at it. So I have been letting go. In this way, I honor my sobriety.

I honor it another way, by taking seriously the power it has given me over my condition. I had a trainload of troubles from drinking. Slowly but surely I unpacked them all and solved them. But I was left with some problems that started long before I took up drinking, things that drinking hid. I realized I could not solve them myself so some weeks ago I started seeing a therapist. It has already helped.

Sober I can admit my shortcomings and get outside help. I can participate willingly in the process. I come to the therapy with a clear mind free of hang-over fog and willing to do the work, endure the emotional discomfort. I have the mental endurance to concentrate and surrender my pettiness and ego. Another way I honor my sobriety is by revealing this here on the board. I have become a lot more honest since I sobered up but I still hide parts of myself in an act of immaturity because I am trying to obscure these things from myself, like a child pretending to be something he is not.

I want people who are struggling to read my words and know that life can be good and not a series of struggles or chaotic stumbles from one crisis to another. You can get stability and clarity and put down a solid foundation. You can face the world squarely but most important and first, you can face yourself. It takes time and may be unpleasant but it is possible, slowly, to come to know yourself in an inner way that welds ownership of your soul, your self, your mind, and your heart seamlessly, creating the peace whose absence taunts us so mercilessly when we are enslaved to drinking.

This afternoon I scheduled an audition to be in a play. A while back, I

started acting lessons. It is crazy different for me, unlike anything I have ever done. Maybe I am having a second childhood or a midlife crisis but it feels good to go into this strange, alien territory. I am thinking new thoughts and learning about things I never knew existed. It is definitely new country and I have no map, just like the journey into sobriety, but this is wonderful travel with interesting people into a new upland I have never seen. The outcome is uncertain just as was the journey to sobriety but in this case I am certain whatever outcome I meet will be good because it will all be new and something I would not have gotten without risking it.

When I decided to sober up, I imagined this is the way normal people who are not enslaved to alcohol live their lives – doing real, concrete things with enduring importance and personal meaning. These are some of the things being sober mean to me.

### Those spooky old woods

by Fenquat, SMART Recovery® Online Volunteer



I wrote this about six years ago, and remembered it recently when posting on the message boards.

I have been playing in my woods for several weeks now. When I say playing, I mean I am clearing away years of



neglect. There are scrub trees. There are trees that have been twisted by vines and are not healthy. There are stickers, small patches and great clumps of them as big around as a car, and in some cases they stretch higher than I stand tall. There are vines, some as big around as my wrist.

When we built, over 12 years ago I knew I needed to do something, but I averted my eyes and found other, more pleasurable things to occupy my time. All the while, those woods grew increasingly tangled. On occasion I would look at them and say to myself that one day I would get around to taking care of them.

So I finally decided to do something. I gathered up my tools, such as they are, and entered the woods. At first, I would spend an hour or so, hacking away and upon return they looked about the same. So I redoubled my efforts and spent more time hacking away. Then when I would re-enter, damn, if the place didn't look worse. Now I could clearly see how much work was involved. The easy stuff had been taken care of, new harder chores awaited and, cripes, there was chopped up stuff EVERYWHERE.

The easy out would be to go back to letting it be, but for some reason I stuck

with it. Daily sessions with my scythe interspaced with the saws and whatever it is called with those long handles. I found it a great joy to locate one of those vines and pinch it off with that thing. Then when I returned I could see the leaves on that vine dying off. Place started to have some spots that actually looked better. There were sections now open enough that a cooling breeze could actually be felt. Not bad.

So I continue. If you look at the scythe, you can see a tag on it. I just got it re-sharpened.

Even the best tools have to be sharpened on occasion. There are sections of the woods that still need to be attacked. There are sections that I have cleared that need to be revisited to keep them under control.

If you have been around very long (and it does not take long) you may have learned I am into metaphors. We all have woods that got out of control, time to get in there with the tools available and do something. Trust me, there is some work, but it does get better.

Six years later...still true, work and progress, take the tools out and swing them a bit, the sharpest axe in the world leaves no marks until swung and the object at hand is struck.

***...So I finally decided to do something. I gathered up my tools, such as they are, and entered the woods.***



**Prison Outreach**

## From Beyond the Walls

Stay tuned for Beyond the Walls in the fall issue of the *News & Views*!



**3-Minute REBT**

You may look forward to future 3-Minute REBT articles from Dr. Tate in future issues of the *News & Views*.

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