

Oxford House Stories®

Oxford House, Inc. is the nonprofit 501(c)(3) umbrella organization for more than 1,300 individual Oxford Houses throughout the country. It is a member of the Combined Federal Campaign [CFC] and numerous United Way Campaigns around the country. Donated funds are used to expand the number of Oxford Houses. Each Oxford House is an ordinary house rented by individual groups of 6 to 15 residents recovering from addiction to alcohol and/or drug addiction. Many residents also are afflicted by other mental or physical illnesses. Together, they help each other to become comfortable enough in sobriety to function well as productive, clean and sober citizens. Each current or former resident of Oxford House has an individual story about his or her own addiction and the joy of recovery. Their paths from addictive behavior to comfortable recovery are different but have one common thread – the role Oxford House living played in their successful journey.

At any given time, about 10,000 people are living in Oxford Houses in the United States. The recovering individuals who share their stories below do so in order to help others afflicted by alcoholism and drug addiction to understand the hope afforded by Oxford House and the possibility of recovery. Many readers will be struck by the devastating damage associated with alcoholism and drug addiction. There is no pill or magic bullet that can produce a cure for addiction. The only path to recovery is total abstinence from alcohol and addictive drugs. Few are able to master such behavior change alone. Together with 12-Step self-help programs, Oxford House offers its residents the opportunity and time to use peer support, a safe living environment and a disciplined system of operation to achieve the behavior changes necessary to avoid a return to the use of alcohol and addictive drugs.

The thousands of individuals who have found a path to recovery by living in an Oxford House know that Oxford Houses provides the time, peer support and discipline to develop sobriety comfortable enough to avoid relapse. The following stories are a reminder that alcoholism and drug addiction are not abstractions. Both diseases deprive people of free choice. The compulsion to drink alcohol or to use mind-altering drugs produces slavery for the individual addict. Over and over again the individual seeks pleasure but finds unpredictable behavior arising both from the compulsion to use and the crazy behavior that comes from such use. The end result is that family, friends and communities at large become fearful – and with good reason. The alcoholic and addict, when intoxicated, often are violent and use reckless judgment. Behavior change is the only way to stop the devastating effects of addiction. Millions of addicts have achieved behavior change and moved from compulsive use of addictive drugs to absolute sobriety.

All members of the Oxford House family hope that, by sharing these personal stories of hard-won, but comfortable sobriety, they will contribute to the growth of the Oxford House network and guide those not yet in recovery toward an effective program, and while fostering the understanding and support of the broader community. All donations to Oxford House, Inc. are used to establish new houses to help more people master recovery.

James M.'s Story

My name is James M. and I was born on April 4, 1937 in Nashville Tennessee, the youngest of four children. I attended Nashville Public Schools and three years of college at Tennessee State University.

In 1957, at age 20, I got married; my wife and I had one daughter. In 1959, I began working at the Nashville Post Office as a Railway Postal Clerk and in January 1967 I was given a choice by the Post Office to stay in Nashville in another position or move to another city and remain in my current job. In February 1967, I decided to move to Washington DC. I thought I could do better financially in the big city.

In Washington DC, away from friends and family, I began suffering from depression and was prescribed Valium. I became addicted to Valium, which led to an addiction to more drugs. I still functioned at my job with the Washington DC Postal Service and received promotions to supervisory positions, but my private life was a haze of smoking crack cocaine, divorce, and despair. I thought I had it all because I had a good business selling drugs until I became my own best customer.

On November 17, 1981, I was urged by friends to get addiction treatment and entered the Arlington Treatment Program in Arlington VA. I came out and promptly relapsed. On May 1982 I stopped using again but did not know how long I could stay clean without help. In August of 1982, I applied to live in Northampton Oxford House in Washington DC. I was sure they would not accept me. All the residents were white and the house was in the best section of town. I went back to my sponsor and hoped to talk him into putting me up. Then I got a call. I had been accepted.

Immediately upon moving in, I felt fortunate to have discovered this new family – even though it took a few weeks before some of the guys felt comfortable around me. I studied the Oxford House manual from cover to cover. Soon every meeting was a place where other guys would ask me whether we were conducting the meeting the way we were supposed to. I was elected to one house office after another. I stayed in Oxford House – Northampton for more than twelve years. My new family taught me what was important in life. After a few months in the Northampton House, I decided to devote my life to helping other addicts and alcoholics to find what I had found – a housing situation that provided support for recovery while also teaching the residents how to live responsibly.

I have been fortunate. I married a wonderful woman. That was why I moved out of Oxford House. She has put up with me traveling around the country – from Hawaii to Texas – to help others establish Oxford Houses. Years ago I convinced my brother Milton to get some houses going in my old hometown, Nashville. Today I am a proud member of Board of Oxford House, Inc. and am thankful every day that I found Oxford House, AA and NA.

Myrna B.'s Story

Quit drinking forever...did that mean I couldn't even have a glass of wine with dinner? I knew my social life would be non-existent and how would I function without a cocktail? What would I do without my drinking 'friends'? I knew I drank like a lady.

The reality was I was totally dependent on alcohol and failing in all aspects of my life. My one-year alcoholic marriage was a disaster. I had alienated my family; I pretty much abdicated my responsibility as a mother; I quit my job (it took too much effort and interfered with my drinking); my social life was one continual drinking spree; and my spiritual life consisted of bargaining prayers during a hangover. As one of my acquaintances put it, I didn't drink like 'a' lady, I drank like 10 ladies. It was after one of my marital drinking rows that my children put me in treatment.

I had been in treatment before in 1980, but it was an aversion type treatment. You know, like Pavlov's dog. The attendants would pour a drink down me and give me a shot to make me throw up. This lasted for ten days and even the smell of alcohol triggered a nauseated reaction. Can you imagine, I couldn't even use hair spray. This lasted for about a year but the only support or outside assistance I had was that I could go back to the treatment facility and throw up for a weekend. Well, my alcoholic mind told me I could still drink and throw up and have some fun. Controlled drinking worked for a time but eventually I hit my bottom. So, when treatment was pushed on me, I accepted gladly. The program at this facility was entirely based on the AA 12 steps.

It was here I learned about the 24-hour program and it began to work. There were people just like me, suffering from the addiction of alcohol and all the *crazy* things that go along with it. *Crazy?* When I read that second step about the insanity, I was highly indignant. I wasn't insane. I just drank too much and did some really stupid things. Like marrying a fellow abusive alcoholic I met in a bar, which, in reality, was one of the minor sins I committed. My counselor suggested I reread my first step and then decide if my behavior wasn't insane. Thus I started on my journey of physical, mental and spiritual recovery.

When it came time to leave, fear set in. I didn't want to go back to that disastrous alcoholic marriage and I needed an opportunity to start a new life. I asked my counselor if there were any group homes for recovering women. I heard a lot about places for guys. She said she had heard that a woman in the AA program was going to open a house to women but it hadn't got going yet. I met with the lady who was going to manage it and decided to move in. I had to close out my other home and put my 'stuff' in storage, so I didn't move in until a month after I completed treatment in March. One other woman was now there. I came in there with no self-esteem, and both my spirit and physical body were broken and bruised.

About 2 weeks after I moved in, the manager handed me a booklet and said I could read it and see what I thought. It was the Oxford House Manual. I read it and had the other resident woman read it too. She said it sounded good, but we would need 10 years of sobriety to start something like this. Being the controlling addict I was, I decided to call the '800' number in the book. A life-saving angel named Mollie Brown answered the call. She filled me in on the real concept and told me there were no houses in Washington, but 3 men's houses had started in Oregon. She also explained that there was a start-up loan in the works and I should contact the State Offices and the Oregon men. I believed her and took action. I probably drove her crazy calling almost daily.

The owner of the home lived out of state, but decided to visit the house and look into this Oxford idea. She met with the Oregon people, released her manager and said, "Go for it." I spend many hours on the phone with Mollie and our state DASA contact. In May, 1990, we (4) applied for the Charter of the Chalet Oxford House, joined the Oregon folks in a Chapter, furnished our 10-bed home, started making presentations, and became the first Oxford House in Washington. I wish I could say I did this as a service project but it was out of my need. Today I know that this was all part of God's plan for me. I gained so much in my recovery by sharing with these women and taking on responsibility again.

In the meantime I found a home group in AA, or they found me, and developed a support group both in AA and in the Oxford House. I now had 3 months of sobriety. The early feelings of insecurity, fear and shame plagued me but my Oxford roommates and my AA support group carried me through and encouraged me to start a men's house in our area. My thought was that I wasn't going to need this much longer and would move back to my old area. This obviously wasn't God's plan. With the help of a fellow in AA, we searched for a couple of months to find a landlord – any landlord – willing to believe that a bunch of alcoholics and addicts would be good tenants. We finally found a landlord and 5 months later opened the men's Lincoln house. This landlord was another blessing who ended up owning 8 of our houses.

Oxford Inc. had sent an outreach worker to Seattle to fulfill a contract with the State of Washington. After opening a couple of houses in that area he was sent to another state. A women's house with children had opened in the suburbs of Seattle and was failing. I received a call from Paul M. and Mark S. asking me if I would go there to help them out. Fear and apprehension gripped my total being. Seattle was a *really* big city that I knew little about. I had been there to visit a few times, but to go up there by myself! I had graduated from no self-esteem to low self-esteem, but that wasn't enough. It was one of the women in my house and my AA support folks who convinced me that I should go and put God in my pocket. I was 10 months sober.

I knew one of the first things I needed to do was to find an AA meeting. I celebrated my one-year at a podium meeting of about 200 people. Again, AA let me know I was a part of a larger family. We eventually closed the house. It couldn't even be turned into a men's house because of its inaccessibility to bus service and shopping. My 3 months turned into a year and more years and more houses. What a blessing! I stayed sober and truly had begun a new way of living. I lived in various Oxford Houses for 4

years until I moved to the Olympia area, our State capital. Again my first priority was to find an AA home group and continue to open new Oxford Houses. This continued on for 14 years.

The combination of Oxford House and the people and the program of AA have given me a life of peace and, most of the time, serenity. My family and I have renewed our relationships and added 9 grandchildren. I retired as a fulltime Oxford employee a few years ago. I am exceedingly grateful to God, to AA and to Paul M. and the founders for the Oxford concepts, Mollie B. and the staff of Oxford, Inc., the State of Washington DASA, the hundreds of other people who have supported me personally including my sponsors, and the Oxford Houses and my sponsees.

Recovery hasn't always been easy. I have experienced a divorce, death of a family member, serious health problems and the day-to-day frustrations of my job and life in general. Things that I have learned through AA and Oxford House are an *attitude of gratitude*, acceptance, love, forgiveness, compassion, and the willingness to take that next step. With each of these comes action. Oxford House gave me the opportunity to practice the principles and action. Today, I try to 'walk my talk.' It is through my continued participation in AA that I can apply the '24-hour program' and the principles in all aspects of my life.

Stan T.'s Story

My name is Stan; I'm an Alcoholic. When I had my first taste of alcohol, I enjoyed the flavor and the idea of stealing it from my parents. Pretty soon I was cutting the booze with water so my dad wouldn't know. I moved on to being a weekend warrior. I'd just drink on weekends. I didn't drink to just get high; I would drink until I passed out. I'd brag to my friends how much I drank and how much fun I had, even though I couldn't remember a thing that happened that night. Worse yet, if I did remember, I wouldn't want to share the fact that I wet my pants, or got sick or was a complete ass.

At the old age of 18 I was in the service and drinking like a man – straight whiskey, beer back. I was gung-ho and drank until I dropped every night. One night I got drunk, got into a fight, woke up in the hospital. I had a completely disarranged right knee and I missed my flight to Vietnam. When I found out about the deaths of some of my friends in my squad, I threw a two-week drunk. When I was discharged from the service I was drinking all day every day. I hadn't seen my family for two years. My mom told me to quit feeling sorry for myself and get home.

I settled down for a while, found a wife, and life was good. I don't know why, but my life seemed to be missing something – alcohol. The next 20 years of my life I would spend drinking and drugging. I lost everything I worked so hard for, house, truck, boat and a wonderful wife. Drinking wasn't fun; it was something I needed to get to the next day. It's what I thought about when I got up in the morning, until I passed out. Something finally hit me; I was tired of the loneliness and self-pity of this addiction. I asked for help. I entered LakeSide-Milam on September 14, 2002. I thought if I could just keep away from the booze for a couple of weeks I'd have it made. While they were repairing my body with food and rest, they gave me a book to read and tried to explain what makes us addicts – not the booze or the drugs but the disease. I was always tired; I couldn't stay awake. I admitted that I was powerless and my life unmanageable. I wanted to surrender. That's when I knew there was a power greater than ourselves. The next two weeks I had the chance to really look at myself; they gave me ways to control the anger and pain that I was feeling. I learned to share my feelings with others. I attended AA meetings and found out I was not the only one who asked for help. My 28 days were up. I gave up my room at the house I was staying at with 5 other alcoholics. I couldn't go back; I made a decision to stop using. I was told about Oxford House.

"My name is Sam; I'm a hot tar roofer and an Alcoholic." That's all I had to say to get an interview at Brockman Oxford House. I explained that I just got out of treatment 2 hours ago and needed a safe place to stay. I had enough money to pay a weeks' rent, or a couple days at a hotel. They heard my story and gave me a ride to the locker to get my things. I was accepted. I just had to follow the rules, get along with everyone, and work on my recovery. I've been living at Brockman House for almost 4 years now. It took me awhile to get used to being with a group of guys like myself. But together we have learned to manage and maintain the house and interact as a family. I've had the honor to hold all House officer positions and pass that training on. The last couple of years I've assisted Chapter 23 as Chapter

Vice Chair and Chapter Chair. This year I was elected Chairman of the Washington State Association of Oxford House. I would like to show the community that recovery works, that we are good people, that we can be successful.

Mike Z.'s Story

My name is Mike Z. and I AM an alcoholic. I grew up in the Chicago suburbs. Mom and Dad always had cocktail hour at 4pm each day. I couldn't WAIT to be like them. My first hint I might be an alcoholic should have been when my friends and I found a bottle of Peppermint Schnapps. I told them to meet me later. I ditched them, then I drank the whole bottle. I was 14 years old.

The police were kind enough to stop me 4 times in a 2-year period after I turned 21, each resulted in a DUI. I was sent to treatment in lieu of jail in 1986. I found out then that I was an alcoholic. They said it was my parent's fault, and that was JUST what I wanted to hear. Being young, I was in no way ready to give up the lifestyle I had become accustomed to, which was drinking every chance I got.

Years went by, my drinking cost me my driver's license, my job I had for 8.5 years, and countless relationships. It's funny how (now it is) I knew my drinking was the cause of my problems, but chose alcohol over everything, and did not care about the consequences. I used to go to nightclubs; now I went to low-end bars. Soon enough though, I ended up drinking out in the woods by myself, I did not like to share my bottle with ANYONE.

I had two seizures in 2001, the first one in February. They asked me if I drank a lot. I said of course I don't. They said maybe I had diabetes. I was happy to hear that because if they said it was alcohol, that would mean I have a drinking problem, even though I was well aware that I was an alcoholic (thanks to treatment in '86). The 2nd seizure in Nov. '01 was without a doubt, and I fessed up that it was caused by lack of alcohol. I was in the hospital for 7 days. They sent me to a halfway house in the ghettos of Chicago. I drank and used drugs while there.

My sister, who lives in WA State, called me in Jan. 02 and asked me if I wanted to stop the madness. I told her yes. She offered to buy me a one-way ticket to WA to try and help me. I took her up on that and arrived in WA Feb. 7, 2002. I was taken to an AA meeting there, and found all these people smiling and welcoming me with open arms. I hated it. I didn't want to stop, and sure as heck didn't have the 3rd Tradition, the desire to stop drinking at all!! But, to keep my sister happy and a room over my head, I went every Tuesday, made it my home group, and had a friend who knew me all too well. He later became my sponsor. My sister found my liquor. I told her, and I absolutely believed, that there was no hope for me. I would NEVER, NEVER, NEVER be able to live any kind of life without drinking. They prayed for me and said if I had faith, there is a way. I didn't buy it. I went to detox in April of '02. Because I was from Chicago, I couldn't get into treatment. I was mad, and I showed them by going directly to the liquor store upon my departure from detox and got drunk. I was in that detox for 16 days. Two weeks later, my sister and brother-in-law went to Chicago for a wedding, and left me alone. On May 28th, 2002, I wrote my sister a letter thanking her for all the help. I was convinced I could drink normally and be okay. I told her not to worry and don't come looking for me.

I got on a bus with the intent on going down to San Diego, CA to crash my brother's place and live on his couch for a while. Normal, huh!!! I didn't make it 5 miles, and I was looking for a liquor store, saw one, got off the bus, went and got a hotel room. Now this is where GOD comes in. I was intent on getting this room for the night; go have dinner in a restaurant, have a 'cocktail' before dinner, eat and then go back to the room, and get ready for the next days travels. Normal stuff, right? I never made it out of the room. I immediately made one of my drinks, got drunk, and did what I always did. Then, while sitting on my hotel bed, I looked in the mirror, and that is when I KNEW that YES, I AM an alcoholic and can't even manage one night, let alone my life. I asked GOD for help. I totally surrendered to my disease and prayed hard. This was IT!! I'M DONE, AND NOW I HAVE THE DESIRE TO STOP DRINKING.

I called the same detox center I was in the previous month, knowing they were full up. My first miracle, they had a bed, and if I could get there the next day by 9am I was in. Well, I made it. I thank GOD for this, HE removed my obsession for alcohol and I never wanted to drink again. Of course, I would only have to change EVERYTHING ABOUT ME. I was Okay with that, because I, in my present state, was not the person I could be. So for me, changing everything was pretty easy.

The detox center suggested I call an Oxford House (never heard of 'em). I was willing to do WHATEVER IT TAKES to stay sober so I did. I interviewed, got rejected, went to the Oxford House-Lloyd in Mountlake Terrace, WA and got in. I was thrust into House Officer positions from the get-go. I loved what I was seeing and decided I was going to learn everything there is to know to live comfortably in this House if it was going to be my home. I continued to go to my home group, S.O.S. (Sober On the Sound). That guy I mentioned earlier became my sponsor and I began working the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous to the best of my ability. I have since done so, and continue to practice these principles in ALL my affairs on a daily basis.

I then moved into the Oxford House-Evergreen Terrace, in Everett, WA. I became very involved with my chapter, Chapter One, in Snohomish County. I was first elected Chapter Secretary, then Housing Services Chair, and in my last year and a half in WA, I was Chapter chair. I have tried to give back to Oxford House all that I can. I believe if I can help someone, somewhere, find clean and sober living, and then be able to be there for support to share the experience, strength, and hope with, it's a win-win situation no matter what!! I cannot lose if I stay involved in both my program of recovery and my Oxford House family.

I lived in WA State for 3 and half years of my sobriety. I have a great passion and gratefulness for Oxford House and I mentioned to Gino P., an Outreach Consultant in WA, that I would love to have the honor to work for Oxford House. Well, that dream came true in November of '05. Paul M. asked me to come aboard, and I have since moved to New Jersey where I hope I am doing justice for my chance to be a part of the best Organization I can imagine. For this I am truly grateful. Keep coming back. I will!!! GOD BLESS.

Shirley R.'s Story

My name is Shirley R. and on September 9th, 2006 I will have 5 years clean and sober. Before coming to Oxford House I was a woman looking for love in all the wrong places, and I simply did not want to deal with the reality of life.

I started using crack cocaine at the age of 30, all because of a relationship that did not go my way. You see, I had the habit of taking care of needy men. I endured verbal, sexual and emotional abuse. I did not care. I just did not want to be alone. After that relationship ended I was introduced to the world of drugs. I had found something to take my pain away. Needless to say, I got more than what I bargained for.

The world of drugs also got me doing things as a woman I never thought I would do and along with that it got me plenty of time behind bars. Even all of that was not enough to stop me from using. Until I met a probation officer who cared more about me than I did myself and he decided to send me to treatment. I went to treatment for 90 days and finally surrendered to my addiction and began to start loving and caring for myself.

While I was in treatment, it was suggested that I move to an Oxford House because it would be a safe and sober place and that I could learn how to live on life's terms. I was scared at first but the women I lived with showed me how to live and to accept things and to be honest. I became very involved in Oxford House my first month living in the house, both in my house and with the Chapter we belonged to. I became President of my house and Chairperson of my Chapter. Then, at the 2003 World Convention, I was elected to the Oxford House World Council.

I called Paul M. and asked him if I could open houses and he allowed me to that. I did this because of my gratitude to Oxford House and in order to help other people just like me live. I did this without pay. I was blessed when the opportunity came for the job of Outreach Worker and by God's grace I was hired. I now travel throughout the state of Virginia, opening houses and doing presentations and meeting wonderful people. I feel that God gave me this calling and this job was chosen for me. I will be going to school to become a substance abuse counselor in the fall. All of this is due to Oxford House. I would have never thought I would be here at this point in my life.

I was also blessed to get married to a man who also lived in an Oxford House and things just keep getting better. I try to show others that miracles do happen and if they just do the footwork, more blessings will come. It takes time and patience and a willingness to keep trying. Oxford House is a true blessing for those that really want recovery and I am forever grateful.

Kurtis T.'s Story

I became addicted to alcohol at the age of 12. I became addicted to crack at the age of 16. I spent 10 long hard years in the streets – homeless for the most part, unemployable, and completely hopeless. I found Oxford House in 1996 and fell in love with the concept. It worked for me and I became involved. I served as Housing Chair, Chapter Chair, and I was the first NC State Board Chair. I helped to open houses and did service work whenever I could. I got married in 1999 and moved out of Oxford House. Nine months later I suffered a 21-day relapse. I managed to stay clean for another 9 months and relapsed again, for 30 days this time. I came back and stayed clean for 6 months then relapsed again. I just couldn't get back into the swing of recovery. The shame and the guilt were killing me. I came back and stayed clean for 18 months and relapsed again on 6-1-02. This was the mother of all relapses. I lost my wife, my home, my car, my mind – everything.

Two days before Christmas in 2002, I was either going to kill myself or surrender to God's will. By God's grace, I surrendered myself completely to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I turned myself in to the authorities for some crimes I had committed and served 17 months in the NC Department of Corrections. Upon release, I thought I was going to a homeless shelter and I was going with an attitude of gratitude. However, my good friends Keith and Kathleen Gibson decided to take me into their home for a few days. They set up an interview at an Oxford House for me, gave me clothes to wear, food to eat, and plenty of Love.

Since then, Jesus has put my marriage back together. I am a father to my children. He has blessed me with my own Carpet and Vinyl Installation Business. I am Criminal Justice Outreach for NC State Oxford Houses. I'm a Den Leader for the Cub Scouts. I teach Children's Church and serve on the Usher Board. When I came home from prison, I didn't even get a chance to fill out a job application before I was blessed with a fulltime job. Since the day that I surrendered to Christ, I have been delivered from Cigarettes and so many other self-destructive habits. I place all my faith and confidence in Him. I have found satisfaction and peace in Him. The answer for me is Jesus.

Lori G.'s Story

When I was first asked to write my Oxford House story by our founder Paul M., a person that I truly honor...my reaction was typical of most addicts. I don't have a story...why would anyone care to know my experience...I do not have any profound reflections on life. That was the addict in my head, but the woman in recovery that I have become through the support and love of my Oxford family knows that is a LIE! I do have a story...people do call upon my experience...and I am a miracle.

I moved into the Oxford House – Asera in October 2002, *broken* by my addiction, not knowing how to be honest with others or myself and too afraid to be open-minded, but I had become willing. I came from a place that many of us have faced and over time became survivors instead of victims. I was living with sexual incest until I left home at 16, running into the arms of a man surrounded with drugs and alcohol, finding myself again with another man and I became trapped in the cycle of violence, and then again in another marriage and was introduced to new drugs and new ways to do them.

After 26 years of using my disease had progressed and very quickly the ground I stood on slipped away from me as if turning into sand below my feet. I lost my career; the car was repossessed, my children taken by the state. I lost my freedom as I went into treatment and while I was there I lost my home to a house fire and my husband went to prison. So *'broken'* is the word I will use to describe myself the day I walked into an Oxford house interview.

The process of producing a miracle began immediately. When I interviewed while transitioning from residential treatment I was terrified to try LIFE! I knew that I had failed at being a daughter, a mother, a wife, and a friend and had become unemployable. But the moment I was accepted into an Oxford House I felt wanted and needed and the healing process began. I will be forever grateful to that small group of women who did not know me but saw that I wanted a new way of life and blew on that tiny ember of self-esteem that was deep inside me to spark my flame of life into existence again.

Immediately after moving into Oxford House my children began to transition back to me and after a few short months they were returned home. I was very fearful of moving out on my own and would visit

my house for continued support often. I had gotten involved with service work for Oxford House and had a position in the chapter as secretary. When my term came up I was again full of fear to lose the accountability I had in place. My Oxford family recognized my need to stay involved and created an Alumni representative position in their chapter for me to hold. As every door closed another was opened to me, and with every opportunity my peers supported me into my self-esteem grew. The following year I was voted into a position as State Secretary and was blessed with the opportunity to come to my first Oxford House World Convention in Washington DC and also to participate in the Women's Conference. There I realized the true impact that Oxford House has made all around the world.

I have grown to become so many things today because of my experiences and service to Oxford House. I now am a loving daughter, a caring parent, a sponsor, a sponsee, a friend, a responsible member of society and employable. Today I work for the state with the woman that removed my children and the one that returned them helping other parents find recovery and always encouraging the opportunities that are available by choosing to live in Oxford House.

Today I no longer feel that I do not have a direction or purpose. I am part of a huge family that I am dedicated to. I have a direction to continue to assist in cultivating new houses for any addict seeking a new way of life. I have a purpose to preserve the Oxford House principles and traditions. Today I have come of AGE!

Paul S.'s Story

I was destined to become an addict long before I ever picked up my first drug. So in that sense, I started on a road that was unavoidably leading me to Oxford House twenty years before I had even heard of it. As a child, I knew I wanted to have as many life experiences as I could and for me, part of that intention meant I was planning to try every mind-altering substance there was to try. You don't find too many ten-year-olds that will tell you they plan to do heroin someday. Between what I then thought of as an adventurous attitude (but would later realize was a self-sabotaging one), and the fact that there was a lot of alcoholism in my family, I was a disaster waiting to happen. But I was ambitious and managed to get through high school and into a prestigious university before really starting to self-destruct. I was naïve too. I knew that there were alcoholics in my family and by then my mother had gotten sober through the help of a twelve-step program. I thought if I just avoided alcohol, I could use other drugs and avoid any negative consequences. That was one of many lies I told myself in order to rationalize my addiction.

Another lie I told myself was that I chose to do drugs because I wanted to try things most people were afraid to do. In actuality, I was the one who was afraid – afraid of living life on its terms like the rest of the world and afraid of being me. I was uncomfortable in my own skin and when I started doing drugs, I thought I had found that answer to all that. I wasn't running to drugs as much as I was running away from life and my own feelings. As soon as I went off to school, I became a hard-core stoner, and experimentation with lots of other drugs followed. It took me a few extra years to graduate because of my drug use and the depression that followed. By the time I did, I had tried heroin. Again, I was so naïve, and I really thought I could use this highly addictive drug and avoid the terrible fate of all the other junkies out there. I thought I was better than all of them. Of course I wasn't. I had the disease of addiction as bad as anyone else I knew and eventually I was shooting heroin and cocaine, unable to keep a job, and wearing out my welcome with family and friends everywhere I went. I was starting to see the worst consequences of addiction happening to the people around me, including finding my girlfriend dead from an overdose, but that still wasn't enough to stop me. I ended up going to jail in Virginia for possession. I had fallen a long way from the guy who was voted "Most Likely to Become President" in his high school senior class. Even then, I was unwilling to admit my own powerlessness over drugs and I still thought I could figure out how to manage my using if I just tried harder. I was on probation and randomly drug-tested. I was drinking all the time and even started to think I could outsmart the probation office. I was wrong again and they sent me back to jail. This time the reality of my situation finally hit me. I never thought I'd be back in jail again. I had abandoned someone I really cared about. I had lost everything and I was totally helpless to do anything about it. And I didn't have the slightest idea what to do about any of it. I had really hit rock bottom.

I was sent to a treatment unit inside the jail and fortunately, was finally miserable enough to approach the ideas of addiction and recovery with an appropriate level of open-mindedness and

willingness. I was still skeptical, but I decided to give it a chance. It was here, as I approached my release that I first heard about Oxford House. At first, I just wanted to find an alternative to them sending me to more residential treatment once I got out. I had been clean and sober for almost a year and I was anxious to start trying to live a life again. The judge really didn't want to let me go and only by agreeing to move into an Oxford House was I released. I found an Oxford House in Richmond that had an opening and was willing to accept me.

Right from the start, I was impressed with the Oxford House system. I remember thinking whoever came up with this must be a genius. The idea that you could set up an environment structured in a way that screw-up addicts and alcoholics like me could run the place themselves was unbelievable. But there I was, seeing it happen for myself. The inmates were really running the asylum. And they were doing a great job of it, too. We paid our bills on time, the house stayed clean, we treated each other respectfully (most of the time), and people were staying sober. The ones that didn't stay clean and sober were evicted immediately. I was really excited about what a wonderful thing Oxford House was. The most important thing Oxford House was and still continues to be is the reason that I'm here today with over five years clean and sober, and not back in jail or dead. I know that I couldn't have done that if I hadn't come to live in an Oxford House. Even though I was released from jail with almost a year clean, I still wasn't ready to live on my own and navigate life sober without the kind of support that Oxford House provided. I owe so much to my 12-step recovery program but I remember there were many days in my first few months in Oxford House, when I was shaky, and probably the only thing that kept my unwell mind from going to the idea of using, was knowing that the house wasn't going to tolerate it, and I'd be out on the street within a day. Soon though, the threat of negative consequences gave way to the power of service work as one of my main motivators for staying clean. Sometimes I think sobriety became a habit for me in spite of myself. Getting involved in being of service in my own house and then the local chapter was a way I sometimes say I tricked myself into staying clean. There were many times when I was neglecting my recovery program, maybe not doing enough step work or may not going to enough meetings. But on those days when I hardly felt like getting out of bed, let alone working on bettering myself, I usually had something to do for Oxford House. And sometimes, just showing up is enough. Knowing another addict was counting on me and getting outside of myself in that way has really been what has kept me clean and that's all because of Oxford House. After two and a half years of living in Oxford house, I left with a strong foundation of recovery, ready to take all the different things I had learned there and apply them in the rest of my life.

But the blessings Oxford House has brought to me didn't end with my residency. Oxford House gave me a sense of belonging to something greater than myself. Unlike most of what I did during my active addiction, this was something it felt good to be a part of. I began attending chapter and state workshops and conventions. I'll never forget the first time I met Paul M., the founder of Oxford House. It felt like I was meeting Bill W., the founder of AA. When I attended my first world convention, in Seattle, I truly realized I was a part of an amazing thing that was growing worldwide. I continued attending world conventions and learning more and more about Oxford House every time. Then, a few months after I became an alumnus of Oxford House, I was hired to be the state coordinator for Virginia. I never thought I would have the honor of working for Oxford House. Now I travel around the state opening new houses, making presentations, and training residents. The hours are crazy and sometimes there's so much to do, it can be overwhelming, but I always feels very lucky to have been given this opportunity. I have so much gratitude for how Oxford House saved my life. Now I'm able to express that gratitude all the time in being of service to Oxford House and all the alcoholics and addicts that are fortunate enough to find one. And there are so many more suffering alcoholics and addicts that need Oxford house, so it's nice to be a part of expanding this great program. I have never done anything in my life so rewarding, where I new I was really helping people and I could see the results every day. I have returned to school and hope to earn a graduate degree in sociology. I don't know what lies in store after that or whether I will continue to work for Oxford House. I do know that I will always be a part of Oxford House and whatever good things are coming in my life, I have Oxford House to thank for all of it.

Leann W.'s Story

My name is Leann and I am an alcoholic and addict. My first meeting was in November 1984 and I just celebrated my 5th year clean in July 2006. It took me 17 years to get one year of SOBRIETY. I always knew I was an alcoholic. My first drink was at 13 years old and I wanted more immediately. It took the pain away. It suddenly made me feel O.K. I was no longer that little girl on the outside looking in.

I can honestly remember having low self-esteem in 2nd grade; that's 7 years old! Needless to say, once I could escape and numb those feelings – I had found my calling.

I had tried every drug, every way at least once by the time I was 19 years old. I got addicted to crystal meth (we used to call it crank then) at 21 years old. I had found my drugs of choice – alcohol and ANY kind of amphetamine I could find. This included over the counter drugs, anything at all. I would be “UP” all day and then come down at night with alcohol. I could never face a day at work without speed. I really can't remember ever being “speed free” at work except during my two pregnancies. They were such miserable days too.

At 30 years old I went into my 3rd or 4th rehab. Immediately coming out – I met my “husband to be”. We were “in love.” (I think he had about 4 months). We got married 11 months later (DO NOT DO THIS!) About a year after our son was born in 1993 we decided to drink together. (I had been eating speed the whole year after my son was born though- but I was functional, so it was OK!) Well from 1994 until 2001 it was the blind leading the blind in our house. My marriage was a joke, but we enabled each other – it was PERFECT! We would drink every night and continue to live like everything was OK. After my daughter was born in 1999 I found a diet center that gave you as many pills as you needed every two weeks for \$60.00. All you had to do was tell them you were still hungry and they slowly increased your daily dosage. Toward the end of my using I was eating about 15-20 pills (37.5 mg each) of phentermine a day and drinking about ½ gallon of vodka in two days. I was crazy! I was paranoid and psychotic. I was the meanest, most emotional woman ever. I was hallucinating. All I was doing was running around in circles every day. I wouldn't go to sleep for 4 of 5 days at a time. When I would run out of pills then life stopped and I crashed for a couple days – but I was up and ready to go when I could go back and get more pills. (You couldn't go back before the two weeks were up)

To make a long story short, in July 2001 I went into my last rehab to date. When I walked out of Warwick Manor – something changed. I suddenly realized that I couldn't blame anyone for my problems – it was all me. It took me 9 months to withdrawal from the speed. It's an emotional withdrawal and I cried and cried at a moments notice. By this time I was a single parent trying to cope with it. The cravings were gone – but the hard part was living! I felt less then and simply didn't want to be a parent to a 7 year old and a 1 year old. But GOD got me through it!

When I was three months clean I applied for an accounting job listed in the paper for a “non-profit in Silver Spring Maryland”. They called me after receiving my resume and told me that the organization was Oxford House, Inc. (I had lived in a house for about 3 days in 1991 but had totally forgotten about this until about 3 years ago. I was so toxic.) I explained that I knew what an Oxford House was and they asked me if I was in the program. The rest you could say is history. I've been working for Oxford House for five years now and not found it necessary to use. GOD opened this door for me and I feel like the luckiest woman in the world. I am truly blessed. During this past 5 years – I have turned my life around. Today I have a great relationship with GOD, working the steps every day, sponsor people, but I still have a lot to learn. Thank goodness this is a journey. Today I can look at people in the eye and not feel ashamed. I'm a good mother and my ex and I get along fairly well today. (He is also clean!) What a blessing! There is no question in my mind that if I didn't get this job at OHI, I probably would be dead now. For five years I have asked GOD to come into heart and give me more and more faith in HIM. He has answered my prayers. You see I always “believed” in GOD but today I TRUST HIM. There is a difference. I am teaching my children to TRUST HIM. I do not take credit for this. This is all HIS doing. I have so much more to learn about myself and I look forward to doing the steps all over again. I want to stay green and remember the pain. You see I never really lived in an Oxford House but Oxford House saved my life.

Judy M.'s Story

I started using drugs at a very early age, around 14. I was married and had my first child at 16, my second child at 20. I drank and smoked pot through both pregnancies and continued to introduce myself to more and more different drugs throughout my life. I tried just about everything but heroin. As my children grew up, it was “normal” to see mom doing lines, drinking, and smoking pot constantly. It was also “normal” to see pot plants growing in between the tomato plants, the spare bedroom to have a clothes line in it with pot hanging and drying, and a constant flow of “friends” coming and going at all hours of the day and night. When we went anywhere in the car, the bong pipe was right there between the seats. When I

did sleep, the bong was right there on the headboard, loaded and ready to go for my first bong hit of the day before I even rolled out of bed. I did manage to work at a job where I could take my small brown bottle of cocaine to work with me. The hours were perfect for me as I stocked the bakery department of the local chain store from 1:00 AM to 6:00 AM. That gave me most of the day to rest in the sun after getting the kids off to school and gear up for an evening of partying, more cocaine, then off to work again.

I had a few moments of clarity after visiting my sister who lived here in Washington (my home was in California) and thought it would be good for me to move my kids and myself up here to Washington and change my ways. I did make the move but I didn't change my ways! In fact, things got worse. I was a chronic cokehead and was introduced to something new called "METH." It was a lot stronger than coke and it took a lot less of it to keep me "up" for days on end! I had found my new love. The same friends who introduced me to this new drug also taught me how to make it. For years I traveled around with this group with our "portable lab" renting nice vacation homes in remote areas of California, Nevada, Oregon and Washington State to set up shop and "cook." I would send the kids down to California to visit their dad and grandmother there during Spring break, Christmas vacation and summer break. Sometimes they had to stay longer if I wasn't able to get back to town or my sister would take care of them for me. After the other people decided to go back to California to carry on their business, I was of course, going to find a way to carry on the business here so I shared the "recipe" with a family member and it was off to the races again!!! I was living with my family and cooking up a storm at their remote Battleground home. Eventually the SWAT team interrupted our sessions and some of the family had to go to prison for a while. I lucked out that time and my brother-in-law took the rap for us all.

I moved around from house to house and from boyfriend to boyfriend. Eventually I found myself a real nice boyfriend (David) and, as a bonus, his family liked to get high just like me! By this time my kids were getting high right along with me because I introduced them to drugs. An addict's mind doesn't work anywhere near normal and I told myself it was better to have my kids at home getting high with me because they were going to do it anyway! So, as my addiction progressed so did theirs. Eventually they found mates of their own and we were one big happy addicted family! We had moved out of David's family's house and were staying in a trailer in the driveway of a friend's house. Both the kids had lives of their own and were on their way to making me a grandma!

I had gotten very sick with blood poisoning and was in the hospital for 2 weeks and with only 2 visits from David during that time, I knew we were over. For 2 weeks the hospital put me through every test in the book and couldn't find out why I was sick. They had given up any hope of finding a cure for my blood poisoning, I should have died from it but someone up there had a plan for me. I had very badly decayed back teeth from all the meth I had been doing and my sister and brother-in-law told the doctors to check my teeth. They did, and the dentist pulled 9 back teeth and I was released from the hospital the next day! No fever and no more bugs in my blood! I had actually prayed to get better and promised I wouldn't do any more drugs if I got better. Well, I got better but didn't keep my promise. It was all because David had left me shortly after I got out of the hospital. He was always totally against IV drug users so, my sick mind decided to punish him by starting to use the needle to consume my meth.

My daughter Heather, who was ready to give birth at any moment, took me in and I made her life a living hell. She was trying to be a good clean new mommy and I was doing more and more drugs in her house than was imaginable. I tried to stop but couldn't; the needle had a hold on me. That was the beginning of the end! Eventually I was banned from my daughter's house and was living in a car someone had given to me. The guy I was with at that time drove the car to a remote place in Yacolt and we passed out. Next thing I knew we were getting woke up by the police! The car was mine and all the drugs and paraphernalia they found in it were mine too. And of course all the needle marks on me were a sure sign of me being an addict. So, off to jail I went. This was my first time in jail and after spending 15 days there I got out and went right back to the drugs. Only I had decided to quit using the needle and start smoking it because that was the way David liked to do it and I was trying very hard to get him back in my life. He started to supply me with all the meth I needed to help me pay off my court costs and fines. I avoided the courts and my probation officer as long as I could but, they caught up with me one night riding in a friend's car with bad tabs and lots of glass ware, pipes, pot, and a lot of little and big baggies of meth all broken up and ready to be sold. I gave the police a false name; I told them my name was Amanda Kay Ayers (AKA). After about an hour trying to figure out who I really was as I sat handcuffed in the back seat of their car, I finally told them. All that time my friend, who was driving, was in her car parked behind the police car.

The police searched her car after they found out who I was and found all of the drugs and other stuff in there. She had not been in trouble with the police before so they let her go, and off to jail I went again!

I was looking at some mighty stiff sentences because of what I got caught with. Again, I prayed and promised to stop doing drugs if I didn't go to prison, and again someone had a plan for me. I went to court a couple of days after I got put in jail, expecting to be sentenced for all kinds of stuff and instead I was exonerated of all charges because the police had left my friend in her car alone while they interrogated me. So my new case got thrown out of court. BUT, I still had to answer to the DOC for not complying with the court orders from my first charges so; I stayed in jail for 9 months. During that time my daughter brought my granddaughter Ashlynn into the jail to visit me and it just about killed me when she asked why I was there and why she couldn't hug me?! I told myself at that time it was time to grow up and be a grandmother to my grandkids. But, of course when I did get out of jail, I went right back to smoking the meth. I had to comply with DOC this time or else so I stopped smoking pot because someone told me I could still do the meth and cover it up when I had to go UA. The cover-ups didn't work and I kept getting dirty UA's when I did show up for them.

I finally had it with all the headaches of trying to cover up my meth use and went in to see my probation officer and told him "I need help!" I told him I had given up everything but the meth and I needed help or to be locked up forever to keep me away from it. He gave me the option of going back to jail or going to inpatient treatment for 30 days, then to John Owens recovery house for 60 days, then he wanted me to move into this place called "Oxford House" for as long as it took to keep my clean. I agreed and was going to jump through his hoops to keep myself out of jail. I even told my brother-in-law to bury some of the last batch we made so I could have some good stuff to do when I got out of treatment. But, something happened about 3 weeks into my treatment program; it was like a light bulb had just come on in my sick little brain! I understood some about the disease I had and didn't want to have it anymore! I made a conscious decision to really try to stay away from the drugs and anyone who used them (which was just about all of my family!).

So, I went to the recovery house and then moved in to the Lavina Oxford house in early July 1997. The women there really cared about me and supported me in every way they possibly could. I was voted in as house Secretary right away and started to feel good about myself. There was this woman who everyone in Oxford House was always talking about; her name was Myrna Brown. I felt like I had known her forever when I did get to meet her. She came by the house looking for volunteers for putting on a workshop and dance and of course we all know how Myrna likes to pull in the newcomers right away and get them doing service work right off the bat! So, off I went and the rest is history! I was hooked on Oxford House and what it did for so many people and what it was doing for me. I got involved in Chapter when I became house President and from there I got involved at the State level. I had a good job, found a boyfriend in Oxford House and decided to move out together. I stayed very involved at the State level as the Board made a position for me as Alumni Coordinator.

When the time came for Myrna to retire I applied for the position of an Outreach Representative. I was second choice but I am still here today in my 7th year of spreading the word of Oxford House and finding houses to open so everyone who has suffered from the disease of addiction can have a safe place to call home. I would not be clean and sober today if it weren't for Oxford House and I know that in my heart. I touched so many lives throughout my life in such a negative way by doing, making and selling drugs. Oxford House is in my heart and soul and has provided me with the opportunity to touch so many lives in such a positive way. I had to live through the Hell of addiction so I could understand what people are going through with their own addictions and remember where I came from. I truly believe this is the plan God had for me!

Joe C.'s Story

"You're accepted Congratulations" those words rang dear to me that day more than 14 years ago and they still do today. I had made a life changing decision by interviewing at an Oxford House and I didn't even know it. My time at a long-term residential treatment program for substance abuse had ended. After years of abusing myself with alcohol and drugs (specifically Crystal Methamphetamine), a failed marriage, losing countless jobs, dodging creditors, alienating friends, family, and all those close to me, I had finally found a place I would come to call home; Oxford House Salt Lake. I never would have guessed an

organization that allowed self admitted alcoholics and drug addicts to manage the day-to-day operations of a clean and sober house could have such a powerful influence on my life.

The house I was moving into wasn't spectacular by any means. It was painted green with brown shutters and was very unassuming in a residential neighborhood known as Foster Village. The house was just a few minutes drive to the back gate of Pearl Harbor; something that made my roommate very happy as he was an active duty sailor pulling shore duty. He was also the house coordinator, which made our weekly house meetings very interesting as he would use his military bearing to point out the smallest infraction of the household chores. One of the other housemates was a gentleman named Kelly P. He is the man who not only helped move me out of the residential treatment and into Oxford House Salt Lake, but he also loaned me money for my rent and deposit. I had just started working and was unable to pay my rent much less the required deposit. Kelly loaned me the money and good-humoredly said "don't worry, I know where you live." I believe there is a special place in heaven for Kelly P.

I stayed at Oxford House Salt Lake for about nine months before moving to Oxford House Lusitana. It was a new house for men, but it had been a struggling female house in the preceding months before my arrival. With the help of the Housing Service Committee, and the local Oxford House Chapter, the new male house thrived. We had lived at that location for nearly a year when the landlord told us she was moving back into the property and we would have 45 days to vacate the premises! This was a significant challenge for me as I was previously able to move into two existing Oxford Houses but I had never sought to open a brand new house. I remember feeling scared and overwhelmed when I called the Oxford House Corporate office to seek guidance. I was given a pep talk and was assured that I could do this. The key advice from the Corp. Office was to "remember you are part of a family." I wrote down what information I could remember so I could share with my housemates. Later that evening the 8 of us sat in our house meeting. I retold of my phone call to Oxford House Inc. Then we began to talk and talk and share and then agreed that rather than go our separate ways, we would pull together and find a house. Our decision reenergized all of us. With a 45-day notice to move looming over our head we began to meet each evening to discuss our progress on locating a new property. It seemed our biggest stumbling block was convincing a landlord that allowing 8 adult men in recovery from alcohol, and other illicit substances, would have a positive pay-off for them. We began rehearsing our lines for prospective landlords and honing our salesmanship skills. We felt confident that as long as we conveyed the Oxford House concept and assured the prospective landlords that Oxford Houses pay their bills on time, we would be successful. We even added a touch of soft-soap and pointed out that each new Oxford House helps society deal effectively with people who are new to substance abuse recovery.

Our teamwork paid big dividends as we secured a house in Kapahulu near Diamond Head. It was a five-minute walk to the local community college a ten-minute walk to Waikiki beach, and 2 blocks away a Church held AA meetings three times a week. We moved into our new house and named it Oxford House Iwalani that in Hawaiian means bird from heaven.

Oxford House Iwalani was my home for nearly six years. The house rarely had a vacancy. While the location was ideal, it was not the only draw. The house had a solid reputation of being a serious house for recovery. The seriousness of the house was always on display at the weekly house meeting. The members knew the house was able to function best when there was good communication amongst the house members. The meeting always opened with a thirty-minute smoking rule. We never allowed smoking in the common area, but on meeting night we could smoke thirty minutes after the meeting started, and could smoke thirty minutes after the meeting ended. This allowed us to get down to business right a way and then allowed us time after the meeting to relax and to share stories and catch up after a busy week.

I lived with many different people from many walks of life at that location. At Iwalani at one time or another we had roommates who were a teacher, a fireman, lawyer, actor, former pro golfer, taxi driver and countless individuals who were getting re-started with their lives. We also had people from every ethnic background imaginable. We had local Hawaiian folks, people from the mainland, a couple of guys from South Korea and a gentleman from as far away as Kenya. However, my two favorite roommates were a pair of taxi drivers. One was from Iran and the other was from Chicago. One was Muslim and the other Jewish. They became fast friends. They would go to 12-step meetings together, play cards, watch TV, have meals together and occasionally one would affectionately call the other the great Satan – much to the delight of the rest of us. Those two men taught the rest of us that in recovery all things are possible.

I moved out of Oxford House Iwalani in December 2000. My stay was an experience I will always cherish. It opened my eyes to a world in which one alcoholic indeed helps another alcoholic live a clean and sober life. I learned that giving a hand up is more effective than giving a handout but at Oxford House Iwalani we did both. My stay at Oxford House helped me to grow in all areas of my life. For the first time in my life I was gainfully employed at a job that was both challenging and fulfilling. I paid my bills on time no longer dodging creditors. I worked my recovery program, took some college night classes, became involved in service work at Oxford House and I even had the good fortune to attend the July 1993 Oxford House Chapter Meeting where I met a woman who would later become my wife. All these things were possible because I was clean and sober.

Today I approach my 17th year of sobriety. If I reflect on the trying times of my first few years in recovery, the divorce of my first marriage, the constant search for a meaningful job, my distrust of most people, my whole discontent and unhappiness – I realize that Oxford House and the people who lived there helped get me through some of the toughest periods in my life. My foundation for recovery was created in Oxford House. I firmly believe were it not for Oxford House, I would not have the successes I have today. With Oxford House, learning to live a fulfilling drug and alcohol-free life in recovery is possible and in recovery all things are possible.

Kari M.'s Story

Where to begin? A little about me. I am an ex-offender, addict and recovering prostitute. Before coming to Oxford I was using the prison system as a revolving door (11½ years). I went to SAFF (treatment behind the walls) 3 times before I really wanted to change. On Nov. 18, 2000 I was once again arrested for stealing another car and I knew that day that I was either going to die or go to jail. My God saw fit for me to live not die, and I made a vow to do things different from that point on. So when I got into Dallas Co. jail, I started writing to go into the substance abuse program there. I was accepted in January of 2001, and started working on Kari.

I then went to court and the D.A. wanted me to get 25 years minimum or LIFE. Why? The D.A. accurately pointed out that I had 6 felonies in the state of Texas and 2 in Ohio. I prayed and went open plea before my judge (Judge Cruetzot). He told me the problem was that I could do time and I needed to learn how to live life on life's terms. So he sent me to SAFF [Substance Abuse Felony Program] unit of the Texas Correctional System for the 3rd time and put me on 5 years probation on top of my parole. While at SAFF I did just that, I worked hard on myself. I worked on my abuse issues and learned a lot about Kari and how my behaviors played into my lifestyle I continued to live in. Also, I am dually diagnosed (bipolar disorder plus addiction).

After leaving SAFF I went to a TCC (transitional treatment center) for 60-90 days. I did that and my counselor brought up Oxford Houses to me. They had told me about it the last time but of course I wasn't ready and you see where I ended up once again. This time I wanted my life to be different, so I called Oxford House – Catalpa and set up an interview. On the night of the interview I told them everything about me and I just knew they wouldn't want someone like me in their nice house. When I got off the bus at the Salvation Army I had like 15 minutes before I had to be in, so I called back to the house and Laurie (now an alumni in GA.) told me I had a home to come to. I sat down on the ground and cried because I couldn't believe they actually wanted me there after hearing what a bad person I was. I then prayed all the way in the building because I know that was my God working in my life. I moved in and my life has been one blessing after another. I was determined to do things totally different than before so I began to get involved. I started with becoming an officer in my house, working with housing committee, then becoming chapter chair. And later I became one of the members to help start the Texas State Association (state board). I now will have 6 years drug and crime-free on Nov. 19, 2006. Who would have thought? To all the newcomers, no one can work harder for your recovery than you. I have a saying, "How Bad Do You Want It?"

Get active in your recovery, my house will tell you that my biggest pet peeve in Oxford is how some people just live in a house and don't participate and become active. For me, It's not me just living in a house, when I did my 12 steps I learned the true meaning to the saying, "You have to give it away in order to keep it." I have to give back what was so freely given to me!!!! So a challenge is to see how many members will get active in recovery, and within your house, chapter and state level.

Debbie D.'s Story

My journey to Oxford House started with 30 years of insanity. I am from Baltimore and had a wonderful childhood until the sudden death of my father. His suicide left a hole in my heart and soul that I tried to fill with alcohol, drugs, men, money and whatever made me not feel the pain of his death. During the early years of my using, I was able to go to college, buy a home, maintain good paying jobs and live a comfortable life. But my disease progressed to the point where I lost the home and the good paying jobs. Jail and institutions became my home throughout my journey to Oxford House. To avoid ridicule from my family, I would admit myself to inpatient drug treatment. To avoid possible suspension from work, I would admit myself to outpatient treatment. I continued to avoid other things like paying taxes, car notes, rent, family and friends. The shame and guilt of the kind of person I had become forced me into a world of not just using drugs but also using people. I didn't know how to live without drugs. And just like my father who self-destructed, I was well on my way.

Drug dealing then became what I thought was a good idea. That just ended up with having my house raided and me getting charged with 5 felonies and being detained for weeks in jail. I was facing 25 years in prison but received three years probation. What a relief! I then picked up where I left off – using and abusing. My 30 year run finally came to an end when I found myself evicted again but this time with no where to go. There seemed to be a moment of clarity as I watched what little I had out on the curb in front of my apartment house. I finally realized that something needed to change – that something was me.

My family was not receptive to letting me move in with them but they would get me help. It was suggested that I get into treatment again – which I did. This time I was more than willing to get help and stop using. While in treatment, Narcotics Anonymous would bring meetings in for us. It was then that I heard about Oxford House. But, of course, I thought I knew what was best for me and wanted to go into transitional housing that was available through the treatment center. However, they did not have any beds open and it was suggested that I interview with the area Oxford House. I was reluctant since I thought I needed more structure. The bottom line was that I was scared – scared of leaving treatment, scared that I couldn't live somewhere without strict supervision, just scared to live life without drugs. My counselors kept telling me that I needed to have faith. Well, faith and much gratitude got me through my interview and acceptance into the Emack Oxford House.

Living in an Oxford House reinforced and reestablished a lot of things that I was not able to do or unwilling to do when I was using. Things like paying rent and working. Things like learning how to live without using drugs. Things like becoming a responsible person. Things like developing healthy friendships and relationships. While I resided at Emack Oxford House, I started working for Oxford House Inc. What a blessing! As a result of living in Emack and working for OHI, I was willing to help open more Oxford Houses especially for women.

The 30-year-old hole in my heart has been filled with much love. Now I have my biological family back in my life and I have been blessed with my new family – My Oxford Family. GOD has been with me throughout this journey to Oxford House and I am so grateful. My life is good. I have been able to keep a job, buy and pay off a car note, pay taxes, complete and receive my Master's degree and, most important, stay clean and serene for over 5 ½ years. With God's help, I pray and have faith that my life will only get better. I have Oxford House living and my Oxford House family to thank for helping me start and being a part of this new journey.

Tony P.'s Story

I started drinking at an early age. By the time I was in high school, I was getting drunk on a regular basis and experimenting with many drugs. It wasn't until I was married and divorced with two children that I took a hard look at my addictions. I had gotten numerous Driving While Intoxicated, Hit and Runs, and other misdemeanor charges throughout the years. A bartender at one of my drinking holes would later in life tell me stories of my drinking and how one day, after 30 double whiskey and cokes I would still walk around talk like I hadn't had a drink all day. I had been in and out of a number of treatment centers, both inpatient and outpatient. One day I was driving after being up for 36 hours on one of my drinking binges and smashed my pickup into the back of a UPS truck. The next day I asked one of my co-workers to take me to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting.

I would get a week clean and relapse. Then I would get three weeks and then relapse, 30 days and relapse and on and on. After about six months of in and out of sobriety my sponsor and I had a serious talk and he mentioned he had helped Myrna Brown open the first women's Oxford House in the state and that Oxford House might be a good thing for me. I didn't like the idea. It sounded so much like a treatment center or "halfway" house. But with my sponsor's suggestion, I called the phone number and went for an interview.

I was accepted into the Silver Star Oxford House and things started changing immediately. I stated working with my sponsor and the 12 steps. For the first six months, I was on that "Pink Cloud" everyone talks about. I got involved with Oxford House and AA. After six months sobriety, I got a job working with computers, which was something I had wanted to do for a long time. I started dating my ex-wife and resumed my relationship with my children. After a year with Silver Star, I was so impressed with the Oxford House Concept and thankful, I helped open the Laurelwood Oxford House. Then after two years, my Ex-wife asked me to come home and I got a government job with an office and a view as a Computer Systems Analyst. Things were really looking up. I had everything I wanted. Everything I needed. And it just wasn't enough.

I wish I could say that life has been wonderful but after a year back with my ex-wife, I stopped working the steps, I stopped calling my sponsor, working with others and stopped all my service work. Work and Family life had demanded more of my time. Up to this point I had primarily been a drunk. I wanted an escape but it wasn't alcohol I wanted. The Big Book tells us "Resentment is the "number one" offender. It destroys more alcoholics than anything else. From it stems all forms of spiritual disease." Hindsight is always 20/20. I got resentments over someone in the program and I became bitter. I only ended up hurting myself and loved ones around me. As I was driving home one day from work, I saw a drug deal go down and I pulled my car over and bought whatever it was he was selling. It was Crack Cocaine and I was instantly hooked.

In eight short months after the first hit of Crack, I lost my job, my ex-wife booted me out again, and I had lost all the material possessions to the dealer or pawn shop. I was homeless, penniless and desperate. I slept in a storage room 3 feet by 6 feet. I kept telling myself that I had been down here before and I could pull myself up again. But I couldn't, every \$20 I earned I had the best intentions for the money but it ultimately went to the dealer. I remember everyone talking about the "yets". This is something that hasn't happened to us "Yet" and that our drinking and using hadn't brought us to that "Yet". I wish I had heeded those wonderful clichés from AA. They say bad things come in threes and this is what happened to me. First I was arrested for a possession charge downtown and sentenced to drug court. Second, in desperation for the drug, I stole from a friend of mine and she rightfully pressed felony theft charges. And last, I was driving home with my brother. I had been drinking and smoking crack earlier that day. Although I had a license I did not have insurance. I should not have been on the road. I was in a crash that killed an 11-year old boy. Had it not been for the testimonies of the drivers behind me, I would still be in prison today for vehicular manslaughter.

It was then I decided to take my own life. There was no way I should live while others die because of my choices. One night I took all the pills I had and became sick and hospitalized for about a week. Isolation was my only friend. I didn't want to get clean. I didn't want to keep using. I just wanted all the pain to end. The outpatient treatment center and my counselor kept encouraging me to keep moving forward but it wasn't until the Judge from drug court gave me an ultimatum that I really started to try. He said either get and stay clean or go to jail for a year. I went back to my counselor and we came up with a plan. I would get 30 days clean again and apply at an Oxford House. It seemed so simple. It was the missing key.

I was accepted back into the house I had helped open up five years previously. They didn't have a bed available but I convinced them to let me sleep on the couch until one was available. I slept on the couch and floor for over a month while paying my fair share and I was happy to be there. I started working the steps again, got involved and was going to meeting after meeting.

It hasn't been easy this time around. Things haven't come my way as easily and as fast as they did the first time. I made a deal with myself. I would give it two years and if things did not get better then I could always go back to being miserable. There were a number of times I wanted to give in and finish the

job. But, every day, every month I could look back and see that things were getting better little by little. I became involved. I helped open a number of houses in my area. Over the last five years we have gone from 13 houses to 26. I have held every house position, chapter position and was the state chairman for a year. I currently sit on the world council.

For me there was a combination of things that had to take place in order for me to get and stay clean. AA, NA, CA and Oxford House are the biggest parts of me staying sober. My ex-wife and I are dating again. I see my kids' everyday. I no longer value material things the way I used to. I help wherever I can and sometimes I do too much. I'm still trying to find that balance in life. I go to meetings all the time, AA CA and NA alike. I still live in the Oxford House I helped open three years ago. My friends kid around about how I use Oxford House for the cheap rent. Not true. I would pay double to stay around other recovering people. I suppose in some eyes, I should be ready to move on but when I think about it, there is absolutely no reason for me to leave. Oxford House is my family. If we need more beds, I'll stand ready to help open another house.

Robert J.'s Story

The first Oxford House outside of the Washington D.C. area was in the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania. It was started with the help of Rep. Rooney from the area and the goal was that, if it could be sustained, other houses would be opened in the area. I joined the house in March of 1988, just a couple of months after it began. I was looking for a safe haven. I had had a history of alcohol and drug related problems as well as a failed track record of trying to stop the insanity. By the time I found the house, I had just been released from my second rehab and had a history of grand mal seizures associated with my drinking. I had spent 9 years from my first inpatient detox in 1979 battling this disease with no avail. At the end of my stay at the rehab, they had suggested some form of alternative housing. There was a halfway house in Allentown, but it was filled at the time. The nearest facility was in Reading, an hour away, and by some miracle I had kept my job by the slimmest of threads, and didn't want either the commute or the restrictions that a halfway house entailed. I saw a flier for the Oxford House in Bethlehem at a meeting. Nobody knew a lot about it but it sounded exactly like the kind of place I was looking for. I was afraid that I would once again fail if I was to live on my own and even though living with a bunch of other recovering drunks wasn't my ideal scenario, I knew I had to do something and do it quickly.

The house was located on the South side of Bethlehem, near Lehigh University. The area consisted of older homes with many converted to student apartments. In one direction was a lower income area spotted with small storefronts and bars where it looked like you could get into trouble easily. The other way was the University with eateries and more bars. The Oxford House at 426 Carlton Avenue was going to be our oasis in the desert.

There were 7 of us and, as with any Oxford House, the group represented a rather broad cross section of society; various backgrounds, ethnicities, and histories of problems with addictions. I think we were all looking for a safe place to hide out while we figured out this recovery thing. Jack was the unofficial leader in the house. He was the treasurer and at that time had sole control of house finances. Ralph and Van were both retired. Acie was wheelchair-bound due to an accident that took off his one leg above the knee. Steve, Frank and I were all in our thirties and worked at various jobs.

Everything was smooth for a while. I paid my rent, did my chores and went to meetings. Then our treasurer left with the contents of our checking account. At the ensuing house meeting, Frank and I were volunteered to take over the books. We made the provision that all checks required 2 signatures and started the long haul back to getting our finances in order. We managed to turn things around and towards the end of that first year we had made a deal with the landlord that if we fixed up the house, he would pay for materials and we would split the cost of installing wall-to-wall carpeting. We put a lot of time and effort making the house more than just a place to crash. We scraped the old layers of wallpaper off, spackled the cracks and repainted the entire downstairs. We bought some better furniture and a large screen TV for the living room. Things were looking good, but we never forgot the main purpose of this experiment – if we made it, we were going to expand. By the second year we had enough funds to consider opening an additional house. We were introduced to a gentleman who owned and leased some houses out as mental health group homes. He happened to have an available house and we decided to open the Broad Street Oxford house. He was a bit leery in the beginning due to the makeup of his new tenants. Mental

health was one thing, but alcoholics and addicts? We signed the lease and that started our relationship with the owner. He now owns several houses that we lease from him and is so pleased with us as tenants that he once told me that if at any time we ever needed another house he would go out and buy one for us to use.

Don, a newer member of the original house, and I moved into the new house. We had made a deal and had gotten eight bedrooms worth of beds, dressers and nightstands from a used furniture dealer along with some living and dining room furniture. They delivered everything into a big pile in the front room and Don and I spend the first couple of days rearranging everything. By this time, news of the Oxford house was spreading. We had contacted rehabs and halfway houses, telling them we were expanding and, if they had any candidates, we were available. We soon started getting more requests that we had room for. I think the concept of self-governing recovery houses was a great draw. People who weren't thrilled with the prospect of a halfway house were happy to find an alternative.

By the middle of 1989 we had pooled the resources of both houses and were ready to open another house. We had been talking to some women in the program who wondered why there wasn't a similar housing option for them. It took some doing but we finally found four women who were willing to try living together. The Broad Street landlord found us a house in Allentown and we decided to open the first women's recovery house in the area. It didn't take long for the word to get out and the house filled up. At almost the same time we opened the third men's house on Chew Street in Allentown. Again, Don and I moved to the new Chew Street house to give it some sense of stability. By this time we were getting to be old hands at this.

By the winter of 1989 we had grown from an experiment to four houses. They were full and thriving. We had planted the seeds of what is now a system of 24 houses in the area.

Though we put time and effort into establishing the houses, I, for one, gained much more from the experience. When Frank and I were asked to take over the finances of a broke house in 1988, I wasn't sure where it would lead, or if we could even survive. I went to the Oxford House to find a safe place where I could live until I was capable of living on my own. I found that and so much more. People put their trust in me for the first time in a long time. I had to accept my share of the responsibility of maintaining the house. I had to learn how to balance a checkbook for the first time. People actually gave and trusted me with their money. I had to learn to get along with other people. That everything didn't have to go my way. Sadly, I also learned that not everyone in an Oxford House makes it.

These days there aren't many people living in the houses who know who I am and I don't really mention what we accomplished almost 20 years ago, but when I hear someone in the meetings mention they live in an Oxford House, my ears perk up a little and I thank God I was given the opportunity to maybe, just maybe, do a little good in the world and give back what was given me.

Kathleen G.'s Story

My name is Kathleen G. and I am an addict. I am also in recovery thanks to a twelve-step recovery program, Oxford House and my Higher Power. I have been clean and sober for 13 years. I wasn't an abuse child but growing up was hard. I think it's hard for almost everyone. Except for being a rather overly social girl, I never got in much trouble. Like a lot of people I started drinking, partying, and experimenting with drugs and alcohol in my early teens. My father was a professor and my mother a full time university administrator, I was the youngest of four children. I attended a small private school. My parents were probably a little too permissive but they were loving and supportive. In my household was around every day.

At the end of every day alcohol was used to relax and unwind. I learned very early to use things outside my body to help me cope with my feelings. When I was 15 we lived in London where my father was taking a sabbatical. This is where I had my first blackout from drinking alcohol. I had been drinking hard liquor for several months and everything just seemed to escalate until I no longer was in control. One night I woke up in a train station I have never been in before. I wore that I'd never let myself get in that position again.

During my college years at UNC Greensboro I used alcohol nightly. I always had to have a drink before any social occasions. Occasionally I was smoking marijuana or snorting cocaine. I became very

depressed, but of course never associated it with my drinking. I was never sure how I managed to graduate with a Bachelors Degree in Social Work.

After college I lived in Chapel Hill, NC and going out partying was a normal way of life. I began dating a man who physically abused me for three years. When looking back it is hard to imagine how or why I stayed in that relationship so long. I started using cocaine more and more often to numb the pain and so began a life of insanity. On my 28th birthday I got my first DWI. My drug use began to escalate. Snorting cocaine turned into smoking crack. Very shortly after I began smoking crack I started stealing money from my job. Six months later I got caught. I had lost everything. I was being prosecuted by the NC State Attorney General's Office.

My parents had no idea that I was having problems until they got a call from me in a treatment center. I really shocked and scared my whole family. I learned a lot in treatment and was exposed to the 12-steps. I thought I'd go through treatment and get right back to life or what was left of my life, maybe attend an occasional 12-step meeting and be ok. It didn't work out that way.

I relapsed in thirty days. I knew when I went to court if I was to have a chance to not go to prison I needed to stay clean. I had nowhere clean and sober to live. My family really did not want much to do with me. While in outpatient treatment someone mentioned Oxford House. I immediately envisioned an old run down house with a bunch of people telling you what to do. Out of pure desperation I scheduled an interview with Oxford House – Millbrook in Raleigh, NC. It took me three scheduled interviews to finally show up. When I got there I fell in love with the house and the people there. It was set back in the trees and had a beautiful screened in porch and stone fireplace. The women seemed nice but the house was having some financial problems. After being there three weeks I went to court. The Judge said that since I was living in an Oxford House, he would give me chance to make restitution. The Judge gave me probation and sent me home.

It took me over a year to get comfortable in my own skin again. Oxford House really saved me. I wasn't big on going to meetings. The women there went to meetings and dragged me along until I felt comfortable. I wasn't comfortable in getting a sponsor. The women in my house invited their sponsors over and I got to begin to see what a blessing it would be to have some guidance. Our House has some financial problems but we worked together and solved them. No one was telling what to do. We challenged each other to do the best we could.

After I lived in the Oxford House for one year, I was given the honor of working for Oxford House. Today, 12 years later, I still work for Oxford House. What a wonderful gift to be able to share my experience with others. Oxford House has changed my life in so many ways. I met my husband through Oxford House. Today I have a beautiful daughter and stepson. We own our home. Through Oxford house we learned to be responsible productive members of society.

We will forever be grateful to Paul M. and other founders of Oxford House. They gave the recovering individual the gift of clean and sober living.

Greg H.'s Story

After a week in detox and twenty-eight days in rehab, I was clean and sober and ready to go home. However the staff at the rehab did not agree. My insurance had run out and the twenty-eight day program was completed, but the staff told me I was not leaving until I had some structured place to go. The staff was going to let me stay free of charge until a place they deemed safe was available for me. I thought I'd just go to my parents' house. They would let me stay there until I could move in with some friends or find a place of my own. No matter that my father was an alcoholic, I had no decent friends, and no job or money. The staff told me I'd be drunk if I did that, and if I drank again I would dead by the time I was twenty-five.

I was twenty-one years old. I had been drinking a case of beer a day for the last five years. That was on top of daily pot smoking, PCP, Quaaludes, Valium, or whatever else came my way. Jails, car accidents, psychiatrists, Anabuse, none of it stopped my drinking, until now. And until now no one seemed to care as much as the staff at the rehab. When I arrived they thought of sending me back to detox because

I would not talk and my roommate complained I was having the DT's at night. Aside from one visit by my mom to bring me a carton of Marlboros, I had no visitors.

That was until a couple of days after my twenty-eighth days when Amos White came to see me. He was probably sixty but looked to be eighty. A true AA old timer. He used a portable oxygen tank to breathe because of emphysema. I had met him at an AA meeting that I had sporadically attended during the past year trying to get sober. Someone had told him I was in rehab, and I could not leave for lack of a place to go. It was a hot summer afternoon when he came to visit and we sat outside. He invited me to stay with him and his wife, Dorothy, until an opening in a halfway house came up. The staff agreed and I was gone the next day to Amos' three-bedroom brick ranch.

Within a week I got a call from the rehab. An Oxford House in DC, just a few miles away, had an opening. I was to call to make an appointment for an interview. Amos drove me downtown to the row house on 19th Street. He waited outside as I mounted the steps to the small front stoop. A little spindly old black man with no front teeth and a lit cigarette dangling from his mouth eyed me as I came up the steps. I asked if this was the Oxford House. He grunted and motioned his head for me to go inside. This was Ed Gibbs. A long time house resident, he actually had a lot to say, but unfortunately most of it was no more coherent than his grunting.

The house was an old narrow three-story row house with a full basement. All floors had three bedrooms and a bathroom, except the first floor which had a kitchen at the back and a living room at the front, with a small dining room in between. The house was home to fifteen men. I was greeted by Hugh Johnson, an even older black man than Ed. But Hugh was cheerful, a true host. I was shown to the living room and introduced to the few guys sitting there watching TV.

We made small talk as the rest of the house members were rounded up for the interview. When everyone had assembled in the living room, I couldn't help but notice that I was one of only a few white guys. I was also the youngest. The short interview was uneventful with questions about how I got sober, how long I was sober, did I have a job, was I willing to get a job and pay rent and do my chores. I do recall some questions about whether or not I went to AA or NA, which was followed by an angry retort from one old guy that going to AA or NA was not necessary. I came to find out that old guy was Ben, another long-time house resident who had moved in straight out of Lorton, the DC Federal Prison. He had managed to stay clean and sober (and angry) since then, without ever attending a single meeting. After the short interview I was asked to sit in the dining room, some ten feet away. I sat at the table, trying not to look into the living room, but hearing everything that was said. A heated debate ensued. One side led by Ben argued I was too young, and not the right type of guy. The other side led by Hugh suggested I should be given a chance. Finally a vote was taken. Hugh came to the dining room and asked me to come forward. He announced I had been accepted. I moved in the next day.

Being the newest member to the house, my room was at the far back on the third floor with the next newest member. My roommate worked nights for the City as a maintenance worker. He slept during the day. This was to become a source of problems as he expected me to be quiet when he was sleeping. He also liked the room boiling hot in the winter. It was the hottest room in the house already being on the top floor. I couldn't stand it when he came home from work, without taking a shower and went to bed in the little room. I opened the window, even in the winter when it was snowing. This would eventually wake him up and we would argue. One argument had us in the hallway yelling at each other. Physical contact was off limits. I knew this, but I enticed him to push me. I then called a house meeting to have him evicted for touching me. It didn't work, and we eventually made up.

I felt right at home with the arguing that went on. I hadn't been there a week when I saw Ben arguing with Ed in the kitchen. Ben, well over six feet and two hundred pounds, and Ed all but five and half feet tall and maybe a hundred and fifty pounds. Both were yelling and cussing at each other about some menial issue with the house. Ben opened a kitchen drawer and pulled out a long carving knife and waved it in the air, as Ed yelled and shook his finger at him. All the while Hugh sat at the kitchen table and smiled at me. Soon the argument died down with muffled "motherfuckers" and Ed walking out and Ben returning the knife to the drawer. Later that evening they were playing spades at the dining room table as if they were the longtime friends they were.

I had been kicked out of everywhere I had lived since leaving home. The reasons were well founded and related to by drunken behavior and my general inability to get along with people. Oxford House helped. I felt comfortable with the anger that was allowed to be displayed toward one another. We were fifteen recovering drunks, prone to antisocial behavior, from varying backgrounds in varying stages of recovery. It was only natural that we would have difficulty getting along at times. We all needed to learn to live with others. The Oxford House taught me how to live with others by allowing me to be myself. When problems did arise we talked about them. Everything was resolved democratically. Everyone was on equal footing and of equal importance in an Oxford House.

One time we had an applicant who was young and HIV positive. At that time in the mid 1980's there was not much public awareness or public education about HIV and AIDS. HIV positive persons were often shunned. Because I was given a chance when I was younger than most, I felt compelled to argue for the guy's admission. We had a vigorous debate and he was admitted.

I lived and breathed recovery that first year in the house. We went to meetings together, played cards at night, ate together, drank coffee and talked. When I first moved in I had no money. The house supplied condiments such as ketchup, mustard, salt, sugar, and coffee. But also the house supplied hotdogs, bread, and peanut butter and jelly. There was one guy who rarely worked, and usually lived off peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, hotdogs, and coffee. I did the same the first month.

A guy named Holland who had been in the house about six months when I moved in worked for a construction company. A guy in the program came to the house each morning to pick Holland up to work doing labor and cleanup for a builder. Knowing I needed a job, Holland got me work with the guy. I kept that job for a year until I was hired by the builder himself.

After a year in the house I went back to college. I had been kicked out of one college and dropped out of another. I enrolled at the University of Maryland. I took the subway to the DC line and then transferred to a bus for the remaining trip each day. I was able to study during these long commutes, and then work my construction job on days off and weekends.

About this time Hugh announced that the local Chapter had decided to open another house. (At that time this was the only Oxford House Chapter, since there were only a dozen Oxford Houses, all in or around DC). Our landlord was going to rent another house a few blocks away. The new house was nicer and in a better neighborhood. Hugh, myself and Mike, a long time resident like Hugh, moved over to the new house. Mike and I were roommates; we had the best room in the house. While the house was nicer, it had a terrible smell in the kitchen when the oven was on. We pulled the oven out from the wall and discovered a large half-baked rat. We also had the usual roaches in the bathrooms and kitchen. It was especially bad late at night when you turned on the kitchen light; it would take a few seconds for all the roaches to clear out as they ran under the appliances and cabinets.

After another year at the new house I moved out on my own with some others in the program. A few years later I went to work for Oxford House when government funding fueled an expansion of Oxford Houses across the country. Later I went to law school. I have been a lawyer for over ten years, and am now married with kids. None of which would have happened if I was still drinking and using. I have not had a drink in over twenty years. By the grace of God, AA, and Oxford House.

Paula H.'s Story

My name is Paula H. and I live in Durham, North Carolina. My sobriety date is April 26, 1998. I was born in 1951 in Greensboro, North Carolina. I started 1st grade early at the age of 5 at a small Lutheran School. Even back then I was very compulsive and obsessive in my behavior. I talked all the time and for some reason told everyone my name was Laverne. I had a frightening experience during this time due to an illness which caused me to have two needles in my back. From that time on I was extremely afraid of needles which I now look at as a blessing due to my 30 year addiction to heroin.

I did not grow up in a very dysfunctional family and had the experience of being raised by two very religious parents. However, one was quiet and strong (my father) and the other was very mean and outspoken (my mother). Growing up as the only girl with three brothers and being a Daddy's girl, you would think everything was fine. Early on I had to learn how to lie to go places if it was not church related. I had developed a resentment toward my mother because nothing or no one pleased her. Later, on as I

learned how to accept people by working the steps, I was finally able to not focus on her but on how I could not let it keep bothering me. This always was a reason for me to use after having one of my constant bad encounters with my mother.

Also, at this time, the Civil Rights movement was in full swing and I vividly remember having to go to the back of the movie theater and sit in the balcony because I was Black. I was the 2nd class to integrate the first white high school in Greensboro, NC. Needless to say, I had no love for white people. When I graduated from high school my goal was to get as far away from my mother, Greensboro and the church as possible.

This led me to Howard University in August 1968, just turning 17 in March. I had family there whom I had visited, and because I wanted to be Black and relevant, and Howard University was the No.1 Black school in the nation, that's where I needed to be. I immediately started participating in every aspect of college life since I was not allowed to drink or smoke growing up. First it started with drinking in the dorms with my roommates and occasionally smoking marijuana. Then I received a visit from some friends from home who lived in New York and they were doing heroin. I tried it because I didn't think they would give me anything bad. One friend was living in DC so I continued to hang with him and it was not until he told me to watch that I could get a habit that I started beginning to realize what was going on but not how it would play out for the rest of my life.

Right after that, drugs hit the campus and before I knew it in 1970, I was a full-blown heroin addict. I cannot smell well today because I snorted so much drugs up my nostrils. I was afraid of needles because of my childhood experience and after seeing a couple of people overdose I was real glad of this fear. However, I was in so much denial I did not consider myself a junkie because I didn't shoot drugs.

My first husband and I started using together and before long, he was selling only to college students which made me think I was better than other addicts on the streets. The excitement of having money all the time and possessing more material things than my parents fascinated me. I was unaware of how it was changing my way of thinking or my morals. School became secondary and being cool became a way of life. I did manage to get a good job after school and would have probably have managed a successful career there but my office ethics were poor. I would be up all night high, come to work late, do the minimum and was not really interested in upward mobility.

Eventually, people started complaining and started suspecting something but could not really put their finger on what was the problem. By 1979, I had been in a relationship for 11 years, gotten married, had a son and had continued to use steadily. I did not use most of my pregnancy because I did not want to have a junkie baby and had watched one of my girlfriends continue to use and have a stillborn child. Ironically, the thought of not using still had not crossed my mind. In fact, the night I delivered my son, who is 26 now, a minister and working on his Ph.D., my request to my friends was to bring me some dope, that I had done my nine months. I initially thought that having my first child would slow me down because I was 29 but the disease is more powerful than your wanting to take care of a child. I was even aware by now that I had a problem: I was still having fun.

As both my husband and my habit increased and his not having a real 9-5 job, naturally money became an issue and my husband was more concerned about his habit than mine. So this began my process of stealing my drugs from him. We started promoting concert with the Jackson Five, Marvin Gaye and the Village People as a result of my husband's connection with big dealers in New York. As a result, we really started living the life of drug dealers. In a few years as our habits increased and we were our best customers, and we were separating, my family had to come to DC to get me and my son. I finally had to tell them about my addiction. I was sent to drug programs that I didn't want to attend and ended up with them getting custody of my son. Even this did not make me look at what was going on.

Once back in NC, I continued seeking those who used and ended up marrying my 2nd husband who was a drug dealer. This relationship was very physically and mentally abusive. I started dealing myself, was arrested for the first time in my life, left town and returned to DC to keep from going to jail. I started working but was still caught up with others who used. After 20 years of just using heroin, I started using crack and if I was not crazy before, I certainly was now. I ended up getting locked up after a house was raided and was handcuffed, shackled and brought back to NC because they found out I was a fugitive.

In 1983, I was sentenced to 4 years for conspiracy to sell heroin, but it was reduced to 6 months, day for day...After spending 6 months in jail, I did have a chance to look at who I had become but had not decided that I wanted to stop but rather focused on controlling my use by not using everyday. I started to work again for temporary agencies and finally got a good job related to the accounting I had studied in college at NC A&T State University in Greensboro, NC. But by now, I am doing okay so I did not realize that drugs have affected every aspect of my life.

So toward the end of 1994 after burying one of my best friends from college who died from this disease, I found myself in treatment for the first time. This was the first time that I learned that I had a disease and that a 12-step program was the way to recover. I learned a lot there but was not ready to buy into, no drug use of any kind at all or following all the suggestions. Needless to say, I relapsed after four months clean, almost killed my children and myself in a car accident because I was so high but after a few weeks continued using again. In 1996, my job started finding out that I had a problem. Campus police had me on video driving the State vehicle because by now my husband won't let me drive any of our cars because I don't know how to come home.

The University had started a No smoking in the building policy and I was still smoking crack in the bathrooms at lunch with air freshener. So I was told that I could not come back on campus and immediately went back to treatment after consulting with the Employee Assistance Program. I was scheduled to attend an Exit interview from my job while in treatment and I was so nervous. But for the first time, I followed a suggestion and was honest that I was an addict. My job let me resign with rehire status, yes, and I know it was only God's grace and mercy that intervened.

From treatment, I went to a halfway house in Chapel Hill for 6 months. But because I didn't spend the time working on building a foundation of recovery by working closely with a sponsor, working steps or learning spiritual principles, I made the decision to go back home to my family which I was advised against. I was counseled that I needed more time to learn how to stay clean and sober by everyone including my mental health counselor. So, after going home, and a job not working out, and husband still using, after 10 months clean I relapsed. The next 6 months were the worse in all my using years. I was calling the NA hotline and everyone in Chapel Hill, Greensboro or wherever I knew in recovery.

So, finally on 4/26/98, I came back to Chapel Hill to re-build a foundation of recovery. I went back to Detox, Stabilization and was in the first women's Oxford House in Chapel Hill. All of us in the house (6) had a month clean and were crazy as hell. So after 6 months, the Chapter came in and put us all back on Newcomers' Contract. From then on, I realized the importance of the guidelines and got involved in the Chapter as the Secretary. Oxford House definitely is a major reason while I am clean today and that's why I continue to work with the houses with Special Projects. It taught me how to be responsible and care for everyone regardless of their race, gender or sexual preference and enhanced my 12-step recovery program. Today, I am a Human Resources Facilitator and Administrative Assistant to the Chair of the Department, but what I enjoy most is my work for Oxford House which is my passion. I know what it can do because I am a living witness.

David J.'s Story

My name is David, and I'm a gratefully recovering addict. I was born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland. I had a fairly good childhood. Both of my parents worked and did the best they could in raising me. As I entered the adolescent stage, I became a follower and education was no longer a top priority for me. I can recall the importance of proving myself in order to fit in, and this meant getting into fights and doing other mischievous acts. At age thirteen, after years of watching relatives, including my parents, smoke marijuana, I became curious of how it made you felt. So two of friends and I tried smoking burnt leaves in rolling paper to see if we would have the same effect as marijuana. The leaves didn't give us a buzz. Within a year, I was introduced to marijuana by a group of older guys in the neighborhood. The particular drug caused me to hallucinate to the point where I became frightened.

For the next few years, I occasionally smoked marijuana with extreme caution. It wasn't until I was introduced to crack cocaine in 1991 that "weed" had become a played out fad. For the next eight years, unmanageability, degradation, and self destruction became the story of my life. Because of my low self esteem, inability to cope with life's ups and downs, and unwillingness to accept personal responsibility, my only coping skill was smoking crack.

In 1999, after running out of ideas, becoming physical exhausted, and being homeless, I surrendered to the disease of active addiction. I checked into a treatment center called Reality Inc. located in Laurel, Maryland where I spent twenty-eight days. While I was at Reality, I heard about Oxford House. I told my counselor that I wanted to move into an Oxford house upon completion of treatment. Somehow, she convinced me that an Oxford house wouldn't have been my best option at that time. She recommended that I moved into Reality's 9-12 month transitional house. So I moved into the T.R.R. and lived there for fifteen months. At this point, moving into an Oxford house was not part of my post-treatment plan. Moving into my own apartment was. After living in the transitional house, I had no other alternative but to move into another recovery house because of my financial situation. I lived in this particular recovery house for one year.

Once again, my plan to move into my own apartment had failed. Not only was I financially unstable, my life had again become unmanageable. My meeting attendance and step work had greatly diminished. My disease told me that I was OK because I drove a Cadillac, dated a beautiful woman, and maintained a few service positions. I had lost contact with my inner self. In other words, I was in relapse mode. Because I decided that the rent at the sober house was too expensive, so I decided to move out. This question was where was I going to live? Both my sponsor and my significant other, who did and still works at Oxford House World Services (Anna M., who is now my wife) strongly suggested that I move into an Oxford House. Once again, I humbly did what was suggested. In October of 2001, I moved into Oxford House, Olney located in Silver Spring, Maryland where I resided for six months. Step work and meeting attendance immediately became a high priority. During my residence at Olney, I served as the Chapter Secretary for the Montgomery County Chapter and the president of the House. I also served on the Oxford House World Council as an alumnus for three years. Although I've move out of the Oxford House 4 years ago and completed my term as a World Council member, I will continue to give back to the Oxford House community when and wherever possible.

Antonio R.'s Story

Let me first start off by saying that when my life is over, on my tomb will be my name and date of birth – with a dash between that date and the year of my demise. I am so grateful that I have the opportunity to have this awesome outcome in that dash.

I was born in Raleigh, N.C., the middle child of five. I grew up having parents who were both visibly impaired. I can remember as early as 6 years old seeing Mom sloppy drunk. Also, the house was dirty and there was no food on the table. Dad lived there but I think he really hated her. He only came home late at night or sometimes two or three days later. As kids, my younger brother and I would play outside with the other kids and go over to their nice clean houses and see their sober and responsible parents. Although I didn't know what being responsible was, at least that looked good. It looked loving and caring and it is what I wanted so, at age six, I didn't want to be a Russell, I wanted to belong somewhere else. I couldn't invite kids to my house; I was too ashamed for them to see Mom passed out, or to see another man in Mom's bedroom. Notice I said my Mom's bedroom; I never knew them to share bedrooms like I think my friends parents did. So, at a very young age, I began to experience unbalanced living and verbal abuse.

When I was 10 years old, Mom continued to drink and at times would display public drinking and drunkenness. This was so embarrassing to me that it crushed my esteem. I felt ashamed; all my friends would laugh at her and I was hurt. I always thought of myself as being sensitive to my own and other people's feelings. What I mean is that, if I was hurt, I would show it real well so when my friends would laugh at my Mom, we would fight, and when their parents came out to see what was going on, my Mom would come also. She was very protective of us. Even if she hurt us, she wouldn't allow anyone else to do it, so if a another kid's parents would come to her to tell her that I got angry and attacked their kid, she would defend me, and oftentimes there were fist fights between the adults right in front of us.

Mom would always be drinking. I remember when I was around 13 years old there would be parties at our house – alcohol of course – and at the end of the party all the adults would leave and leave the alcohol there. My younger brother and I wondered what it would taste like. If we drank a little bit, nobody would know, so we went down, and got us some – just a little cup of 6 O'clock Scotch. It made me feel different. You know, I believe I felt like Mom isn't that bad. I drank some more that night alone. My brother was scared; he went on to bed or he may have been drunk. As I took that drink, I don't know what

happened but I know I liked it. I looked forward from that day on for Mom to buy alcohol, get drunk, and pass out so I could feel like that too.

I may have been in the 5th grade before they integrated the schools but the only white teacher at my school noticed that I had not been as involved as I had been before. The problem was really a lot of things. First, I couldn't read. Second, I felt I needed a little something to make me feel better. I didn't want to tell her what was going on but I didn't want to always feel sick when I drank. I wanted help but didn't want any adults to know. Mrs. Holleyfield insisted that I allow her to help me with reading, I am so grateful to her today for that. She had the chance to meet my mom. She knew about my mom's condition, but never knew about me; at least I didn't think she did. Thinking about that now, maybe she did, but being the only white person who was in our community maybe she didn't want to address my mom. I figure what she did was this: she got me connected with outside activities such as Boy Scouts, YMCA, and a lot of positive things that had spiritual connections, so my drinking stopped as I stayed involved in those things. Life at home was still rough, but the outside things allowed me to develop values.

At 13 or 14 I felt I had outgrown those activities and was interested in girls, and the things that come along with that. At times, I was really unbalanced. Mom still drank so that had begun to feel normal. On the other hand, I had the teaching of Mrs. Holleyfield, and Scout Master Mallette to whom I owe a lot, but I wanted to fit in with the hood crowd so I abandoned all the positive help only to return to the pain, fighting, shootings stabbing, the alcohol and the rest. Then, at age 15, I used the weed and alcohol together because the stuff made me not feel, and when I didn't want to feel, it worked. I continued to go to school drunk but I graduated on time and joined the U S Marine Corps – what a place for a alcoholic like me!! BUT I LOVE THE MARINE CORPS! We could have drinking and drugging parties and nobody cared. This was before drug tests in the military.

At that time Mom was at home and she had stopped cold turkey but her health was bad. I was a member of the reserve unit and needed a job. I could always make the right connections to get a job because I could do a good job for anyone but the drinking and dope was a problem. I had a chance to meet the then-Governor of the state. I always put myself in a position where I can get connected to get help if I need it. He had his secretary make a phone call to get me a job with the IRS. That was awesome. I worked there three years. I don't know how but I drank that one up too. Then I was able to get a job with the Department of Corrections. I allowed my addiction to make them force me to make a decision – quit or be fired.

After this, I worked at a large hospital. I was there about twelve years, and I drank and got high on and off the job. One day, my new boss, who had moved to North Carolina from Poughkeepsie, N. Y., saw my behavior, my absences from work and my tardiness and told me that I had a problem. I thought she had to be crazy; I was doing this before she got there. But she told me that her husband was a friend of Bill Wilson. I didn't know what the hell she was talking about. Then she told me what she and her husband had gone through, and how help was available. She said she loved me and wanted to see me helped. I wanted that also but not totally; just until I felt better. She said she would fire me from my \$40,000 a year job if I didn't get help.

The job paid for treatment and gave me awesome tool to use. It even gave me a home plan. Somewhere in the story I got married and had two kids whom I love very much, but the home plan was Oxford House so I followed through and went to the house. It was very nice but I couldn't understand how this many people could live in a house with everyone preaching the same sermon – don't use, go to meetings, pay your fees. It seemed strange and on New Year's night I figured I hadn't had a drink in two whole weeks and maybe one wouldn't hurt. That was a mistake. The guys said: "We told you at the door that if you felt that not using and living here was a problem you should let us know. We love you but you can't stay here." I was hurt again so I went back into treatment. I said to my Oxford House friends later that I just needed to leave Raleigh and go somewhere else and they suggested I try a Greensboro Oxford House. Having had prior experience in an Oxford House – even if it was brief – I knew it was safe haven for anyone who would commit to saying clean and sober and life would get better. I had seen it happen.

I have now committed myself to God and to spiritual principles. Oxford House has afforded me the opportunity to be the natural burning bush that we have read about. Also, Oxford House has allowed me to see the Red Seas in my life and the lives or others open up and we have been able to walk through to

better lives. It is the will of God. I am so grateful that Oxford House is in my dash. I have committed the rest of my life to be used by God.

THANKS FOR LETTING ME SHARE, MAY GOD'S CHOICE BLESSING BE YOURS.

John F.'s Story

I was born in 1959 in Phoenix, Az. I'm 46 years old; I was the only child who lived in the house. When my mom was pregnant with me, my father died in a car accident; he was drunk. Mother remarried when I was 6. The man she married became my father in every sense of the word. I was raised in Florida and we were pretty much a normal family. I played sports, had lots of friends, did ok in school, did not get in much trouble then, drank a beer every once in a while with my parents, smoked a joint even less but not with my parents. When I was about 13 we moved to North Carolina. It was like moving to Mars – everything was different – the schools, people, even the little league – which they didn't have. I did not fit in too good and I began to isolate and get very angry for being there and I became very unsure of myself. My schoolwork went way down as they were teaching things I had learned two years earlier and I got bored and finally dropped out but went back later to get my GED. That went on for a year or so. The people I was hanging out with were smoking pot and taking pills so I did too and liked it and began to do it all the time and began to take other drugs – anything I could get. When I was sixteen I stuck a needle in my arm and began shooting heroin and then it was on. I loved it.

When I was twenty I realized after being up all night that I was going to die or go to jail. Neither sounded good to me so I went to Augusta, GA., stopped doing drugs, got a job and then got drunk. Jim Beam became my new best friend. I drank daily till I passed out. I could not just have a few, I was able to keep my job and did very well at it getting promotions along the way but, like all alcoholics, things started going down hill. I started drinking before and at work so, after six years, I took 4 weeks vacation, went back to NC and got married and we started using heroin again. I got on the methadone program on and off but that did not work.

I lost everything in the next 9 years: my pride, dignity, self-esteem, wife, and all my belongings. I became homeless and there it was my bottom. I wanted to kill myself but had not the nerve and ended up in Duke Hospital and detox and I became very willing to do what I had to do to stop using. I started taking suggestions and after three weeks I said what do I do now. They said 'treatment' so I went for thirty-four days, then I said, what do I do now? They suggested a halfway house or an Oxford House. I remembered when I was in detox a couple of guys came in one night and showed us a tape and talked to us about Oxford House. I did not remember much about it but Oxford House sounded cooler than a halfway house so I went for an interview in Henderson, NC. There was one bed and two applicants. They knew the other guy since he was friends with some of them so I knew I was not going to get in but they accepted me because I had two more days clean than the other guy, and they said they went by principles before personalities. That was just too cool; I loved it.

I got involved in NA and AA but I had an overwhelming to give something back and Oxford House is where I fit in. So I went to meetings to help me stay clean and Oxford House gave me the time I needed to do so. I got involved with Oxford House by going to a lot of house and chapter meetings and really liked it. I felt like I was really doing something good. After about a year clean and sober I had a couple weeks vacation and I asked if there was anything I could do to help and was told to go to Greensboro, NC and find a house to open as a Oxford House so I did. A job opened up about that same time and I was offered the position. Since then, I have been working with Oxford House – opening houses, starting Chapters, working with the communities staying clean and sober and maybe helping 1 or 2 along the way. I've loved just about every minute of it. That was ten years ago last month. I'm tired of typing but that's the gist of it.

Anna M.'s Story

Hello, my name is Anna and I am beyond doubt a grateful recovering addict. I was born and raised in Washington, DC. I'm the seventh of eight children and lived the majority of my earlier years in a dysfunctional family life style that was similar to most of the inner city kids I grew up with. My father and mother separated when I was 5 years old and for a few years my mother did not allow me to see or speak to

my father. There was not a lot of stability and I can remember moving from place to place, being transferred from school to school.

After a while I was able to spend weekends and holidays with my father who was a bookie and ran a boarding house. Needless to say this was not a healthy environment for a kid to grow up in. Although my mother tried her best, she had her demon (alcohol) and her drinking habits and the constant drinkers in the household often clouded her judgment.

I remember this first time I got high. I was sent home from school because I had an embarrassing incident in class. My mother sent me back to school and on the way back a friend and I spotted a joint on the ground. We picked it up and smoked it. I can remember feeling “this is okay” since it made having to face the kids (who were taunting me) an easy cross to bear. I was in the sixth grade.

My addiction progressed to alcohol and snorting cocaine throughout high school and college. I can remember saying to myself that I would never become a crackhead but two years after coming home from college I found myself hitting the pipe. Throughout the years of my crack addiction, I lost friends, family members and even my own self-respect. I tried treatment centers but always for the wrong reasons – to get my job back, get my family off my back or to gain weight. It never really worked; I always came out and continued my old patterns of use and abuse. I never took the advice that was given to me or suggestions. I needed to learn and accept that I had a problem with drugs and alcohol.

In August 1999 I actually hit rock bottom and my older sister wrote my obituary and sent it to me. At this point I had given up all faith that I could stop using. I was a crack addict and I didn't care. One day while wandering the streets of DC my ex-husband spotted me and noticed how much I'd deteriorated and suggested I try treatment again, he told me about a place in Laurel, MD.

I remember walking up the stairs of The Reality Treatment Center and finally realizing I had to change my life because I was killing myself. This time I had the desire to do whatever it took to get my life back. I had in fact surrendered. I stayed there for 28 days and this time it was different, I listened and learned about the disease of addiction and as I learned I became more willing to change.

After treatment I spent six months at the halfway house next door and this is where I was introduced to Oxford House. I never knew there were places for women to live with the same illnesses, working together to stay clean. I knew this was where I belonged. The interviewing process for me was thorough and the women of Oxford House Emack made me feel at home. What I remember most about the interview and took to heart was their honesty, and being told that I had to learn to change and keep an open mind. I was accepted at Oxford House Emack in Beltsville, MD. At this time it was the only women's house in PG County MD. The women were an example of what I could accomplish with my life. I felt honored to be in the company of each and every one of my roommates.

While living at Oxford House Emack I held the position of Secretary, Treasure, Chore Coordinator and President. The more involved I became with Oxford House, it made me want to grow and help other women see that if I could do it, so could they. I applied for a job with Oxford House, Inc. and was hired as an Administrative Assistant to the Executive Director. I quickly learned the importance of Chapters and how houses help in expanding Oxford Houses Worldwide. With the help of each house in PG County, MD we formed a Chapter and I was elected Chapter Chair. I am now the Housing Services Manager where I help dozens of Oxford Houses throughout the country become chartered and stay on track. Working at Oxford House, Inc. has led me to take steps I never imagined I could. I help coordinate the World Conventions, I've started five new houses and I've been granted the opportunity to become an advocate for recovery, speaking at workshops and giving presentations on the tremendous gift I received and the good work of Oxford House, Inc. Women who live in Oxford Houses learn to focus on themselves, deal with life after addiction and gain comfortable sobriety. I'm living proof.

I've remarried and my husband is an Oxford House alumnus. I've regained my family and friends and built new friendships; something I never thought would be possible. Oxford House has afforded me the opportunity to become an advocate for recovery, and I work with my church spreading the word on how Oxford House has saved my life (and others like me) and helped me to become a productive member of society. Along with the pastor of my church, we've formed an Oxford House Partnership Grant to help women in need with the financial help they need prior to moving into an Oxford House. Oxford House

living has been a blessing in my life; I've learned to love myself, focus on my purpose in life and continue on my path of sobriety.

Joe P.'s Story

On June 17th 1989 I was walking out of Hempstead General hospital in somewhat of a daze having just gotten stitches put in my scalp and deciding what I should do. If I turned right I might be able to get another hit, but was it worth the trouble? After all, I just had gotten out of the hospital because I was smacked in the head with a five gallon plastic piss and shit bucket for not passing the pipe quick enough to another addict. If I turned left I could walk home to my parents house and ask for help.

I turned left. That night I called the 1-800 Cocaine Hotline number and thirty days later I was leaving an alcohol and drug abuse treatment center in Shawnee Mission, Kansas, 1200 miles from home. I was headed to meet someone from Washington D.C., who was opening up some kind of a new halfway house in Kansas City, Missouri. It was called Oxford House and after hearing some horror stories about the traditional Kansas City halfway houses I knew that this was my best bet.

I always hated being told what to do and the rules that I had heard about in this place were somewhat livable. All I had to do was stay clean and sober, pay my rent and participate in the democratic functioning of the house. I truly wanted to stay clean and sober and having just finished my second in-patient treatment in the last six months I knew I could not do it alone, nor could I do it the way I had previously tried.

While I was in treatment I was told "we don't think you should go back to New York" and, having been beaten to a state of willingness by alcohol and drugs I acquiesced to my counselor's suggestion. I became the first person to move into Oxford House in Missouri, it was July 20, 1989 and they had just entered into a lease agreement for a house in midtown Kansas City. I moved in and slept on the floor for the first few days while they tried to get beds delivered.

The counselor who dropped me off on Friday figured he wouldn't see me on Monday when he came back. He did however take me to my first outside AA meeting, it was a men's group called P III. It became my home group. I found a job as a line cook at the Allis Plaza Hotel in downtown Kansas City and within a few weeks we had six or seven people living in the house.

We had people from the Washington D.C. area come to the house who were veterans of the Oxford House system. They showed us how to run the house, how to have house meetings, how to keep the books and how to do interviews for new housemates. I was elected the house president and for the next year I went to work, went to AA meetings on a daily basis and helped whoever was there working with the Oxford House program establish new houses.

I was truly fortunate because while in treatment I had what is called a spiritual experience. While I knew on an intellectual level that alcohol and drugs only meant trouble for me, I did not know what I could do about the misery and trouble they always seemed to bring about. One afternoon however a light went off and I was able to accept that I was powerless over alcohol and drugs with the knowledge that there was a solution. Once I accepted the fact of my powerlessness I was somehow filled with some peace and serenity knowing that the solution was to be found in the programs of AA and NA.

My spiritual experience also lifted the obsession to drink and drug. I no longer thought constantly about where I was going to get my next drink or next hit. Living with other people who were clean and sober and trying to do the right thing was great because you always had someone to talk to or go to a meeting with. I could always find a ride or even walk if the weather was decent.

I'd been working with the people from DC who were opening up houses in the KC area and I knew that I wanted to do the same. That is, help other people in early recovery have a chance to live in an Oxford House. After being clean for a year I applied for a position with the state of Missouri to help open up Oxford Houses throughout the state. I was hired and became the first housing specialist in Missouri.

My mentor from DC became the coordinator of the program and we began to open up houses throughout the state. It was a little odd because here I was a New Yorker and I became more familiar with the state of Missouri than most Missourians. I traveled from Cape Girardeau in the southeast corner of the state to St. Joseph in the Northwest corner of the state.

I lived in the first Oxford House in the state of Missouri for over eighteen months. Gradually my life got better. I purchased a new car, a 1989 Hyundai Exel, so I could do all of the traveling my new job required. I no longer had to take the bus to work and I even had a phone installed in the car. It was about the size of a small shoebox but at that time I certainly thought I was pretty uptown.

Living in Oxford House helped me learn to be responsible. I had to pay my rent on time, I had to do my chores and attend house meetings. It was OK though because for the first time in my life I was doing what I needed to take care of myself. Living with nine other alcoholics and addicts in a six bedroom house can be both a blessing and a curse. It is a curse when people are not responsible for themselves and go back to their old behaviors. It was a blessing because more often than not the people I lived with were working a program of recovery and if I needed someone to talk to there was always someone there.

Oxford House taught me that I can be assertive and stand up for what I believe is right. I went back to college and eventually graduated Magna Cum Laude from Columbia College. While working for the Missouri Oxford House program I became involved with a number of lawsuits that we were having with neighborhood associations and cities throughout the state.

I was able to work closely with the wonderful attorneys the state and Oxford House had defending their rights to locate houses in good neighborhoods. It was at that time that I asked one of the attorneys whether I should take the law school admissions test and he offered me two choices; he offered to either talk me into or out of going to law school. I graduated law school in December 1998 and have been practicing law since that time.

In September 1990 I met my future wife, she also was in recovery and was working as a counselor for a treatment program. We married in 1991 and today have four children that we have adopted from China. After moving out of Oxford House I maintained my sobriety by attending twelve step meetings, opening up Oxford Houses throughout the state and working with other alcoholics.

Unfortunately for me though the gifts of sobriety took me away from the program and after fifteen years of sobriety I went back out. After years of sobriety my disease came knocking on my door and I answered. The misery and the pain of alcoholism and drug addiction once again appeared in my life as a result of putting the program of AA on the back burner.

I had become an AA expert and no longer needed to go to meetings. It has been a struggle to regain what I once took for granted, however, I have been fortunate and am regaining what I once took for granted one day at a time. I ended up in treatment once again, and when I first got there all I wanted to know was when was my out date. After being there for about two days though there was a lecture about turning problems into opportunities.

I had forgotten what I had once known about recovery because I had stayed away from the program for so long. I finally saw that here was an opportunity to get back on track, work the steps and ask for help. I go to meetings once again on a daily basis, I call my sponsor and am once again enjoying things that I took for granted.

As they say in the program, the disease of alcoholism and drug addiction is a subtle foe, it is cunning, baffling and powerful, and I am not. I need a program of recovery to help me stay sober. I thank God on a daily basis for my recovery and I still thank the Oxford House program for helping me to learn that I can stay sober with the help and support of other recovering individuals.

Andrea's Story

Sometime in March 1989, I was ninety days clean and sober and homeless. I had heard about Oxford House because my boyfriend, Jeff G., had moved into one after he had left me the year before because I continued to use drugs and alcohol. Now clean, Jeff was living in a nice big beautiful house across from Rock Creek Park and he always bragged how great it was and how it was helping his recovery. I was living with my manicurist in a room in a very slippery neighborhood in Northeast Washington, D.C. I continued to tell Jeff and my network "no way am I going to live with a bunch of addicts, especially women."

At an NA meeting that we all attended on Monday nights, a young lady announced there was an opening at a women's Oxford House in Georgetown up Wisconsin Avenue. My network raised my hand to

get the woman's attention to meet her after the meeting to get more information. I moved into the River Road Oxford House [RROH] a few days later. My whole life changed after that day. The RROH was one of five women OH in the WDC area. It was a small house that held 5 women and later on we opened the basement to hold nine more. We were a close-knit house and loved recovery, especially each other. We felt so blessed to live in a nice neighborhood near great 12-step meetings. We extended our blessings and OH experience to other women.

I became personally involved with the OH Board of Directors and helped start other women OHs. Watching and following Paul M. and others who gave their time and dedication unconditionally helped me grow in all areas of my recovery. I was off to learning and experiencing life beyond my imagination. I worked in other states and the US Virgin Islands spreading the wonderful principles of OH. RR OH soon became Argyle Terrace and the core women remaining continued to grow spiritually and mentally in our recovery. We were asked to tell our story on the CBS 60 Minutes program. What an exciting opportunity to tell my OH story on national TV. After staying in OH for three years and holding every position in the house, it was time for me to leave to let another addict/alcoholic receive the OH rewards. It was hard to leave the house but I was prepared and stood on solid ground.

I received my Master of Human Services in the year 2000, became employed as a Program Manager to my current position as Substance Abuse Therapist. The Argyle Women still get together and support each other in our new endeavors. We are still clean and most of all grateful to Oxford House for our new way of life. I recently bought a nice house in a good neighborhood. Thanks to Oxford House I can live in a house and neighborhood even a good as I did when I was at Argyle Terrace.

Angela J.'s Story

My name is Angela J. and this is my Oxford House story. I am originally from Chicago, Illinois and I started using drugs at the age of 16 years old. I was a person who felt that I just did not fit in. A single parent of two that relocated to Maryland for employment at a large transportation company. My using of drugs came to Maryland with me. By the time I reached the age of 32 years old I was introduced to crack cocaine. My life was on a sprawl downwards. I went to eight different rehabs in and out patient. After treatment I always returned to the same environment because I thought I needed to be home with my kids and I couldn't afford to move. It was so difficult to try to stay clean with drug dealers that I knew hanging on the corners and people that I once got high with knocking on my door. Needless to say I didn't stay clean. I even tried staying with my family members who never understood the disease of addiction. They wanted to talk about the harm I had done, they would truly beat me up with my past. The idea of me talking about a drug dream was not comprehensible to them nor was the understanding that for the first 90 days was truly necessary for someone like me to attend an AA or NA meeting. The pressure was the excuse I needed to get high again. I soon landed myself in jail then I finally made a decision to try a rehab again and follow every suggestion given to me by my counselors.

I went to NIH for 28 days and the nurse suggested that I consider going to stay in an Oxford House. I called for an interview. The interview was in College Park, Maryland. There were six ladies that gave me a warm welcome when I got there and they played a video about Oxford Houses. They allowed me to share about my experience and they shared about themselves. I truly felt that this was where I needed to be and wanted to be. They went over the guidelines and by-laws of the house. I was given a contract to sign which I felt gave me some balance and boundaries that was greatly needed at that time. A curfew would not allow me to be out at night when my disease was active the most when I was using. Four meeting per week with a signed slip was a requirement and that got me in the habit of attending meetings, I also had to have a job in two weeks or volunteer; there would be no lying around the house. Most important was to pay my rent on time. I stayed at the Oxford House in College Park for 45 days then I was asked to leave for disruptive behavior. I couldn't understand that but my sponsor who an alumna of Oxford House was able to help me understand the role I played in getting myself put out. Now I was homeless for thirty days and had nowhere to go. An outreach worker whose name was Anna was starting a new house and I was given an opportunity to stay there

The Cardinal Oxford House opened in October 2006. The outreach worker came for three months to train the members in the house on the officers' positions and how to deal with differences. I found that an Oxford House gives me a place where I can live with people that understand the disease of addiction. Never am I able to isolate like when I lived in my own apartment. It gives me a safety net

because I know if I use drugs or drink I will be asked to leave. Family members weren't able to recognize behaviors when I was headed towards relapse or even if I used drugs. An addict can tell when another addict is high. Cardinal Oxford House has allowed me to grow and develop to be a better person. The skills that I have developed have prepared me to be more productive in life. The Oxford House it is self ran. As President you learn to show leadership and how to listen to others. The Secretary position has given me the opportunity to learn the importance of recording details in a business meeting. The Treasurer position showed me how to balance financial reports, how to read a bank statement to be sure all bills are being paid on time, and the importance of doing an audit. As Comptroller I have learned to keep records of all incoming finances and to be sure that rent is paid on the time schedule agreed with house members. The chore coordinator job is to make sure that the house has the supplies needed and that everyone is doing their part to keep the house clean. Also she must report any repairs that might need to be reported to be fixed.

I presently have been able to stay clean for two years and can truly say it would not have been possible without living in the Oxford House. I have a healthy relationship with my kids and my family today. The rent is very affordable and I am to pay off some of the debts I accumulated while I was using drugs. I have been through some hardships but there are people that I have developed a relationship with who have helped me through them. I been able to attend workshops about Oxford House and the convention that Oxford House residents throughout the United States attend. I have had an opportunity to be in the survey given by DePaul University on Oxford House. I am also a member of the World Council Committee whose major responsibility is to suggest any necessary changes to improve the Oxford House Operating System. Today I am eternally grateful and I will always be an advocate for Oxford Houses.

Mark S.'s Story

I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me Philippians 4:13

I was born in 1960 and was raised in St. Martins Catholic Church and am still a member today. Through the years, my parents made huge sacrifices so that I could attend Catholic school from first grade up to my college graduation. They wanted me to get a good education.

While in grade school, I excelled in academics and athletics. I also participated in groups such as the Chess Club, Glee club, the Basketball team, and I was an alter boy. By being an active member in these clubs, it helped me to become socially active with my peers and the adults that surrounded me and helped me along the way. With the help and support of my family, teachers and friends, I continued to achieve good grades and graduated 12th of my class at Mackin Catholic High School.

When the opportunity came for me to decide which college I wanted to attend, I decided to attend Wheeling Jesuit College in Wheeling, West Virginia. Upon entering college, I had a clean record. I didn't follow what everyone else was doing such as having sexual intercourse, drinking alcohol or using drugs. However during my freshman year, I was introduced to all the negativity that surrounded me. I started doing all the things everyone else was doing instead of keeping the clean record that I entered with. Although I graduated with a Bachelor Of Arts Degree in Banking and Finance, I also graduated with a full fledge addiction to cocaine and alcohol.

When I returned home from college, my family and friends were excited to see me. They were very proud of me for being the 13th African-American student to graduate from Wheeling Jesuit College. As days turned into weeks, it was time for me to venture out and start my career. However I became lazy searching for a job and ended up working at a grocery store.

As the days went by, I started to see more and more of my high school friends who were selling drugs. I saw what they were doing so I began to sell drugs myself in order to support my habit. I found myself drinking Remy Martin, Pink Champel and snorting cocaine. A couple of years went by and my condition only got worse. I felt bad about all the drugs and drinking that I was doing so I decided to do something to make my situation better; I joined the Army Reserves.

A change was needed in my life, and I was willing to make that change by joining the military. I thought the military's strict, structured and disciplined environment would help me with my addiction but unfortunately it did not. I was sent to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri for eight months for basic training. When the time came for me to graduate from basic training and return home, I found myself back in the same situation prior to entering the military.

When I came home this time, it was different. I was introduced to smoking crack, and after a year went by with this addiction, I lost everything I had; my home, my lady, and my mind. I abandoned everything I had in my life. I had no insurance, no credit cards, I was three car notes behind, my license was dead, I was \$30,000 in debt, and I had been out five days straight, trying to find money to support my habit. Then on December 10, 1988, as I sat in my car in an alley, I cried out to God for help. On the next day, I received help, which started me on the road to recovery.

I went to in-patient treatment for two weeks, and within those two weeks I was educated on what I was doing to myself; mentally as well as emotionally. My drug addiction was a behavioral disease, and in order to be cured from this disease the first thing I had to do was change the people I was around, the places I was going and the things I was doing. I was told I had to find a new place to live, and I could not return to the place where I was staying. I moved back in with my mother, and since I wasn't being productive there it was suggested to me that I move into a recovery house.

There were two types of recovery houses; one was a Halfway house, in which you had to have a job, pay to live there, and someone was monitoring the house. The second type of home was an Oxford house, where the members of the house monitored the house, everyone in the house was in a 12-step program, and the members of the house chose who was elected in and out of the house. Due to the differences in the two homes; I decided that Oxford house was the best for me.

In December of 1988, I went to an interview to get into an Oxford house. I put my best suit on, grabbed my briefcase and was ready for the interview. During the interview, I never spoke about recovering from my drug addiction; instead, I talked about how they could improve their house. I suggested how they could fix the drapes and what kind of furniture they needed to put inside the house. Therefore they decided not to accept me in the house.

From that point on, my attitude was completely different because I knew I had no place to go. I went to another interview for the house and during this interview I talked about my recovery and how I could stay off drugs and alcohol and how the house could help me in my recovery. This time the members of the house accepted me in. During my acceptance, they mentioned I would have a roommate. I questioned which one of the members would be my roommate and a man named Billy raised his hand. Billy was tall, thin, and he was gay. At the time, I did not like gay men, but I realized Billy had 6 months of clean time and I had 10 days so it was principles over personalities. Billy and other members of the house taught me the process of how to stay clean off of drugs and alcohol. I started to excel as a person in the house. I began going to my 12-Step program meetings, arriving to work on time and eventually ended up with 60 days of being clean from drugs and alcohol. The members of the house then voted me to be the Coordinator of the house, which gave me some responsibility and self worth. I was so excited about being clean and being in charge of the house that my sponsor asked me to open up another house in D.C. with him.

During the opening of this house, my sponsor allowed me to play a key role in assisting him in teaching the people the concept of the Oxford house. We did a great job in starting the house. This experience strengthened my confidence and therefore I decided that I wanted to change jobs. Instead of working at a grocery store, I wanted to utilize my degree so I interviewed for jobs at the local banks. The interviews went great, but they also did credit checks, and at the time my credit wasn't good; so they said "well, Mr. Spence, if you can't take care of your money, how can we expect you to take care of ours."

During my job-hunting process, God intervened in my life once again and a door was opened for me. Oxford House received federal legislation to open up houses all over the country. After this announcement they asked me to become a spokesperson for the company, which consisted of traveling all

over the country opening up houses everywhere, since my sponsor and I did such a great job in D.C. I was then asked to tell my Oxford House story on The 60 Minutes Television broadcast, which was an honor for me to share my story with the world.

I continued working for Oxford house for approximately four years and I am eternally grateful to Paul M. and The Oxford House family for giving me an opportunity to show my skills around the country.

Today, I am happily married with a son and I own several businesses ranging from Mental Health homes to Hair Salons. Just think, it all came from saying no to drugs and alcohol and yes to Jesus in a new way of life through Oxford house.

Barbara's Story

I was born during the summer of '64; my parents were both students at Oregon State University. My mother was the daughter of an Oregon State Senator studying teaching and my father dropped out to later become a major success in the lumber business. My father was your "rags to riches" back to "rags" story, due to his own alcoholism, and by the time I was twelve, I was sneaking his cigarettes and booze.

By the age of fourteen, I was a runaway and by sixteen I was pregnant and married to a pot dealer. The marriage was over at nineteen and my aunt and uncle adopted our daughter. I went off to Beauty College and to explore my musical ambitions. By the time I was twenty-five, I was in my first successful musical group and well into cocaine. I became addicted quickly. I used more coke so that I could drink more, and visa versa. At twenty-six I started to use heroin. Although I had a career as a Hair Stylist, I became more and more involved with music and I eventually met up with a known Rock Celebrity and moved to Seattle, Washington where we lived together. My downhill spiral was in progress but it was hard to see because I was doing quite well musically and I was sheltered by the fame that was all around me. By the time I was thirty-two, I was on Methadone, Methamphetamine, Ritalin, heroin, and crack cocaine on a daily basis. My hairdressing career was long gone, and I had lost my musical ambitions after three independent recordings and a regional tour; by this time I had been declared mentally incompetent and placed on Social Security (SSI).

After losing my apartment and being on the Seattle streets for a couple of weeks, I took the train back to Portland, and moved into my mother's basement. Within a month I got kicked off the methadone program, out of my mom's, and back onto the streets where I soon met up with a character who ran a recycle center, which was a hub for local homeless drug addicts, and criminals. For the next two and a half years I drifted between mental wards jails, hospitals, the recycle center, the streets, and motel rooms. I finally bought a crappy car off a tow lot for \$200.00 and lived in it for a couple of weeks until one day, Thanksgiving Day, 1999 to be exact, I was doing the last of my dope when the police came upon me and arrested me for the last time. After a thirty-day sentence, I was released and I entered a six-month treatment program for women offenders. I applied myself and completed the program.

I was then accepted into the Ankeny Oxford House in Portland Oregon where I lived for the next two years. I got a job and got off Social Security, I got a sponsor and a home group and I started to work the 12 steps. I served as House Secretary and President along with serving my chapter as Secretary, Co-chair and Chair. I went to the Oxford World Convention in 2002 where I was inspired when I heard Paul Molloy speak. I felt the exhilaration and excitement as I met other Oxford House family members from all over the country and the world. I cast my vote in the elections of the Oxford House World Council and two years later I was elected to the Oxford House World Council. In 2005 I became the second female in Oxford House history to hold the office of World Council Chairperson. After seven wonderful years in sobriety, I continue to serve my fellows in Oxford House as a current alumni member of the World Council.

I am married to an incredible man who is also an alumnus of Oxford House. We have two beautiful children and we both feel that we owe much of our success to Oxford House. Thank you, Paul, for having the vision to open the first Oxford House. I truly do not know where I would be today if Oxford House hadn't been there for me.

Dan L's Story

I was a total nerd in school. I really didn't have any friends. I had a neighbor Matt who occasionally acknowledged my existence, if no other kids were around. Matt showed up on my 18th birthday. He'd snuck a 12-pack of Miller from his uncle. I'd never even thought about drinking. He handed me a bottle and I nearly chugged it. I've heard lots say how lousy alcohol tasted at first. Not for me. It was love at first swallow.

I was a klutzy kid. Two left feet, last chosen for baseball, dreaded gym. Everything a kid wanted to be good at, I stunk. Not just sports. At 13 I had my first crush. Her name was Kate. I idolized her and believed she was of a higher species. My cousin had me sit me next to Kate at his birthday party. She smiled and asked me a question. I looked at her and forgot the English language. I was too paralyzed to be embarrassed. It was like my first blackout, before my first drink. I resolved never to be seen in public again.

The only thing I was good at was video games. My talent was perfect for an anti-social life. At first, it was just Mario, Luigi and me. My universe expanded, but no more people, just more and more video games.

But that bottle of Miller changed my life. I drained it and had another, then a third. Matt said, "Wow, you can really put that stuff away." It was my first compliment.

Matt drank one bottle, so there were eight left. I instinctively knew to monitor my supply. Matt said, "let's go share it with my brother." "Like Hell," I said. I was a selfish drunk in my first forty minutes. I'd found something other than Nintendo I was good at. I was an absolute natural alcoholic.

I suddenly took a liking to Matt's Uncle Frank because he had oceans of alcohol. He was a good, friendly and kind man too. He was divorced, his wife had the kids, but he had every luxury imaginable and he didn't work. His station in life was based on two words: 'Trust Fund'.

Frank was about 35. I was 18 but we totally hit it off. Frank was always drinking and hated drinking alone. I didn't know any other way to get beer. In reality, we were both starved for human companionship. I essentially moved into his house. My father had left when I was three and my mother was a somewhat functioning alcoholic-addict. I don't think my mother noticed I'd moved. She was immersed in her 'Double-V Unreality' – vodka and Valium – always. I guess she thought I was still living my usual life, up in my room, endlessly playing video games.

Matt's older brother said he knew why Uncle Frank and I hit it off so well. He told me I was a 'sycophant'. I was mad as hell; I didn't have a clue what it meant, but it sounded disgusting.

I looked it up and all was OK. The dictionary defined 'sycophant', as a 'self-seeking, servile flatterer; fawning parasite.' Sounded like an OK job description to me. And, that was my entire drinking career. I moved in with Frank at 18 and we drank. We were both alcoholics and that's what drunks do.

One day I opened mail and it was a 21st birthday card from my dentist. Three years had gone by? Two months later, I got up one day and Frank didn't. I called 911 and cops and EMTs flooded the place. That was my longest day. I was crying and talking to cops and I ended the day in a detox. I was furious with Frank. He went away forever. And, he didn't take me with him.

I landed at Connecticut Valley Hospital in a ward that was a combo rehab- nuthouse-jail. I figured I'd be there forever. But I was 2, the state was gutting human services and I hadn't committed any crime, so 28 days later I'd be out. My counselor told me about Oxford Houses, said they'd drive me to an interview and pay initial costs. He also said he loved coffee, had been to a zillion Dunkin' Doughnuts and saw 'Help Wanted' signs there daily.

I moved into Oxford House Hamden and they told me, “go to meetings, pay rent, do my chore and the rest was just life.” Amazingly, I thrived.

I knew I loved Frank. Always will. He was my true father. I was his surrogate son. Yes, Frank gave alcohol to an 18-year-old alcoholic. Illegal, but in the scheme of things, not really bad. I knew I was alcoholic from my first drink and would have been drinking no matter what.

Everything else Frank gave me was positive. I’d just done what he did. He read mountains of books, watched about every fine film made, loved all kinds of music, and regularly went to art museums from Boston to New York. And he loved baseball. We went lots to Yankee Stadium and Fenway and to lots of college basketball games. Me, the all time nerd, became a big baseball, basketball fan. Amazing! Frank’s money cushioned both of us from some consequences of alcohol. There was always someone to drive and someone to get us home safely and make certain our cigarettes were out.

Just sober, I still felt incredibly shy. In my first talk with my sponsor, he laid down the rules and emphasized no relationships my first year. Relationship! I wasn’t planning on a conversation.

Oxford House was no less than a miracle for me. I was totally alone in the world and I moved into a true family. That’s just not supposed to happen. Seven-eight guys, 21 to 60, most all had very little money, but we were living in a great town, in a terrific old house and were bonded by our addictions.

We were immersed in a double fraternity, the program (AA/NA) and Oxford House. One complemented the other, beginning with the absolute bedrock of our existence; living free of alcohol and drugs. Then honesty, personal responsibility, concern for and consideration of others. And tolerance, empathy and gratitude.

Oxford House was an unexpected, virtually inconceivable gift and blessing in my life. And, as I continue along the road of sobriety, I am amazed to meet so many others for whom Oxford House was, and is, a miracle of sober community.

Christy D’s Story

I started drinking in high school-your typical party-on-the-weekend stuff. I am the oldest of 4 children and felt entitled to blow off steam. I was a straight A student and obedient child – I was too afraid of my mother to disobey her. I received an academic scholarship to Spring Hill College in Mobile, AL. Being a native of New Orleans meant automatic friends because the drinking age here was still 18. I felt that I didn’t fit in any crowd in high school and I became a chameleon. I didn’t feel that I was good enough for the Spring Hill kids either as my family did not have anywhere near the financial resources most of the others had. I withdrew from my second semester at Spring Hill, using my father’s recent diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease as an excuse to come home and party more. I told everyone I was going to help my mother financially, but in truth I came home to party with my friends.

I met my future husband during this time. He was extremely good looking and cool and wild – everything I wanted to be. I felt that I could fix the things I didn’t like about him – if someone just loved him enough, he would change. I saw a lot of potential in him. I got pregnant very quickly and 1 year later married. We had another child two years later. I started using pills at around the age of 25. Everything about our life was pretentious – what we looked like in public; what people thought of us. There was a lot of abuse on every level and a lot of secrets. He ended up going to prison when I was 28 and my disease progressed rapidly. I gave custody of my children to my mother and my family disowned me. He came home 3 years later and we continued to use together and things deteriorated fast. We eventually became homeless and he had 9 criminal charges and a lot of child support to pay. He decided we should go to treatment.

He went to Detox and then the Clearview Oxford House. He continued to use in that house and overdosed and died.

I stayed out another 5 months and knew I either had to give getting sober a try or I would be dead. I went to treatment and then to a halfway house in Baton Rouge. I went to work for his uncle who opened an office for me to work out of in Baton Rouge (considering I overdosed in his warehouse while previously working for him, this was a definite miracle). At the close of my 7 months at this house, my boss asked if I knew anyone who didn't use who I could live with. I reminded him of Oxford House and told him there was one in Kenner for women and I would look into it.

I moved into the Kenner House 3 weeks before Hurricane Katrina hit. I was very grateful to get back home. My boss then helped me get a vehicle. I have had a very unique experience at my house. Another woman moved in 2 months after me who was a widow due to her husband overdosing. To say we are as different as night and day is the understatement of the year. We have become the best of friends – we found similarities when at times it seemed there were none. We have learned how to trust and enjoy other women. I have also learned how to not tear other women down and how to confront people in a constructive manner. As for Tiffany and me, I have learned to stand up for myself and she has learned to show the kind heart she really has.

My life has been enriched beyond my wildest imagination and I have true friends today who are not afraid to tell me the truth. I now have relationships with my family and we actually enjoy being around each other. I had the privilege of going to my boss's 25th Anniversary Party recently and I faced all of my in-laws for the first time in 3 years. I felt great being able to be proud of who I am and not having to be embarrassed of who I was – and they actually enjoyed the real Christy. My 14-year-old daughter recently had to write a speech for Speech Class about who she admires most in the world and she chose me. Most "normal" parents dream of something like this – I was astounded.

I now have a successful career and professional life I am very happy with. I feel that this would not have been possible without God and the opportunities provided by the Oxford House. I have been provided a safe and clean haven. I feel that the sky is the limit in my life and I can't wait to see what tomorrow brings and for that I am forever grateful!

Gary C's Story

My name is Gary C. On July 23, 2000, I was lucky enough to be arrested in Prince George's County, Maryland. This was the beginning of the end of a twenty-five year run at drug usage and addiction. The judge took 30 years of possible time, had me plead guilty to a 10 year charge, and gave me the option of 18 months in the HIDTA Program and 18 months probation and also advised me this was my LAST CHANCE for freedom.

I did Phase One, 90 days in the jail drug unit, then on Feb. 21, 2001 I was released to Day Reporting for Phase Two, but to go to Phase Two, I needed a place to stay for 90 days before I could move on to Phase Three (probation). As most of us had done, I had badly burned the bridge to home and had very few options. My cellmate rented me a room at his house but, with his stepson smoking and selling pot in the basement, I was worried that I would go back to jail over their actions.

A co-worker also in recovery suggested that I talk to Jesse Short who does liaison between the Salvation Army and Oxford house. I said okay I would do it soon but he called Jesse that day and Jesse took me right up to the Howard Ave. house for an interview.

I was surprised to see another former inmate I knew living in the house. On the 91st day, when I was allowed to move, I quickly moved to the Howard Ave. Oxford House and spent the next two and a half years living there. During this time I was voted onto the Oxford House World Council where I served for four years. During this time I started my own plumbing and drain cleaning business on Capitol Hill and I have been making a new life clean and sober.

I just had my seven-year anniversary and my life is looking better each day! I have obtained many memories in life, lots of material things, and I am looking forward to a lifelong commitment of marriage

and starting a family with a very beautiful lady who has seen both the good and bad sides of me over the last ten years and still loves me today!

This would not have been possible without the HIDTA Program laying the foundation, Oxford House for the chance to grow in a safe and sober environment, and the N.A. & A.A. programs to maintain my focus on the future! Anyone who puts their mind and heart into a new life can do it, just look at me. I DID IT!!!!!!

Gordon N's Story

My story of recovery, and Oxford House, began well before I became a resident of Oxford House in Chesapeake, Virginia in late 2002. I was living in California with my wife and son, where I had carved out a good life during what was at that time nearly 20 years of sobriety. I was active in Alcoholics Anonymous, had a sponsor and was sponsoring others. I worked hard on my program and did my best to practice its principles in all of my affairs.

My wife, however, yearned to be closer to her family, most of them were located in the Tidewater area of southern Virginia. Although my family was in California and I initially didn't want to leave, I eventually gave in to the idea of a new beginning. In retrospect, those really were exciting times. We stayed with her parents while searching for that "perfect" home we could call our own, which we found in less than a month. Arrangements were made for school, my wife pursued her dream of a career in cosmetology and my professional success was immediate. The future looked bright indeed.

There was just one problem; I failed to bring my entire program with me from California. I did initially attend AA meetings, but these became fewer and farther between as I allowed the demands of the move and getting established with a new home and a new job take priority over my recovery. I rationalized that I'd be ok, that I would step up my program once my life was back on track; after all, by this time I had over 20 years sober. I was soon to learn what I had so quickly lost sight of during this process: my disease attacks on a daily basis, and if I fail to fight it daily as well, it will win.

Over the course of that year my sobriety began to erode. I didn't recognize it then, but I was a relapse waiting to happen. About this time, I was diagnosed with chronic arthritis in my right hip; the intense pain I was feeling would only get worse unless I had a hip replacement. Reluctantly, I agreed, not aware of the chain of events that was about to take place. The first surgery – of what would eventually be 5 more surgeries and 25 dislocations – did not go well. To keep a long story short, the next 2 years became an odyssey of hospital visits, pain and more erosion of my sobriety. I was freely prescribed narcotic pain meds; morphine, Demerol, Oxycotin to name a few. I thought I could handle these drugs; after all, I was an alcoholic, not an *addict*.

Flashing forward, I became dependent – addicted – to these drugs. In a very short time, I was drinking again and eventually lost my home and family. I wondered at the time why I didn't fight for my wife and son, but my disease was in control and somehow made these events acceptable. Still employed, I moved out and was soon introduced to crack cocaine, a drug that quickly took away what little I had left. My hip continued to "pop out," and I was told that it was likely I would become wheelchair-bound. This was a huge wake-up call; I searched for a specialist and eventually flew to Detroit for "hip-saving" surgery. Although the operation was a success, the patient was going to die unless something changed. I believe my Higher Power placed me in one of the only out of state facilities my insurance would cover; it was a dismal, lock-down ward where I had nothing but time, and nowhere to run. I was filled with despair, hopelessness and fear and could no longer convince myself that I was in control. It was there that I was, once again, forced to confront my disease.

My job and my home were gone, but I still had several months of unemployment left in Virginia. But where was I going to go? I knew by then that I couldn't trust myself to be on my own and I'd worn out my welcome everywhere else. My mother – truly one of God's messengers – told me she found out about a place called Oxford House that seemed to have what I was looking for.

I contacted Oxford House – Chesapeake, was able to schedule an interview shortly after my discharge and moved in in early January 2004. My initial plan was to stay about 90 days. I got involved with Oxford almost immediately and was elected as the State Association’s Public Relations Chairman after just 75 days. I put out Oxford’s first state newsletter in Virginia, began promoting Oxford to various referring agencies and even pursued some grants. I was attending meetings every day per the house’s “90 in 90” policy. I was elected as president of the house and became active on the chapter level. I reestablished contact with my 14 year old son and began making amends to my family. In retrospect, I was trying to set a Guinness record in getting back everything I had lost. The problem with all of this frantic activity is that I failed to really “work” the program. I didn’t get a sponsor, didn’t work the steps and my meeting attendance fell off sharply. One day, I was driving around in a bad area I knew well and, almost on autopilot, drove to the house of one of my old dealers. In less than a week I was evicted, wondering what the hell had happened.

However, my previous sobriety and my time with Oxford convinced me that I could make it work, provided I made a commitment to *take action* in my program. I was staying with friends when I got a call from Paul Stevens, Oxford Houses of Virginia’s State Coordinator. Paul and I had developed a good relationship while I was at Oxford, and thankfully he still believed in me and valued what I could offer Oxford. He asked if I would help him by moving into Oxford’s first house in Williamsburg. This was not a hard decision; I had no money, soon would have no place to stay and my family would only assist me if I returned to Oxford. I moved in on July 29, 2005 and have been clean and sober since.

This time I got a sponsor, a home group and began working the steps. I also took things more slowly, relying on my renewed faith in a Higher Power that, if I did the footwork, everything would fall into place. Eventually, the Williamsburg house stabilized, although we had some anxious moments along the way. Towards the end of my first year, I was elected as Housing Service Chairman for Chapter 7. The very next day embezzlement was discovered, a theft so significant it threatened the survival of 2 houses. Beyond the financial challenges, there was an overall atmosphere of apathy and lack of direction within the chapter. Most of the houses were in disarray relative to functioning according to the Oxford system of operations. Pro-activity in keeping beds filled was the exception, not the rule. There was also no leadership from the chapter level, and promotion of Oxford – with the exception of Williamsburg – was non-existent. The perception of Oxford in this region was at an all-time low. Today, the chapter enjoys the lowest vacancy rates since its inception. We normally have 1 or 2 beds open throughout the *chapter*, instead of per house. I am proud to report that I was only a small part of this turnaround. We have been blessed to have some very determined and committed individuals who continue to work hard to ensure that we maintain higher standards.

My life is good today, and I credit no small part of this to the principles of Oxford House. I have regained the trust and respect of my family, my ex-wife and many others. I am currently searching for a home that I will be moving into with my son, who still says he wants to be just like me when he grows up. I am still very involved with Oxford House, assisting Outreach in opening new houses, training and supervision of houses and on the chapter level. I am part of the Williamsburg Area Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous and edit their local newsletter. I also regularly share my experience, strength and hope about recovery and Oxford House in presentations to jails, probation and corrections officials, attorneys, rehabilitation facilities and other institutions.

I did not achieve all of this by myself. It was a *process*, through which I developed the capacity to be honest and the willingness to change. Living in an Oxford House, where I was immersed in recovery 24/7 was a major key, as was getting out of my own head and helping others. Resigning from my position as *General Manager of the Universe* allowed me to minimize self-seeking and develop some measure of humility. Working the Steps with a sponsor I trusted enabled me to make some real progress towards the “psychic change” I believe is necessary if we are to be successful in living life on life’s terms and practice the principles of recovery “in all our affairs.”

The biggest gift of all has nothing to do with *money, property or prestige*. I can look in the mirror today and love what I see. I no longer live in fear of the past, present or future. I am, once again,

comfortable in my own skin. I have a relationship with a Higher Power – whom I call God – that has made all of this, and so much more, possible. I will always be grateful to Oxford House for its important role in helping me to continue to strive for progress in recovery and in life on a daily basis.

In closing, I need you to know that my life is far from perfect; I have problems like everyone else, and I don't always see them as "opportunities for growth." I also realize that, although I have come a long way, I am still new in recovery and must remain teachable, humble and willing. However, I *can* say that I am able to stay in the present – often in the moment – a great deal more than I could in the past. Every day is a new adventure, a chance to grow and learn, and – despite the challenges that come my way – I'm embracing life. I truly understand what a very wise man meant when he said: "The journey's the thing . . . " What a ride!

Jerry N.'s Story

I was born August 15th, 1953. I started getting high when I was fifteen years old. My Father says I was sniffing glue at thirteen. Who knows? His memory was better than mine, so it's probably true. I grew up in the late 60's and 70's. I took the drugs that were popular at that time. I never had a moral issue with getting high, only a legal one. Early on I found out that needles were the way to go. I didn't vary from that, even though, years later, to find a usable vein was one of my biggest challenges.

I could tell my story as a "drug-a-log" and it would be about going from drug to drug and combinations of drugs to change the way I feel. Finally, I found the one that was for me. Heroin. It put rose-colored glasses over my eyes and made the world seem like an okay place. The Twelve Step program I belong to today tells me that my drug use will take me to: "Jails, Institutions and Death." So true. By the time I was 19 (1972), I was in Texas Department of Corrections for selling and possessing drugs. It really taught me a valuable lesson: Don't sell to people you don't know. I got out when I was 21 and the drug use continued, but I managed to keep jobs and stay out of trouble.

In 1980 I started to have problems with my drug use to the point I started to try to control it. That didn't work. I tried a shrink, but he wanted as much as my weekly habit cost and I didn't want to give my money to him. Around 1984 I found the solution. I got on Methadone so at least I won't have to get dope sick. That was a real upwind wiz. I ended up with two habits instead of one. Finally, after four years I got off Methadone by shooting lots of Heroin. Kind of ironic that it's supposed to be the other way around, huh?

From 1984 to 1994, it was a bad time for me. In that time period I had been to three treatment centers. By 1990, I was going to jail a lot for boosting out of stores to support my habit. I hit bottom over and over and was taking it to the point I was becoming homeless. What I see today is that I would get out of a treatment center or jail and go right back to using. I was going right back to the environment I came from. I would manage to stay clean enough to become employable and get some money in my pocket and then go back to using. And I was losing everything in the process.

In 1994 I hit a bottom that even I could not believe. Out of jail (again), with no vehicle and no money. I was homeless. I felt that I had taken it way too far down the wire to be able to come back as I had done in the past. I felt that I had "broken" myself beyond repair. So I did what I had done in the past – find somebody or something to bail me out. What I wanted was a cushy place in a treatment center with a bed and food. What I found was a place on Ross Avenue in Dallas, Texas called the 24 Hour Club. It was for people like me, off the streets. I could live there but I had to stay clean and pay rent. If I was hungry I better find work because there you had to stand on your own. I had nothing or anybody left to use. For the first time I was solely responsible for my actions. I would like to tell you that I wound up there and stayed clean, but I can't. I found a job and as soon as I had money I used. But man, the guilt was killing me. I was using knowing that it was killing me and I could not stop.

I managed to stay clean for a week or two (I had no money or a job) when I heard about Oxford House. I had found a job as a security guard (kind of like putting the fox in the hen house) so I went and interviewed at the Richardson House and was accepted. For the first time I was in an environment that was safe. There was no drug use. If we used drugs (alcohol is a drug) or used jailhouse methods to resolve conflicts we were boosted. I started to attend Narcotics Anonymous meetings. We talked constantly about

recovery in the house and encouraged each other in our recovery.

I saw that recovery (not just staying clean) was a good thing and that I wanted it. I stayed in Richardson House for two years that were the most important in my life. I learned to deal with people in an effective manner and was able to take what I learned to my N.A. Home Group and become an effective Trusted Servant there and also to society at large. I am still close with people I met in Oxford that are staying clean. On July 4, 2007 I celebrated 13 years of recovery. It might have happened without Oxford, but in my heart I don't know for sure. I want to stress that my recovery came from a combination of Oxford and a 12 Step Program. In my heart I don't think Oxford would have been enough. When I left Oxford my recovery would have stopped. I know you can stay in Oxford for as long as you like, but after two years I felt an obligation to turn my bed over to someone new. My ongoing recovery is through N.A.

Manuel P.'s Story

I had been a cocaine and heroin addict for the last 20 years, going in and out of jails and prisons, living in ritzy hotels and also under bridges. I was a well-known drug dealer and a troublemaker, someone to be avoided.

I was tired of going to prison, and not having a family to call my own. I didn't know a life without drugs, but I knew that things had to change or else I was going to end up dead or doing life in prison, just like most of my friends.

It was during the last time in prison that I decided to make a change. I got out and went into a treatment program, and applied myself fully to it; while in there, someone came in to give a presentation about Oxford Houses. I was very impressed and I hung on to the idea that there was a possibility that I could stay clean, and pursue a better life.

I went from treatment to an Oxford House. I found a job, and I continued going to outpatient treatment. I was also a secretary of an A.A. meeting. I stayed busy and slowly learned to be responsible, reliable, and to become a man of integrity.

I feel that I owe my new life to Oxford. Things are so much different today. I am married to a wonderful woman. I have two beautiful children, a boy and a girl, and I am graduating this year from a renowned university with a bachelor's degree. I have just bought my first house and I am finally a truly responsible member of society.

Jim R.'s Story

I'm Jim R. and I'm an alcoholic. I began drinking at sixteen and began getting into trouble at seventeen. Just minor troubles with the law, but a preview of things to come.

I was seventeen in 1971 when I joined the Army. I was proud to make the grade as a 'Special Forces, Army Ranger'. I served with the 82nd Airborne in Viet Nam. Sure, I drank some, but combat is literally, 'deadly serious'. Others were counting on me to stay alive, just as I counted on them. We always had each other's backs. War and the military was my reality. I was a Sergeant when discharged in 1974.

I came back to a different world. After the intensity of war, nothing seemed real or important. Nothing seemed real, except for the 'flashbacks' and the dreams of war. Vivid and haunting, they were nightmares of a nightmare. I know they affected my drinking. I was using alcohol in the present to combat nightmares of the past. I was drinking more and more.

I was married at 30 and we had a daughter. But, she was only a toddler when my marriage broke up and I hit the bricks. A wicked New England winter and I had no place to go, so I went down.....way down and fast. That first night it was below zero. With a guy I knew, we got some Vodka and tried to sleep on a wooden pallet on a loading dock under the Coliseum. It was below zero and we only had a sheet. I believe the frostbite began that night.

I was homeless on the streets of New Haven, panhandling part time...my only income to support my drinking, which had become fulltime. Vodka, Irish Rose, beer....anything, seven days a week. Strange. I didn't think much about misery when misery was all I had. My feet were dying, so I went to the hospital. Because of the Frostbite, two and one-half toes on my right foot were amputated. I was released in six weeks and was back on the streets that night, freezing and drinking.

I didn't like homeless shelters and rarely went. But, I sure gave the jails plenty of tries. I was in jail as much time as detoxes. I liked detoxes; they were a good break from the streets. I've been in detox over 150 times.

After four years on the street, a detox took. I went to rehab and from 1990 to 1996, I was clean and sober. I had a job and an apartment in Middletown. It was a second floor apartment and in 1996 I was on the porch arranging plants. I'm 6 foot, 220 pounds. I lost my balance, went through the screen and fell two stories, landing headfirst on the cement sidewalk.

I was in the hospital 6 weeks. They called it 'Traumatic Brain Injury' or 'TBI. Life seemed unreal, a dream. I lived in a cloud. Four years an Army Ranger, Viet Nam, combat, nightmarish missions. Four years homeless on the streets where anything can happen and usually does. And I almost kill myself arranging house plants.

I couldn't go back to work, but I did go back to the bottle. I was in and out of the program and detoxes for years. The detox people were great and we became friends. They were always talking-up rehabs and in 2005 I went to Merrit Hall as much to please them as anything. My counselor Roy had good experience with Oxford House. I didn't want to go back to New Haven, but he recommended an Oxford House there and I hadn't seen my daughter much and she lived in West Haven.

I didn't like the House right way. But, my roommate was John, a great guy who has become a close friend. I got to know others, settled into my meetings and Oxford House grew on me. It felt right. No one was trying to make a buck off my recovery. There were things about the house I thought could be improved. Because the house is run democratically, I voiced my opinions. There were people of like mind and we've made a ton of progress fixing-up and better caring for this big old house.

From the beginning, I was impressed that all bills were paid on time. Later I appreciated the prudent management, which maintains a healthy reserve, because it permitted us to repair, improve and upgrade the house.

I came for one year max and have been here 2 & ½ years. It doesn't feel at all like an institution, but like a home. There is a true sense of community and I feel free. For today, free from active alcoholism and free to live a quality life. I listen to my 60's music, follow my Bears and Broncos and feel I'm part of something unique and good. I've gotten bonuses I never envisioned. When I moved here I knew zero about computers, but housemates did and we have a fine house computer. Now, I have my own computer in my room. I'm on-line and truly enjoy it – an excellent Oxford House bonus.

And, my daughter is part of life my again. That and my sobriety are the greatest blessings of all. My daughter will soon make me a Grandfather. Her due date is September 13th, the very day that, with the grace of God, will be my second anniversary sober in AA. I am one grateful alcoholic.

Jason G.'s Story

As far back as I can remember, my life seemed different from others. I never quite felt as though I fit in with anyone, not my family, not the other kids at school, not anywhere. Something seemed to be missing. I tried everything that I could think of to make myself fit. Looking back on it today, it seems only natural that I would gravitate to using drugs. I remember that first high. I was twelve years old, smoking pot with some older kids. The feeling it gave me, I thought, was exactly what I had been missing all my

life. Finally, everything fit. Then, suddenly, within just a little more than a year, it turned on me. By the time I was thirteen I was freebasing and running into the law. I was sentenced to a TC and spent two and a half years on a compound in Maine.

You'd think I'd learned my lesson, but so often with addicts that is not the case. After leaving the program at sixteen I stayed clean for six months but on my third anniversary of going away I sought that comfort in drugs that I had found those years before. Again the progression took off, now with more furor than before. Alienated, and isolated with nowhere to go, no place to call home, I called my dad and told him I had a little drug problem. He was in AA with years of sobriety and a specialist in addiction medicine. He helped me to get into rehab. It was shortly before my nineteenth birthday.

My dad told me that if I completed rehab I could come and live with him, but I guess after talking to people he realized that that might not be the best idea, so two weeks into rehab he told me I couldn't come home. Infuriated by this in my usual style when I didn't get what I wanted, I signed myself out. Being as stubborn as I was, I was determined to stay clean just to spite everyone who thought that I couldn't. My first dilemma was to find a place to live. My dad had suggested an Oxford House. I had no idea what this was, of course, but I had come to the conclusion that me making my own decisions was a sure fire way to end up using again, and so I took the suggestion and got myself an interview at two of the local houses and both accepted me. One house was more lackadaisical than the other and people in the meetings told me I should go to the house that had more rules, so that's where I went.

I went to meetings, got a sponsor, started doing step work, got a job, paid my rent and took the suggestions that were being given to me by the people in NA and, lo and behold, something started happening that I thought was impossible for me. I began to fit. First I started fitting in with the guys that I lived with in my house because I was a member and I did what the other members did. Then, in NA, because I was a member and did what members did. Then, with my family because I was a member and did what members did. And as time progressed, I fit in with the rest of humanity because I am a member and I do what members do.

I got involved with the house that I lived in and at a chapter meeting met this girl. I followed her around from chapter meeting to chapter meeting and along the way picked up a little bit of what was going on. When the girl was gone, I continued to go to the chapter meetings and when it came time that they needed something done, somehow I was the most qualified. Being in service to the houses in the area became a way of giving back something that I had become eternally grateful for. I continued to be in service for the next few years that followed and was offered the sometimes frustrating but always rewarding, opportunity to work for Oxford House Inc and open houses in my home state of New Jersey.

I just celebrated nine years clean and this last year I came back to work for Oxford House. I have been on an incredible journey since finding recovery. Turbulent at times but so precious that words can not describe it. I came from a place where I felt so alienated from the world that I could no longer see myself as human to a full fledged member of society, human in all regards including flaws and talent. I owe a large part of that to my first Oxford House and the predecessors who made that house possible for me. My house gave me a place to call home, for the first time since I was sent away as a kid I had a place to call home, a place where I fit into the pattern of life. From there, all things became possible.

Troy M.'s Story

My name is Troy M. I was born on July 12, 1971 in a small mill town called Eden, North Carolina. My mother, Betty, worked in the local mill, and my father, Alonzo, worked in construction. I grew up with my two sisters and one brother. At an early age I always felt like I did not fit in with everyone else. I had a hard time in school and had very low self-esteem. I was compared to my brother a lot and I always felt less than him. We grew up poor and did not have things other kids had.

At the age of 12, I tried my first drug, marijuana. I remember that the drug made me feel good about myself. It made me feel I could talk to anyone at anytime. My addiction progressed throughout the years and by the age of 17 I was a full-blown addict. I graduated high school and began to work in the

mills. I went to treatment in 1993 and stayed clean for a short time. My addiction progressed to the point of animalistic living. I lost the ability to live as a human being.

I went to treatment again in 2000 and found out I had a disease and I could stay clean if I treated it. I went to a halfway house for six months and from there I moved into an Oxford House, where I remained for three years. Oxford House gave me time to get my life together, taught me responsibility, and how to live with others. I opened a new house for Oxford House in 2003 and now I work for Oxford House full time. I know that if God had not blessed me to find Oxford House, I would not be here today.

Thank God for Paul and all the people who started Oxford House, Inc.!

Robert K. 's Story

I was raised in a typical central Virginia home; we didn't have a lot but we always had enough. I had an alcoholic grandmother and three uncles, so it was a given that I would drink at some point in my life even though my mother barely touched alcohol and couldn't stand being around a drunk. My childhood was full of fun and laughter, coupled with plenty of mischief for I was a handful. I excelled in school throughout my elementary and junior high school years until the summer before my sophomore year in high school. It was that summer that I had my first toke on a joint and my life was never the same.

It started out being so much fun even though the evidence even then was that I should not, could not, do this without consequences. My grades started slipping and I lost interest in organized sports; all I wanted to do was get high and listen to music and go to house parties. I managed to get through high school barely and entered the United States Air Force. I did the same thing there that I did in high school, got high and partied for almost four years before I realized that I had not accomplished anything and my tour of duty was almost up. I reenlisted for another term with the intention of going to college and not wasting another term partying, but I continued to get high, with much of the same results.

I ended up being discharged (under Honorable Conditions) for failing a urinalysis test after having tried cocaine for the first time. This was the start of a love affair that lasted for another 20 years, fueled with a multitude of character defects, ending with me homeless and in despair for the turn my life had taken after the many successes I had achieved even under the influence. I had never seriously considered treatment in the past before that cold winter of 2003/04. It was in desperation that I sought help and with tears streaming down my face I was given a little hope in the statement that, "It's okay we will help you, if you really want it."

I spent two weeks in a shelter waiting for a bed in treatment and for the first time in years I chose not to use...until the day I walked to treatment. I used and lied about it to the nurse even though it was obvious that I was high. She said: "Are you sure you aren't high? At that moment I said, " No, I am high," and my life has never been the same. That surrender opened the door to a new way of life that is better than any I could have imagined before. I was accepted into an Oxford House after 35 days in treatment and my life really changed. I am not talking about financially, which it did, but I am talking about spiritually. I have been shown a new way of living in my Oxford family that has prepared me for life on life terms very well. All my life I have made choices which were based on desperation and I thought I was really sharp! The truth is, I now realize that I was selling myself cheap because of my addictive nature and I probably would have made quite a few different choices in my life were I not getting high.

I have resided in an Oxford House for the last 3 years, four months, and I have had ups and downs, good times and bad, but I have not found it necessary to go back to my old behavior. The support of my Oxford family has led me to understand that my Higher Power has allowed me the benefit of experiencing all that I have to prepare me for his purpose and, in the end, my best thinking got me where I am... still dependent on the Creators' guidance, mercy and grace. I thank the Creator for Oxford House, because without it I have no idea where I would be or what I would be doing and, given my history, so should you.

Jeff H.'s Story

From the mid-sixties until perhaps 1977 I was a heavy drinker and drug user. I guess you could say I was a child of my generation. I remember living in Colorado in 1971, unemployed, and stumbling upon the movie "Days of Wine and Roses" on a movie channel that played the same movie all day long for a week. I sat there all day long with a bottle of Scotch, thinking, "That's what I am" (meaning an alcoholic). I continued to drink and drug until about a year after I got married. My new wife was at wits end with me, and I had gotten to the point with alcohol where bad things were happening almost every time I drank. I was falling apart. We decided we would move away from all my friends; I would go to college on the GI bill; and I would try to live sober. It worked. I became a terrific student, went on to graduate school, got straight A's and scholarships. The sacrifice was any kind of a social life. Not only was there no time, but I knew I couldn't be around it without drinking. And while I had made the decision to quit freely, I resented my wife for pressuring me. I blamed her for the loss of my friends and closeness with other people.

For the next 20 years I was a dry drunk. Obsessive, angry, unhappy, isolated. I was also a successful business owner. I worked 7 days a week, no time off, no hobbies, no close friends, and no vacations. It began to crumble when my mother died. Her health had been deteriorating for years, and we had lived only 200 miles away, but I never took the time to visit. I was too busy and my business was too important. Right after the funeral I went back to work, no time to grieve. But I realized my life was empty. My wife and I had nothing in common, nothing to talk about. One year later I woke up to find a note on the kitchen table informing me she couldn't live like this any more and please vacate the premises by noon. I stayed sober 3 more days and then walked into the Longbranch Saloon in Overland Park, Kansas, and didn't leave for 5 years.

My business started going south, I made stupid decisions, pressure was mounting and my body stopped processing alcohol. My old friend made me deathly ill. I had a new wife (one of us), and I had the bright idea of picking up crack cocaine. There is not enough money on earth to support a crack cocaine habit. We eventually sold my business, smoked up all the money, and wound up living on the streets of Kansas City and Tulsa for 2 years. No one knew where we were. In September 2003, we were rescued by the police in Tulsa. I went to treatment and my wife went to jail.

At treatment I had wonderful counselors, but I got sober on the front porch of the treatment center. That was where all the patients got together, told our stories, and smoked cigarettes. That was where, for the first time since I quit drinking in the 70's, that I wasn't alone anymore. And I realized I wasn't the only one who thought the way I did. I had a tribe. Funny looking group, but what the heck. My counselor at treatment told me if I wanted to stay sober and have any shot at a new life with my wife (whom I loved dearly), we had to separate for a year. Each of us had to work on ourselves separately. If you put the two of us together, we would work on each other until we killed each other. We were so tired and desperate we listened.

She got out of jail and stayed with family up in Kansas. I interviewed at an Oxford House in Tulsa and was accepted and moved there on October 5, 2003. After the shock wore off, I realized I really liked it. All I had done was take the front porch of the treatment center and move it to the front room of the Oxford House. I went to AA meetings every day, aftercare group, did presentations for the Tulsa chapter and worked. The same group of us in the house went through a full year together. Even though I missed my wife, I loved it. After a year apart, I moved up to Kansas City, reunited with my wife and we began our new life. I got a job, we started getting back on our feet financially, and most important, we had the kind of relationship I had always dreamed of.

Then, just 2 months shy of 2 years sober, I woke up one morning and my wife didn't. I was devastated, the walls were closing in, and I knew I would eventually relapse. So the morning after the funeral, I put whatever I could put in my car, gave away everything else, and moved back to an Oxford House in Tulsa. I stayed sober one day at a time. I had some money saved and decided to do service work for full time as long as it lasted. Two years later, the Outreach job in Oklahoma opened up and I took it.

I believe in Oxford House. It gives people a chance to learn how to get along with other people, resolve conflicts, witness behaviors preceding relapse, and learn to deal with life's problems without picking up a drink or a drug. I don't believe addiction is the primary disease, but rests upon the primary disease, which is isolation. The greatest gift of Oxford House is new friendships in sobriety.

Mark J.'s Story

"...Eeyeeew!" said I at 8 when booze first passed my lips. At twice that age, it wasn't so yucky. Thrice that age I was a moderate social drinker, earning my merit badges in drunken debauchery. Gone were my childhood ambitions of becoming a Catholic priest. My addiction could have been charted by a smooth-curved line, bending ever so quickly toward a dismal destiny. A functioning drunk by 30, my dreams of becoming a rock star had all but drowned in a sea of whiskey and vodka. Graduating college with honors only opened doors to jobs I couldn't keep, since alcohol had been promoted to the top of my priority list. Once again, dreams and aspirations had been swept into the proverbial gutter as I laid with my liquid lover, who raped me on a daily basis.

At 43, desperate to save their dying son, my parents hired a lawyer who convinced a judge to have me court ordered to a 30-day treatment program. Three cops telling me that they were taking me someplace to "get help" only begged the question, "And if I don't want to go?" Their response was, "Then we'll take you to jail." Not a difficult decision to make, but it marked my point of surrender. "OK, let's go get help," I replied. Lame as it may seem, since the choice was obvious, surrendered had I. Knowing that life as I knew it was over, that everything was going to be different, that something new was about to begin, surrendered had I.

The miracles that followed are too numerous to record. I do remember the long ride in the back of the cop car to the treatment center, no hand-cuffs or shackles; the look of despair on my mother's face as I spewed my resentment toward her for doing this to me; the professional idiots going on with some nonsense about a Higher Power; the fear of the unknown; the sense of abandonment; the stench of failure and incompetence. Yet somewhere within me there had been birthed a tiny glimmer of hope. In the handful of days to follow came moments of clarity, my spiritual awakening, seeping in like the river's ripple.

On day 29 of my 30-day treatment program, in her search for half-way houses, my mother called a number, and was gave her another, and the person with whom she spoke suggested she look in the phone book, where she found Oxford House Windsor – the only Oxford House in New Orleans that had been mistakenly listed in the White Pages that year. After a lengthy telephone interview, I was accepted, sight-unseen – a miraculous cohesion of fate and faith. I was immediately drawn to the Oxford House concept. The blend of simplicity and absurdity seemed so fascinating, and radically ingenious. Somehow I knew that I was to embrace it, and make it a fundamental element of my recovery.

Oxford House has certainly fulfilled its objective in helping me learn not only to stop drinking, but more importantly how to *stay* stopped. It gave me the time to create a solid foundation in recovery at a pace that best suited my particular level of addiction to my particular drug of choice – alcohol. It has empowered a very powerless individual and set the stage for countless adventures in spiritual exploration. By serving my House, our Chapter, and other addicts and alcoholics, I've been guided to replace self-indulgence with altruistic philanthropy. The strength and support received from my fellow members, who have suffered as I have, is a treasure of unspeakable value. Together we embrace our successes, learn from our shortcomings, and guide each other toward a future that now has meaning, and purpose. We teach each other to adhere to virtuous principles, while reaping the intangible rewards that come from selflessness and anonymity.

While I will never be able to control my alcoholism, through Oxford House I have learned how to live my life in such a way that today my alcoholism does not control me. My dismal days of suffering, sloth and sleep are over. Limited only by my pitifully tiny human brain, I've managed to acquire a humble understanding of the non-objective powers of life and love, wisdom and growth, as they weave the intricate tapestry of our existence. All these things and more I have learned through my service in and the workings of Oxford House. So work I must now, for I have forever to sleep.

Blake B.'s Story

My name is Blake and I am a grateful recovering drug-addicted alcoholic. My addiction started in my early teens as recreation on weekends with my high school buds. There was nothing like driving around back roads with a case of beer until we threw up and laughed our heads off. Clandestine keggers in the woods were always a big hit and there was the sport of not getting caught by parents or other authority figures. It was always good fun and I was sure I would continue to have alcohol as a social outlet for eternity.

I went into the Navy right out of high school at the age of 17. It was not a very popular occupation at the time because there was this thing going on in Viet Nam. Drinking was almost a requirement because it was cheap and most likely if you wore a uniform and could serve your country, you could drink. It was during this period that I married, made babies, and discovered drugs. It was amazing how rampant drug use was at the time and I fell right into it, but I was only using "soft drugs", not that hardcore needle pushing stuff. Pot, LSD, and a craving to grow my hair ruled my life. I actually gave up alcohol and fed my addiction with the drugs. My addictive personality caused me to try just about everything. Somehow I managed to finish my obligation to my country without getting in trouble, but my marriage had suffered greatly and we separated – not because of anything I had done or said, of course. What a relief to be out of the service, 21 years old and no responsibilities.

I came home to the Northwest and helped out on the family farm for summer harvest. Things on the farm hadn't changed much and, during harvest, drinking beer was almost required. We would start work at 'dark-thirty in the morning and go non-stop until we finished. The first thing we would do in the morning was roar by the house in our freshly serviced machines, slam on the brakes, and a cooler with a half rack of beer and some lunch was tossed into the cab. This was just the warm up. The last sandwich was washed down by the last beer by noon and the cooler would need to be refilled. Day in and day out this was the routine and of course when we came in for the night and were waiting for supper, it was cocktail time. And I could always step out to smoke a joint to get my head straight.

I began to miss my children horribly and needed a break from the booze so I hitchhiked to San Diego made amends and move them to the Northwest. We were going to get back to the land, raise our family and let the rest of the world go by. That worked fine for a while and we even made a baby sister to join our two boys. I was complete, so I thought. There had been too much damage done in the first separation and the old resentments came back. I spent more and more time numbing my pain in alcohol and drugs. Then came the topper. After a failed suicide attempt with pills, I woke up in the hospital looking into the eyes of an alcohol counselor. She convinced me that I needed some treatment and I thought, "OK, maybe this will shut that bitch wife up." I went to a 28-day program and the VA, came home and tried to get on with life. It was a wonderful vacation but after I returned I was now sober and miserable. Needless to say, that lasted for about six months and I left, or shall I say, was asked to leave.

Oh, boy, a new adventure! I was totally relieved to believe that alcohol and drugs were not the problem, it was that woman I lived with that made me insane. I was now 26 years old and decided that I wanted to go to college and live the life of freedom to do as I pleased. The GI Bill and grants allowed me to do just that and for three years I lived that fantasy with all the trimmings. I met a girl who was the ideal drinking buddy – someone to drag me into bars instead of out of them and was ready to go home with me at the drop of a hat. Somehow I managed to get through college and actually got a degree. Now it was time to get back into the real world, get a job and work on my future. I accepted a job in Houston in my field, packed up with my "buddy" and moved to Texas. After about a year I managed to drink my way out of that job and I was stuck in Texas with nothing so I warmed up my thumb and got out of there back to the Northwest.

My disease was getting progressively worse and from there on out I was unable to hold a steady job or even keep a place to live. I was now living to drink and use and drinking and using to live. After too many years of that, I woke up one morning in the back of my 1974 Dodge Dart and said "This is enough." I'm cold, I'm tired, I'm sick, I smell, I've missed my daughter's wedding and the top of that bridge I'm parked under is looking appealing. I managed to pull myself together enough to call the VA and see if I

could go to treatment again. They said that there are no beds available in Spokane for 3 months, but they can get me into Walla Walla in six days. I'm ready and I want it. My car was never going to make the trip and I had burnt all the bridges with my family so how was I going to make this happen? I was 41 years old and I had one friend left on the planet so I made the call. My mother, with her unconditional love, was willing to help me one last time and drove me to treatment.

In treatment, gratitude sets in. I had regular food and took three or four showers a day just because I could. I was finally there for the right reasons. Before I could be of any good to anyone else, I needed to do something for myself. Now came the hard part. I was safe, getting healthy and knowing what I would be doing tomorrow, but what would happen when I have to leave that warm womb? I had a very caring and stern counselor who wanted to make me an experiment. She guided me through the steps to get on ADASTA and convinced me not to go home, but to go to a place called John Owens Recovery in Vancouver, Washington. I balked but finally relented. I needed to go home and wrap up a few affairs and get some clothes so she started me on Antabuse a week before I was to leave. "Don't you trust me?", I asked. "Yes," she said, "but I don't trust your addict." These words I remember and use to this day.

While going through extended treatment in John Owens, I was exposed to Oxford House. A group of people would come and give a presentation about these group homes that encourage recovery. Sure, that is just what I wanted after living with a group of people for the last 90 days. I explored all the options as to where to go. I had made friends with another patient who was of the same mind and tired of living with "strangers". We looked at housing in the area and discovered that it was not very affordable under our present circumstances. We decided that this Oxford House concept sounded good but we wanted to open our own house under their name and be able to keep a few of us together. The local chapter and houses were adamantly against it and wanted us to move into some of the existing houses. We did, however, find one understanding rebel in the group who was willing to help us. Danny contacted an existing landlord, found a house and the Lewis and Clark Oxford House was born. I moved into the house on July 4, 1993. It was still in the process of remodeling and needed furnishing. By this time, the chapter had given up fighting us about opening the house and gave us the support we needed to make it an Oxford House. We got it furnished, had books made, got instructions for operation and read the manuals. We had opened up the 12th Oxford House in the State of Washington.

My intention was to stay for 3 months until my ADATSA ran out; however that began to change as I found a job, child support found me, and I needed an affordable place to stay. I was going through a spiritual awakening and put the length of my stay in God's hands. My higher power would let me know when it was time to leave. The first year of my stay was a time I used for myself, getting used to being sober and taking care of my home. I learned all of the house positions, attended chapter meetings, and met some wonderful people dedicated to recovery. At one chapter meeting I was told we were going to have a guest, an Outreach worker by the name of Myrna Brown. The first time I met her, I felt I had known her for years. She had a way of putting you at ease and was so personable and caring. Little did I know she would become such a good friend, mentor and my guru. I was encouraged to get more involved and proceeded to try to give back some of what was given to me. I served as chapter treasurer, vice chair, and actually campaigned to become chapter chair. I was in awe of this simple system that worked so well. God kept me in that house for over 2 years and while still chapter chair, some other alumni and I started an unofficial Oxford Alumni house. We took the 3 basic rules with us and stayed involved with the chapter.

For some time Myrna had been trying to make a go of having the Regional Organization that Paul Molloy had laid out in the beginning. Her wisdom, logic, and organizational skills came into play and the beginnings of a State Board were formed. What a privilege for me to be involved with that at the ground level. We managed to get that off the ground and, through trial and error, established some bylaws, elected officers, including alumni, and had scheduled meetings with all the chapters in the state. After some hits and misses with our State officers, we came together as a functioning group. Again Myrna came to me and told me she thought I should be State Chair, which miraculously happened. I served for two one-year terms and we managed to evolve into a strong State Association. I was proud of what was accomplished by a bunch of drunks and drug addicts.

During all of this time, I had changed jobs for the better and was being given more responsibility in my paying job. I worked some long hours at times, but I always made time for Oxford House. I was

offered a position in Chicago as a supervisor in a new facility they were starting and after much contemplation decided to take it. In the three years I was in Chicago, I was very absorbed in my work, but managed to keep in touch with all my homies and make it to the World Conference every year. I would plan my vacations to come to the Washington State Campout every year. My one regret is that I didn't get involved with the Illinois houses while I was there, but they obviously are very capable of doing their own thing. Due to some economic changes and managerial decisions, the facility in Chicago closed down and I decided it was time to go back home to my beloved Northwest and family.

God went to work again and I moved into an apartment right next to Myrna Brown. I was in need of a much-needed break from working 80 hours a week and started getting involved with Oxford House again. I was elected to the State Association as Auditor and it evolved in Budget and Finance. We continued to improve the system and the number of houses in Washington increased dramatically. More Outreach positions opened up and I decided that is what I wanted to do. In the first round, someone else was selected over me so I continued to do service work at Housing Services. That is the best training ground I could have had to hone skills needed to be an Outreach Worker. I was asked by the State Association to go to Spokane and help out the chapter and houses there. I ended up moving to Spokane since I spent so much time there. What an honor and blessing that there was the confidence in my abilities to make a difference, and I could be closer to my family. We got Spokane back on track, started opening more houses, and God struck again with another opening for an Outreach position in eastern Washington. It only took 12 years, but I am now proud and honored to have been selected to be that Outreach Worker.

I pinch myself once in a while to see if it's really true that they actually pay me to do what I love to do. I have to say that it is not all joy and roses, but some of the results I see make it all worthwhile. I am in a better position to give someone the opportunity to have a chance for long-term recovery and make a difference on this planet in some small way. I have rebuilt the relationships with my children and the rest of my family, made some true friendships, and have a peace within myself that I never thought I could feel.

Thank you, everyone and everything that made this possible.

Marty W.'s Story

Lets see.... I probably have over 200 arrests totaling a criminal past spanning 16 years. I was paroled at least 20 times and usually had acquired another "case" within 30 days upon release. I only reported to my parole officer initially; I was too loaded and paranoid to go in for a second appointment, so I was always on "abscond" status. I went back with a new charge or a parole violation at LEAST 20-30 times. I can't believe the life I led.

I'm writing this crouched over my laptop keyboard late in the evening. I can't sleep as I keep trying to put my Oxford experience into tangible sentences, and it is one of the most difficult tasks I have ever found to complete.

My family kicked me out of the house when I was 17 as I had become a total deviant – drinking, partying and stealing for kicks daily, which became more than they could handle. I moved in with a drinking buddy and we immediately set off burglarizing homes at night to support our drinking and partying lifestyle. At 18, I was arrested and convicted of my first felony and sent to prison.

In prison, I found a support group of other convicted felons that eagerly wanted to share their experience, strength, and hopes – not in a personally enriching sense, but in different skills that included forgery, drug dealing, auto theft, home invasions, and robbery. Being young and spirited, I vowed to become the best criminal that ever existed, as every day we would dream, plot, and scheme(my criminal friends and I), and, just beyond the guard towers, the glorious lifestyle beckoned. My calling in life was now to be an outlaw, and with the help, support, and teachings of my newfound prison "family", the world was now MY playground!

Ego-ridden and self-serving ways led not to the glamorous life, but to a life spent living in stolen cars, existing from one injection to the next, and trying to steal anything and everything to support a monstrous heroin and cocaine habit. Every time parole came, the active addiction began, and incarceration

only meant time to eat and rest for the next "run" upon release.

Completely beaten and realizing the lies that the "criminal code" were, I sought treatment during my last prison sentence. Nine months of intensive treatment and a work release program brought me new hope and my first job.

Then came the question, "What Now?" My counselor suggested "Oxford House" upon release from prison, and though I really wanted "my own place," I thought I would give it a try, more out of curiosity than anything else.

I showed up for an interview in my "dress-outs" – 34 years old, with 13 felony convictions, 27 misdemeanors, absolutely no experience living life in the free world clean and sober....yet...willing and honest.

They voted me in and said, "Welcome!" For the first time in my life, I didn't drink and use drugs upon release from prison. I lived with a "family" that gave me the camaraderie, fellowship and HEALTHY team support I truly needed and had been seeking from my "prison-brothers."

Enthused beyond words with this wonderful new life I had, free of all the mayhem I had lived through and now building a sense of self-worth by being a productive member of society, I began volunteering for service with Oxford House. Giving back was my priority. For seven years I helped in every capacity possible for me, from updating the hotline, helping form new houses and chapters to sitting in on hundreds, maybe even thousands, of house meetings in troubled houses. It just seemed like the right thing to do, as I was so grateful to be free of active addiction and now enjoyed my new life!

In 2001, I was hired by Oxford House, Inc. to be an outreach worker – the dream job I hold dear to this very day. I had never expected to be paid for helping others, and/or spreading the Oxford House concept to areas that so desperately need it. It has always been, and will ALWAYS be, the Right Thing To Do.

Oxford House and Oxford Inc is the family that saved my life, and continues to do so on a daily basis. I have not been to prison again, and the insane cycle has been broken.

Paul, I don't know how to end this, so I will again say a heartfelt THANK YOU for all you've done for this organization, and THANK YOU for giving me this awesome job!

Robin B.'s Story

Hello my name is Robin Breckenridge; I'm a recovery heroin/meth addict and have been clean since 10/17/1999. I was born on 8/19/1960 the youngest of seven children. I had a pretty normal childhood, family vacations lots of love and my dad was my hero.

I began using at the age of 16 – drinking and smoking pot. I had my first of three sons, Jeremy, when I was 17 years old when I made the decision to get married to Dave my son's father. My dad would not come to my wedding. He said he would not help me make the biggest mistake of my life. I was not sure what he meant by that; I was just let down by him. I soon realized what he meant was that my life was a life of in and out of hospitals from where the man I thought I loved had beat me so bad that I would go into shelters and I would feel better and then I would go back to him (Dave) for the abuse to start once again.

By this time I was already 3 months along with my second son Mike and finally, with the help of my family, I moved away and started a new life. I was no longer using to drugs to cover up the pain and the shame. I started the dating thing and I got pregnant with Joshua. I went on to nursing school and got a degree and I bought my first home at the age of 26. I then got married to my second husband and I started doing drugs again. This time it was heroin and meth and even cocaine. I went to work every day, some days it was very hard to do so. In 1989 I went into treatment and it was then that my life started to change.

In 1993 I found out that I had cancer and I was in and out of hospitals and my life seemed to be over. My dad passed away and my second husband died of a cocaine overdose. I started using again. My life was a mess and it was then that I met Bill. He was a man that I sold dope to and I even threatened to shoot at one time. I was a very angry person. I never thought that I would ever go to jail but I was so wrong. It was then that I began the whole downward spiral of my addiction. Over the next few years I was in and out of jail and it was Bill that was there for my sons. I spent a lot of time in jail, picked up federal gun and drug charges, and lost – my nursing licenses, my home and the rental property that I owned.

I went into another treatment center in Portland Oregon in 1999 where I started my new life in recovery. It has not always been easy and it has been a lot of hard work and a process. I finished treatment and moved into the Danmore building in down town Portland after treatment. I moved back to Salem in the summer of 2000 and was living with my sister and with Bill who was also clean. I needed more time to work on myself and I moved into the Keizer Oxford houses on 8/22/2000.

I then got a job and worked on myself and my recovery and was able to get involved doing service work. I wanted to help and I started opening houses in the Salem area for both women and men needing recovery houses, for when I moved in their was only one opening in the local chapter. I wanted to know more about this kind of houses where the members run the house and we made are own decisions as a group and that anyone that used in the houses would have to leave. So I started going to chapter meetings and State Association Meetings where I learned more about this thing called Oxford House. I learned to hold myself accountable and it was great. I had found a place to call home. My life was worth living when I got sick again and went to the hospital because of the cancer thing I was able to go thought this thing without getting loaded. I had Bill and the women that I lived with and the support of my new Oxford House family to walk with me through the process of treatments. Once again I got better.

I then married Bill, the man I wanted to shoot a few years ago. We got married (2/14/2002) at the recovery club in Salem. All three of my sons were at the wedding and were also clean, along with the new family of Oxford houses in the State. I was also the Oxford Houses of Oregon State Association chair at this time. I was going to school and was able to get a job working with the Washington County Community Corrections as a Recovery Mentor helping new people in recovery – helping them with 12 step meetings and job placement and also with drug free housing with I was good at. Oxford houses became a place that I would be able to help get folks into. After all, it worked for me. I was still on federal probation and I was working in corrections. It was a job that a person with my history could have only dreamed of; that a person like myself and with my criminal record could have ever been able to do but I was doing it.

In 2003 I was asked to apply for a job with the Oregon Recovery homes program which was a position to open recovery based houses that were peer-run and self supporting and that was Oxford houses. I knew how to do that; I had been doing this for years as a volunteer and to know I would get to do this and get paid – that was cool. I have been doing outreach with the ORH opening Oxford houses all over the State since 2003 and today I am the program manager. As of September 2007, we will have 5 Statewide Outreach Workers and the 1 Washington County Outreach Worker.

I need to say one more thing. I truly know the real meaning of love because of the man that I married in my recovery is my best friend and I'm truly blessed. My mother moved to Texas in 1999 and today she is very proud of me and thankful to the Oxford houses network of homes that gave her back her daughter.

Arthur's Story

My biggest enabler was Uncle Sam. Although I had used drugs while in Viet Nam, my real struggle with my addiction started while I was fighting cancer. I was in the hospital for 3 years (1973-76). It was then that I realized that pain medications provided a totally different type of high – a high that I grew fond of.

Whenever I asked for pain medicine, I was given it – whether I needed it or not.

The first time I sought help for my addiction was 1988 and I was 46 years old. I had been kicked out of my living arrangements. I ended up in the psych ward in the Naval Hospital in Bethesda and was sent to the VA Hospital from there.

There were 33 other people in the drug rehabilitation program there. We were told that only 3 would make it and remain clean. After completing the program I went to a transition house but my time there quickly ran out. Fortunately, they had applications for Oxford Houses.

I interviewed for acceptance at Oxford House-Delafield in August of 1988. At Delafield I learned a lot of tolerance and acceptance. I had to. I had a gay roommate. He eventually became the best roommate I ever had and one of my best friends. As a member of Delafield I was fortunate to have attended the very first Oxford House World Convention.

I was a member of Oxford House – Delafield from 1988 to 2008. I managed, with the help of Oxford House, to be 1 in the 3 out of the 33 that made it. I moved from Delafield to Oxford House Decatur in 2008. I didn't move because it was a bad house; I moved because the responsibility I learned while living there allowed me the opportunity to become part owner of the house. Because Oxford House has saved my life and I can still reap benefits from living here, I moved to Oxford House Decatur.

I came in at 46 years old and am still clean at 66. I believe that if it were not for the structure, principles and traditions of Oxford House, I might not be clean today. People were gung-ho about Oxford House back in the day. I just hope that I can pass some of that spirit on to the Oxfordites to follow.

Try Oxford House. It will change your life. There is no sober house, SRO or other recovery housing that can or will ever compare. Thank God for Paul Molloy for thinking that the lives of drunks and druggies were worth saving.

Donna's Story

I'm Donna and I am an addict. I was born in New York City, part of a close and loving family. I was no stranger to the use of drugs and alcohol during my youth. Most of my friends and relatives around my age smoked marijuana and drank socially. I continued to use marijuana and drink occasionally up until I entered school. It was during my last year of school that my addiction progressed. I started to experiment with cocaine and more frequent alcohol use.

Over the next 15 years, my addiction became the most overwhelming force in my life. My life was totally unmanageable. I continued to get jobs and lose them. I moved to 4 different states, and began using in all of them. It wasn't until April of 2006 that my life had spiraled out of control and I hit my bottom. My addiction had me stealing from my mother and family, putting my life in jeopardy on the streets. Enough was enough.

I entered a long-term rehabilitation facility and began my road to recovery. I was introduced to a 12 step-program that taught me how to love myself again. I began to realize that I was suffering from a disease and that I could live a life that did not involve using drugs in any form. When I left that facility, I called for an interview at the Sawmill Oxford House. I was accepted into the house and I was full of gratitude.

I was blessed with finding a job right away. With the help of the ladies in the house, I was able to focus on my recovery and attend lots of meetings. Now that I have been in my Oxford house for two years, I have received many blessings. I am a supervisor on my job where I have been for two years, I am working as a peer advocate, helping other women to transition into Oxford Houses. I am sponsoring women in recovery and I am excited about my future.

Jackson's Story

I was born in Stillwater, Oklahoma on October 23, 1978. I was conceived on the last night my mother and biological father had together before getting a divorce. A few months later my mother was re-married and, since my biological father didn't want to be a dad, he gave me up. My mother's second husband adopted me. By age three, he had split town and didn't bother paying child support or contacting us. I remember living with my grandparents during pre-school while my mom went to nursing school. It was by my grandparents that I was instilled with a set of morals and manners. I would also go to see my biological

father's mom, my other grandma, about once a month and she was a Sunday school teacher for the local First Baptist Church. She is the one who instilled in me my religious beliefs.

I soon moved back in with my mother during my elementary school years and can remember vividly the feeling at school that something wasn't right. I couldn't put my finger on it or even describe it, but I knew something inside of me was different. Something was off. I began to act out in class for attention and approval. I became the class clown and always seemed to have to go above and beyond my peers to feel as if I was their equal. I did well in school and also excelled in sports, especially soccer. By the time I became a teenager I was starting to rebel and have conflicts with my mother. It was about this time that I came in contact with my adopted dad.

My adopted father was living in Texas and I went one summer to go visit him and his new wife. I loved it. He seemed to spoil my brother and I while we were there that couple of months. It may have been his way of making amends. I decided I was ready to have a male figure in my life and so I moved down to Arlington, TX in the summer of 1993. I was starting 9th grade and filled with self-esteem issues. I didn't know any of the kids so the first year I just kept to myself. Then, in 10th grade, I was at the High School and even more kids were there that I didn't know.

By the middle of my sophomore year, I remember wanting so bad to fit in with the popular crowd that I decided to drink with them. I can't remember my first drink, but I do remember that feeling. When alcohol entered my system all my odd feelings of self went away. I became whole. I was complete. Life was meaningful. Life was good. I fell in love with that feeling that it gave me and knew that I wanted to feel like that permanently. As high school went on, I became fairly popular and even began smoking pot as another means to seek euphoria. I was on top of the world.

There were soon hints that I was beginning to have a problem with my drinking. I would want to start partying earlier than all my friends and when the party was winding down, I was just getting started. I didn't understand why people wanted to quit drinking or leave the party. I lived to party and my life centered on where I was going to party, who with, and what substance we were going to party on. I finished high school with a 3.3 GPA and an A+ in party 101. I decided that college could wait. I needed a year off to relax and enjoy life.

It was during my year away from school that I found heavier drugs. Meth, acid, cocaine, and ecstasy were all easily obtained. I would do any drug you put in front of me except stick a needle in my arm. I had a horrible phobia of needles and blades. Drugs and alcohol became my god. I may have been a saved Christian, but ever since moving to Texas I had quit talking to God. I didn't need him anymore. I had found something that was more effective and acted quicker. I needed relief from the boredom of life everyday and drugs were there for me. Drugs were my solution to the problem that is my life. I was making good money, living with passive parents, and had very little responsibility. Partying took up a good portion of my waking moments.

My partying took me to places where drugs were everywhere and soon I was introduced to Crack-cocaine. Once I tried it I knew I had found my drug of choice. I had arrived. The instant gratification that I had been searching for was finally found. It wasn't long before I was in way over my head financially because of my crack using. The winter of 1998 was a very cold year for me. I began hopping motel rooms smoking crack with people that I used to avoid. I was out on a three or four day binge one week and decided to come home to shower and change clothes, but when I arrived and tried to get in the house my key wouldn't unlock the door. My parents had changed the locks. How dare them! They were scared of me? They didn't want me? I'll show them! I make them wish they wanted me! I went out and hit the streets hard. It was only a day later that I was broke, homeless, without a vehicle, and laying my head on a concrete slab outside the rundown motel. That next day I called my grandmother who I lived with as a kid and she came to pick me up that day.

I spent the next two months detoxing at her house. All I felt like doing was sleeping and eating. I once again hated myself and what I had become. She helped me get into college at Oklahoma State University in the fall of 1999. I began working again and things were looking up. That is until I felt a lump. My lower abdomen had a tiny lump about the size of a marble. I thought it was probably a cyst and would eventually go away. Within a couple of weeks it had grown to the size of an egg and I was experiencing a horrible pain when I tried to bend over. I finally submitted to going to see the doctor and they decided to have it

removed. It turns out it was a lymph node that was swollen but was not cancerous. The doctor then gave me an ultrasound and CAT scan. Multiple masses appeared all over my abdomen region. The next procedure was a needle biopsy. They got some tissue, enough to find it to be cancerous, but not enough to know what kind. This was not good. The last resort was major surgery.

The beginning of 2000 was another one of those cold winters for my life. I had the major surgery where they cut my belly open to get to more lymph nodes. It took thirty staples to put me back together and a week in the hospital before I could be put on solid food. They found out that the cancer was Hodgkin's Lymphoma and it was in Stage 2. I was lucky they said, that it didn't reach my bone marrow. Then it could have set up shop anywhere. I didn't see it as being too lucky. I was to spend the next 7 months undergoing chemotherapy. I lost all my hair, had to stay isolated from friends, lost 25 pounds in less than a month because I couldn't keep any food down. My disease took over and helped me justify using during this time.

I smoked lots of pot to help with my appetite and with nausea. I ate tons of pills to relieve me of the aches and hurts from surgery and chemo. I did this and lay on the couch for months. All I would do was watch TV, play video games, or sit in front of the computer, all the while seeking oblivion one joint and pill at a time. After I had my last cycle of chemotherapy I came up with the brilliant idea of making up for lost party time. I had cabin fever like you wouldn't believe. Since I had turned 21 right before getting sick I hadn't had a chance to experience the bar scene. So that's exactly what I did. It wasn't long before I was sitting at some run down house smoking crack and spending money like it was nothing. It got worse and worse and I did some pretty awful things to family and friends to find ways and means to get more crack. It all came crashing down in the spring of 2004.

My mom and her fourth husband were on vacation and I decided to pawn every tool, CD, DVD, and electronic equipment that they owned so that I could party on crack while they were gone. I had every intention of getting the items out of pawn before they got back but when my paycheck came in, I went to the dealer's house before the pawnshop. Needless to say I didn't get anything out of pawn. I can remember the look on my mom's face when she walked in from her trip home and saw the dust ring on the table from where the TV they owned used to sit. My step dad wanted to call the cops, but my mom said that I should go to treatment. I accepted going to treatment and ended up at Valley Hope in Cushing, OK. I never knew what A.A. or N.A. was until getting to treatment. I had heard of them and knew that it had to do with drinking and drugging but that was it. It was in treatment that I began to talk to God again and it not as a foxhole prayer. I had plenty of foxhole prayers while using and during my cancer battle. This time was different. I really knew I needed something greater than me for help.

God was there and during treatment I became close to Him. After treatment I made several mistakes. I didn't follow the suggestions given to me in treatment. I only went to meetings. I didn't get a sponsor. I didn't work the steps. I quit praying daily. I relied on my own strength to get me through the day. I wanted to cut corners so that when I made it, I could take credit for it. Ego and pride grew as I began to get things back. I stayed clean for eleven months and then the relapse that had been building up finally came to a head. I had a random thought that it would be nice to get high smoking crack. It was a small thought and it didn't last long, but I acted on it immediately. I had no defense against it. One week later I was kicked out of my girlfriend's house and was in trouble at work and with family. I spent the next few months doing the rotten things I did before. I got myself in serious financial debt and manipulated family to bail me out time after time. I even introduced my mother to crack and we began smoking together.

It wasn't long before my step dad found out. I had taken my mother's checkbook and written 20 checks for cash within a two-day period. To avoid being hurt bad by him, I decided to return to Valley Hope and try treatment one more time. I was told by most of my family that this was my last chance. I knew something was different about me this time. My bottom was deeper this time. I was more willing to try suggestions this time. I got out of treatment and by the first week I had a sponsor. I attended somewhere around 150 meetings in 90 days. I worked the steps honestly with my sponsor and had all twelve completed in seven months. By my sixth month I began chairing meetings and attending district and area meetings. I got involved with my home group. I would show up to meetings early and stay late. I began to make friends and we would go have dinner and go out together to have fun sober. I made the club house MY home group. I invested in it and the people that attended it. When I reached one year of sobriety, my group voted me in as alternate GSR. I then was voted in as district Gratitude chair by the district. I was participating in

my own recovery and enjoying life. Most importantly I was letting God run the show and giving God the credit for the good in my life.

Somewhere during that first year the miracle happened. The obsession to drink and use was removed. Many more miracles happened as well. I went from being my own worst enemy to becoming my own best friend. I felt okay to be me. Life was no longer missing something. The void inside me was God shaped and God was the only thing that could fill it to satisfaction. I became interested in helping others and getting out of myself. I began to sponsor newcomers and work with others in recovery. During a session with my counselor I was told that there could be a chance for Oxford House to come to town. I jumped on board and got in touch with the landlord that was interested. She owned a duplex in town and wanted to turn it into a recovery home but didn't know what she was doing. I shared with her how much it would help the community and those living there if it was converted to an Oxford House. She loved the idea and I somehow got hold of the number for an outreach worker and hooked them up with the landlord.

During this time God was using me in other ways to reach others. I started a Valley Hope Alumni group for friends, family, and alumni of Cushing Valley to get together once a month and have dinner. I also spoke with the director of Valley Hope and set up one day a month for a group of us to come share experience, strength, and hope with the patients on how important it is to get connected with a home group and to stay in touch with people in recovery.

My story of how I came to Oxford House is probably not the normal story. I didn't come out of treatment and move in a house. I didn't move into Oxford House – Shalimar in Stillwater until I had over one year of sobriety. I was living with my grandmother and God was telling me that it was time to move on. I was scared to move into a single apartment by myself. Isolation could become a problem I sensed. Oxford House coming to my town and me being involved with getting it there was no coincidence. God has a plan. I thought his plan was to bring Oxford House to Stillwater so that I could ease into society as a self-supporting member. This in part is true. I have learned so much by living there the past six months. I am financially responsible thanks to the treasurer position. I am clean thanks to the guidelines set in place for keeping a clean house and room. I am responsible like never before thanks to the structure that Oxford House has put around me. I am held accountable for my actions thanks to the roommates that I have and love.

Oxford House is teaching me how to be a man. I have been living as a child for all of my adult life up until this point. I had never lived on my own. I was always living under the roof of a family member. I remember the first week at the Oxford House. I was the first one to move in and needed groceries. I suddenly realized that I didn't know how to grocery shop. I was so used to food already being in the fridge at grandma's house. I didn't know the first thing about what I needed to buy, how much to buy, and how much it would cost. It is amazing how gratifying the little things of life are to me today. Little is such a relative term. What is little to me today, one year ago was very big. What is big to me today may turn out to be a little thing down the road.

Oh, and about God having a plan. I completely underestimated God's plans for me. It turns out his plan was for me to move into Oxford House so that I could one day be employed by them and open houses all over my home state of Oklahoma. It is funny how things always end up working out for the best in the long run. I have always known that I wanted to work with others, helping them better their lives ever since I got serious about recovery. Today God opened that door through Oxford House so that I can do just that. My failures of yesterday can be shared to someone struggling today for a victory tomorrow.

Vin G.'s Story

Everything happened backwards. When I moved into Oxford House Yale in 2002, I had had 20 years sober. I first heard of Oxford Houses in the early nineties, but had experienced their benefits in the early eighties. In 1995, I read about the first 'Oxford House' founded in Maryland in 1975. But in 1981, I'd read extensively about another 'first Oxford House,' begun in Ohio' in 1935. But, 'First things First'.

I'm a garden variety drunk. A sixties kid.....beer, pot, Dust, LSD & mountains of coke. Alcohol was my drug of choice; Canadian Club, my favorite. But I started with cheap beer and ended with cheap beer.

The details of our using are different, but the insanity is the same. I was in a high speed police chase in a total blackout. I passed out at my father's, got up to take a leak and relieved myself on his dining room floor. Drunk, I walked toward a guy pointing a gun at me, saw a flash, dove, and glass and shingles exploded behind me. I drove drunk and like a maniac daily. That I didn't kill someone is a miracle. I got drunk to celebrate or commiserate, because people were around or because I was alone, to heighten feelings or to stuff feelings. I couldn't live without alcohol, then I couldn't live with it, but I always had it and I could not 'cut back.'

I was a writer for SPORT magazine, had to travel some, but only had to go New York twice a month. Traveling or in New York I'd get drunk and the magazine paid. But, mostly, I stayed in Connecticut, worked the hours alcohol and coke permitted and I was paying with my life.

One day's journal entry from 1980 could have served for a thousand, "I'm drunk, I'm lonely, I'm miserable and I hate it." I woke daily with searing remorse, self-hatred and pain. But, I never went to sleep that way. In fact, I never went to sleep. I just passed out. Near the end, I'd wake with wet jeans, telling myself I'd spilled my last drink when, actually, I was urinating in drunken stupor.

Finally, I thought, 'Maybe I am an alcoholic'. I did what any writer would. I looked up 'Alcoholism' in Encyclopedia Britannica. Within 20 minutes my friend Mariellen walked in. "What are you reading?" "About alcoholism," I said. "Wrong book," she said, "Read this." 20 minutes after I first thought I could be alcoholic, I was handed a 'Big Book.' "Call it a God-shot," Mariellen said. "And by the way, yes...you are an alcoholic. It's not remotely a close call." I was actually relieved to hear her. My insanity had a name, was common and there was a solution.

I went to a huge speaker meeting and told a guy if I stopped drinking, I didn't know how I'd have fun. He laughed in my face. "You think all these people are here because they were having too much fun?"

It was 1981. Most old timers had met or known Bill Wilson. "He'd sit right over there," I heard a 100 times. No one ever suggested a detox or a rehab. "Rehabs? A few thousands bucks to meet chronic relapsers, become friends and risk sobriety-threatening negativity as one by one, you hear most have relapsed again. We've got tons of relapsers in AA. But, we won't let them near you."

They meant that literally. 'First Time Is a Gift,' 'Stick with the Winners,' 'You can't give away what you haven't got,' weren't just slogans; it was how they got you sober. It meant: Slippers and Retreads.....stay away from our newcomers. The AA old-timers were hard core. They didn't believe in slips. Their success rate was phenomenal.

I heard a speaker say, 'Only one of 33 who went to AA stayed sober.' "Total BS," my sponsor said. "You know the program works.....look around....any fool can see AA works. The only question is, 'Will you work the program?' So, it's a fifty-fifty deal and you control the variable."

About 3 weeks sober I called my sponsor, "I think I'm going to drink," I said. My sponsor shot back, "People I sponsor don't drink." My mind was extremely malleable. 'Phew,' I thought. "That's a load off my mind."

Was my sponsor being cocky? No. The requirements for sobriety are simply H.O.W.– Honesty, Open-mindedness & Willingness. No one can see the future, but a good sponsor can pick out those attributes fast.

"Remember, I said the odds were fifty-fifty?" my sponsor said. "I undersold AA. Want the real odds? Read 'Dr. Bob's Nightmare,' 'Big Book, page 181." I read the AA program "...NEVER fails, if you go about it with one-half the zeal...we pursued drinking & drugging." Dr. Bob, the AA co-founder who wrote those words, both drank and drugged.

In late 1981, I read his biography, "Doctor Bob and the Good Old Timers." I read how Dr. Bob finally got sober after years trying. A fellow Akron, Ohio 'Oxford Group' member introduced Dr. Bob to a visiting New York 'Oxford Grouper.' Bill Wilson. Bill W. shared everything he'd learned about alcoholism.

Did Dr. Bob stay sober? No. Bob Smith lived on Ardmore Avenue, in Akron. Dr. Bob invited Bill Wilson to move in. In 1935, for the first time, alcoholics lived together to practice what would be termed, 'AA Principles' and lend mutual support to achieve and maintain sobriety. With both living at 855 Ardmore Avenue, Dr. Bob had his last drink, June 15, 1935, the date Alcoholics Anonymous recognizes as its founding.

It made sense. In early sobriety I was living with an old friend who was a psychologist and gave me encouragement and support. Richard, my 'assistant sponsor' had spent his first two years sober, sleeping on his sponsor's couch. My friend and fellow newcomer Barbara moved in with six years sober Lynn. That was 26 years ago. None of us ever had another drink or drug.

My 'home group' was a little AA Clubhouse, called 'Shakers.' The group immersed me in the program and the fellowship. By example and environment, I learned to live sober, have fun sober and reward myself sober. Also, to experience pain and tragedy sober. I had companionship, support and felt safe. Did I live at that clubhouse? No, it only seemed I did. But that's exactly what my 'Home Group' was: 'A Home of Sobriety.'

The Oxford Group members living together in Akron in 1935 became parable, myth and example. Many more stayed at that house on Ardmore Avenue, as a 'safe place,' for support, to work the program, to maintain sobriety and to help each other grow.

Do people need to live together to achieve sobriety? No. Does living together guarantee sobriety? No. I've known people who'd been in countless rehabs and sober houses, never stayed sober and died miserable, early deaths. I also know a guy who got sober living in a 'Hefty Bag' underneath a bridge. The AA program, worked with no '...half measures....fearless and honest from the very start,' and a higher power surrendered to with 'complete abandon,' will get you sober.

AA began with the co-founders living together. How special it is to be blessed with a living environment that nurtures, protects and encourages as Bill Wilson and Dr Bob Smith were doing for each other in 1935. That is what 'Oxford House' is doing and has done, for tens of thousands. With the change of a single word from the poem 'Death of a Hired Hand', Oxford House fulfills 'home' as Robert Frost so insightfully defined: "Home is where, when you have to go there, they'll do everything they can, to take you in."

Oxford House is there when we need it most. Many of us have needed it more than once. I got sober in AA, utilizing the Oxford House model of support, without having heard of an organization named Oxford House. Twenty years later, I was leveled by clinical depression. And, an Oxford House was there to permit me to pursue wellness and to regain the comfort and community of sobriety. For that, I am profoundly grateful.

Kirk C's Story

I arrived at the Oxford House – Delwood in Greenville, NC exactly three weeks from the time that I was admitted into the treatment center (Walter B. Jones) in Greenville. This is where my journey to recovery started; this Oxford House was the Godsend that freed me from the destructive path that I was traveling. The first day out of treatment I was nervous and I anticipated drug use in this new place, where I sought to find freedom from drug use. I could not understand how addicts could possibly live without using some type of mind-altering chemical. I thought everyone was acting strange in this place that I would now call home. I found that it was me who was strange, I was looking at life without drugs in my system and I found it very scary. I had used for more than thirty years and was unable to stop using drugs for any length of time. I have been arrested many times because of my using and I had been to several institutions in an attempt to change my life and to quit going to jail.

My addiction started at age 13 or maybe before, but this was the tender age that I started getting drunk. This continued through high school and into college. My life was out of control. I got my first DUI when I was only 16 years old and two years later in 1979 I got my second DUI. I followed this pattern; getting a DUI in 1983 the night before I went to Atlanta, GA to go to school. My parents bailed me out and off I went to Georgia. I managed to get an Associated Degree while at DeVry in Atlanta. I also managed to get another DUI. I got two more DUI's in 1994 and my last one in 1999. This last DUI forced me into DART Cherry – a North Carolina Drug and Alcohol rehabilitation therapeutic community. This place was hardcore and I stayed here for three months.

Later this same year I made my first appearance at Walter B. Jones rehab and then to a half way house. I was kicked out of the half way house for drinking, and soon was escorted to prison for my third probation violation. I could not or would not stop using drugs and alcohol. I got caught with a joint in prison, so I had to stay in the hole for three months. I had entirely too much time to think, everyone know an addict is not in a good place in his own head.

This last time in recovery I wanted something different out of life. It was truly hard to let go of my best friend – the drugs – and live a new way of life. As I said before, I got out of treatment and I moved in the Delwood Oxford House. Here I was required to go to 90 meeting in 90 days. It was true; these people were staying clean and were recovering from addiction, one day at a time. I had a hard time of it in the beginning; my mind was like mush, I had a hard time remembering things and I would get lost just going to meetings. My nerves were all to pieces and I felt like I was going to explode. I had to get my scooter back from the FBI, because a friend in active addiction had robbed a bank in my hometown, so my scooter had been impounded. I had drug charges pending and I was trying to go to school. Most of all I was trying something different; life without drugs.

I have been clean now for two and half years. I graduated with honors from the college that I started at when I first moved into the Oxford House. I have taken five classes online at the University of Phoenix and made straight A's. I could not get into East Carolina University, here in Greenville because of the pending drug charges. I have now gone to court with these two drug charges and had them reduced so that I did not have felonies on my record. I am attending my first class at ECU. My goals are to get a Masters in Clinical Psychology and to open a practice here in Greenville and to also teach at a college or university. These dreams are becoming a reality because I learned to live life without the use of any mind-altering substance.

Today, I have a higher power who guides me in my decision making. I am the GSR for my home group of Narcotics Anonymous and have a service position; where I carry a message of hope to the addicts at Walter B. Jones treatment facility. Life is good and I plan on starting another Oxford House here in Greenville soon. Maybe I will get some insight and some experience from the upcoming Oxford House World Convention in Louisiana. I can't wait. Thank you God. Thank you Oxford House.

Jack "Randy" M's Story

After being released from long-term residential treatment (7 ½ months), I moved into a court mandated ¾ house. There was limited structure for 45 men transitioning from all kinds of different facilities. The house rule was "no drinking on premise," but we had drunks, practicing addicts, and "Working Girls" plying their trade and services around the clock.

Three others and I decided our sobriety was at stake and looked into opening an "Oxford House". We had no Oxford House experience, but we found an understanding landlord who let us rent a house – initially on a weekly basis. This allowed us to move in immediately without a security deposit, or a whole month's lease up front. The house was, and is, known as "Oxford House-Dovemeadow". After we obtained our conditional charter, Mollie Brown encouraged us to petition our local chapter for recognition.

Much to our dismay, the chapter denied our joining, citing that we hadn't been approved by their Housing Committee, and we were sent home. The house elected to remain an Oxford House, without chapter affiliation. I was contacted again by the State Board and by Mollie Brown, both of whom asked us

to attend another meeting. After the chapter received encouragement from the State Board, we finally were accepted and now Dovemeadow happens to be one of the strongest houses financially, and with high member participation at the chapter and state levels. On July 14, Dovemeadow and Collingsworth each loaned \$1,000.00 to Colmenero House to open. One of the Dovemeadow's senior residents and I moved into that house and are happy to report a full house.

My experience has been very positive, and a good learning experience, contributing to my recovery. I cannot fathom my successful recovery without my "Oxford House Experience." I now serve as an officer on my state board and chapter. I helped Dovemeadow open from a "Grass Roots" level, without a loan of any kind, relying on all furniture donated from various sources, and an understanding landlord allowing us to pay weekly. Later I helped convert a woman's house in trouble to a men's house, and lived there until they got on their feet. Now I have the privilege to see Colmenero House get off to a good start.

Gino's Story

I was born and brought up in Watertown, Massachusetts, and a direct suburb of Boston. I was the fourth youngest of eleven children in my family. My father was on the Watertown Police Force and for a number of years was the detective in charge of going after illegal drugs. I was a "normal" kid going through high school except I smoked a lot of pot and drank a lot of booze. In 1976 I graduated from High School and, looking back, I suspect the schools just wanted to get rid of me as well as others. Back then, they just kept promoting you to the next grade whether you worked for it or not, so they gave me a diploma and said good-bye.

I joined the carpenter's union and learned how to be a pretty good carpenter but soon left the rather strict union to go out on my own. By then I was a regular user of cocaine. I sniffed so much that within a couple of years I had the first of nine operations on my nose in hopes that doctor's could put it back together enough to permit me to keep snorting. Along the way I managed a couple of car washes and enjoyed the freedom and contacts I could make to get more dope. By December of 1989 I was a mess and one of my brothers who was working in Alaska convinced me to go with him up to Fairbanks to work on the pipeline. For six months I did not drink or use drugs and saved what I thought was a lot of money – so much that I started using again. My bother kicked me out of his house because he didn't want me around anymore. I turned back into the cocaine addict and thief I was in Boston. I spent all the money I made working on the pipeline and was now homeless in Fairbanks Alaska. I started getting in trouble with the police and living the life of a homeless drug addict. The weather started getting bad real quick and it's not fun being homeless in Fairbanks in the winter.

On Christmas Day 1990, it was 45 degrees below zero and I had no place to sleep. I went to the Yellow Pages to look for someplace to get treatment. I found Lakeside Milam listed which was located in Washington State. I called the 800-number and a voice answered and soon asked me if I had health insurance. Fortunately I did as a member of the pipe-fitters union. I told him and he said, "stay by the pay phone and I will check it out. If it checks out, I will call you back." He did and about a half hour later the pay phone rang and I answered. The Lakeside Milam guy told me to go the airport in Fairbanks where there was an airline ticket in my name to get my butt down to Seattle. He told me to do it right now or the tickets would not be good. I arrived at the Fairbanks airport, got the tickets and boarded the plane. Everyone was wishing everyone else Merry Christmas but all I knew was that at least I was no longer facing homelessness in minus 45-degree weather.

When I arrived at the airport in Seattle, I saw a fellow waiting for me holding a hand-letter sign "Ride for Gino." He took me directly to Lakeside – with no stops along the way. For 28 days I welcomed being in out of the cold but I worried about where to go next. Several of the counselors at Lakeside told me about a new program called Oxford House that had just come to the State of Washington. They explained there were two houses for men and one for women in the state. They fortunately took me to interview at both of the men's houses.

The first house I interviewed at was Mercer Island. Mark Spence, an outreach worker from Washington, DC was there for the interview. During my interview I was upset because a puppy ran into the living room and pooped in the corner. I was shocked and let them know it. They told me they would

have a house meeting with existing residents and vote on whether or not I could live there. The counselor took me next to the other men's house located a few miles away in Edmonds. Tom Dugan and the other guys at the Edmonds House were far more welcoming and the house had no puppies, dogs or cats. I really hoped they would vote me in and they did. I called Mercer Island to let them know that I would not be coming. I got Mark Spence on the phone and he immediately said, "You did not get voted in, but try the house in Edmonds," and he added, "If they don't accept you, we will be opening more houses." I just said I had and they had accepted me.

I moved in January 23, 1991 and became part of the family of men in recovery living and running Oxford House – Edmonds. I stayed 15 months and became convinced that I was now free of addiction and convinced myself it was time to move back to Boston. I did okay in Boston for about 3 months but then I began using again. I realize now I didn't give Oxford House enough time. It was back to the old life. One Sunday I was out of money and needed a fix. I was driving past Mass General Hospital and noticed a construction site with nobody around on a Sunday afternoon and a one-man tamper just sitting there waiting to be taken. I backed my van up close to the tamper, got out, found a plank and begin to push it into the back of my van. It slipped off the plank and a cop driving by stopped, came over and asked what I was doing. My mind clicked into overdrive. "My damn boss expects me to move this over to the other side of the building to tamp the gravel down and get the slab ready for concrete on Monday. Here I am all alone trying to do something that requires two or three men to do." "Who do you work for?" he asked. I looked up over the police officer's head and saw a construction sign with the company's name on it. I told him I worked for that company and he helped put the machine in the back of my van. I got out of there waving at the police officer as I drove away and went to a place I knew would pay good money for the hot machine. They did. I bought some more drugs and thought I was on top of the world. All I worried about that whole week was when were the cops going to come get me for doing that. I finally realized that when the cop realized he helped me heist that thing he never said anything because he didn't want to be known as the cop that helped in a heist. He probably said he never saw anything or anybody on that site that day when the machine came up missing.

My family convinced me to move back to Washington State and get back involved with the Oxford Houses. They seemed to be the only thing that has ever worked for me. I drove my van back to Washington State and move into the new Bellevue (Bell-Square) Oxford House that Tom Dugan was opening. That lasted for about six weeks. Tom and the others had to expel me for using cocaine

Soon I was off in my van to find a new place where people would leave me alone. I began an aimless voyage in my van all over the United States. My brother on the Watertown police department reported me as a missing person. While much of the next year is hazy I recall some close calls. One morning after I had pulled off the road near Gulfport, Mississippi and slept in my van, I was just getting ready to move on when I was surrounded by four or five lawmen with guns drawn who said, "Put your hands up." I did. They then asked me to get out the van. I kept my hands up and explained that I had to put the van in park, so could I put my hands down to do so? For some reason they did not understand my Boston pronunciation of "park" and got very excited. Fortunately, one of the officers realized what I was saying and reached over and moved the gearshift to park. I was so afraid that if I went to get out of the van, took my foot off the brake and it moved because it was not in "park," they would have all emptied their guns into me. They brought me to the local police station and towed my van along afterwards. The sheriff told me that if I could pay the tow truck driver, they would let me go. I told him I had no money. He told the driver to take whatever was fair payment from my van. He took my toolbox. Then the sheriff told me to get in my van and get out of town and don't ever come back. I said I had no money for gas and the men in the sheriff office took up a collection and gave me about twenty dollars to buy gas. I did and headed for Phoenix, Arizona. I later learned that my brothers had flown to several cities to view bodies in the morgue to see if I was the John Doe being reported in connection with the missing person file.

Two and half years after I left I got back to the Seattle area only to be arrested for burglarizing a garage. When in jail my family sent Tom Dugan bail money to get me out of jail. Tom decided it would be good if I stayed for a while and after 30 days he came to explain that he was my uncle and would post bond. He was just opening another Oxford House in Mount Vernon and said I could come help get the house started. I did and in March 1995 – following my 30-day detox in jail – I moved into my third

Oxford House. Since I moved into my first Oxford House I have watched the number of houses in Washington State increase from three to nearly two hundred. Early on I learned that I could help new houses get started and my mentor, Tom, often volunteered my services to help start houses all over the country. In 1997, Paul sent me to Arizona and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I guess I taught the guys in Pittsburgh better than the folks in Arizona because that ten-man house has survived while there are currently no Oxford Houses in Arizona. Whatever my skills were then, they have become better. I was hired in Washington State in July 1998 to help get new houses started and to help keep existing houses on track. The men and woman in the Washington Oxford Houses really deserve the credit for our state's successful network of Oxford Houses. Along with early residents of Washington State Oxford Houses like Tom and Myrna, hundreds of men and women who have made Oxford Houses work in the state have helped me understand the job of an outreach worker. Their good teaching has enabled me to become a regional supervisor of other employees of Oxford House, Inc. who are slowly but surely moving toward our goal of having an Oxford House available for everyone seeking recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction.

Teddy H's Story

I came from a broken family. At the age of 5, I was sent to live with my father, an alcoholic. There were parties at the house all the time. At the tender age of 6, I started my drinking career. I was the cute little kid that snuck sips from unattended drinks. It was also a practice in my father's eyes to prescribe hot lemon toddies whenever I was sick (lemon juice mixed with honey and whiskey). I got my first taste of drugs at the age of 11 when my older brother returned from Woodstock. I found his bag of weed in his dresser drawer. I thought it was a new type of tobacco and asked him if I could smoke some (I had started smoking cigarettes when I was 9). He was more than happy to give a lesson in the world of marijuana.

I was always a shy person, but this new experience gave me a newfound courage to open up to people. The only problem was that the people I was opening up to were all into the EXPERIENCE (as Jimmy Hendrix describes it). I progressively started smoking more weed and also started trying other drugs. I started growing my hair long and became a part of the HIPPIE movement. At 12 years old I ran away from home for the first time. I ended up in San Francisco in the Haight Asbury district and my drug career really took off. I was introduced to Barbiturates and to LSD, Tuonol, Seconal, Demoral, and Phenobarbitol, I did it all. My Acid experiences were spectacular journeys into a world never before seen. I crashed in houses where there was every drug imaginable being used. I lived like this for 6 months until I was busted for possession with intent to distribute. Being a minor, I was sent back to my father.

My father was a very abusive drunk. I was constantly beaten and neglected. Food was a rarity in the house. If it weren't for neighbors I probably would have starved. My older brothers had moved away from the house – so it was just me and my father – and I took the full brunt of his fury. At 13, I ran away again. This time I went to see if I could find my mother. My father tried to keep where she lived a secret, but I searched through his personal stuff and found out she lived in California. Once again I thumbed my way from Maryland to LA. Mom took me in with no problem. The problem was that the man she was married to was as bad if not worse than my real father. I tolerated him for a few months until I had enough. I snuck into their bedroom one night and stole his wallet then left California. I just started hitchhiking my way across the country, living on the \$1400 that I stole from my stepfather. That ended when a police car stopped where I was thumbing. He ran a check on me and found out about the grand theft charges. I was once again sent back to Maryland to live with my father.

The abuse continued at home and I decide to do something about it. My father was a retired DOD Police Officer and I stole his 38 revolver one day while he was at work. My plan was to shoot him that night, but he found the gun before I had the chance to carry out my plan. His solution to his problem (me) was to send me of to live with some relatives in Pennsylvania. That worked for about a year until I got to where they couldn't control me anymore. I was the sent to live with relatives in Virginia. Same results, I would find the right people and continue in my drinking and drugging. Every morning, before school started, we would sit in the school parking lot drinking Boone's Farm wine, doing bong hits, and eating whatever pills we could bring from home. My next set of relatives was in Kentucky. I really enjoyed it there. My Aunt raised horses and would let me help with their training, but I still found the right

connections to score weed and some pills. Doing farm work for the local farmers paid a nice bit of money to support my habit. My uncle there was a State Trooper and my family thought that this would help reform me. It turned out that my uncle was also a pothead and we got along just dandy.

I graduated High School and 2 weeks later I enlisted in the Navy (Jobs were hard to come by in rural Kentucky). The drugs stopped for a little while as I went through Boot Camp. As soon as that was over I started looking for those secretive people that were just like me and built up my connections. I was amazed at how many of my fellow sailors were both alcoholics and drug addicts. I fit into it like a fish takes to water (My own little McHale's Navy). There were plenty of hiding spaces to go and smoke using a one-hitter pipe while in port and out at sea you could always go to the back of the ship and smoke a joint. The wind would carry any smell and just blow it away. At night you could always find 4 or 5 small circles with joints being passed around. It was in the navy that I was introduced to Crystal Meth and Cocaine. It was there that I was also introduced to my most favorite drug of all, Methaqualone (Quaaludes). With them I found a true friend. Slowly, my tolerance built up until I got to the point where I was taking 4 ludes just to get off.

Most people take one lude and loose control of their ability to function normally. I would take 4 and ride my motorcycle to go bar hopping. The same thing happened with most of the other barbiturates I was taking. It was not unusual for me to eat 9 Seconal and go partying. A normal person would be in a coma from overdosing, but with me it had a different effect. I wouldn't know why until many years later. This behavior went on for the 8 years I was in. It came to an end in 1986 when the Navy started doing drug testing. That ended my plans for a career in the Navy. During the time I was in the Navy I also discovered a new passion, Motorcycles. I had started going to Biker Bars while I was in and continued that practice when I got out. On the day I was discharged I made a purchase of an ounce of Crystal Meth. My plan was to ride until that was gone and that would be the place where I would try and start a new life. It took 7 days to get from California to Tulsa, Oklahoma; stopping about every 100 miles to refresh my buzz. Looking back, it's a wonder I didn't kill myself along the way.

In Oklahoma I landed a great job as a Sheet Metal Worker. I also immersed myself in the biker culture along with getting drunk every night in the bars and getting stoned as well. My favorite drug was getting harder and harder to find (they stopped making them because of some FDA ruling). Most weekends during the spring, summer, and early fall meant Bike Rallies, those non-stop drinking and drug binges. This behavior went on until 1991 when I quit drinking and doing drugs with the exception of Marijuana. I was laid off after 7 years at the sheet metal shop. I sold everything I owned (The School bus that I was living in and my motorcycle), bought a pickup truck, and headed to Colorado to prospect for Gold. I spent the spring there with some luck and headed for the true gold country in the California Sierras. I had some very good luck there and ended up with approximately \$4,000 in gold nuggets and dust. I made my way to San Diego to get the gold appraised and to sell it. My plan was to spend the winter in the Arizona desert prospecting for gold and turquoise. The same day that I arrived in San Diego, as I was checking into a motel, someone broke into my truck and stole everything that was in it including the gold that I worked so hard to get. I only had enough cash to get the motel for a few days so after that I was homeless with a truck that had the windshield broken out of it. That meant I couldn't drive it or afford to get it fixed. During this time I had quit using Marijuana simply because of the isolation I experienced while out in the wilderness.

I managed to find a job after just a few days and started working in a shipyard. I followed Government Contracts with several Shipyards over the next 3 years, slowly building up a bit of cash surplus to get something else going. In 1994, I found out about a land auction in Tennessee and won a bid on a piece of property. I had enough cash left over to buy an old work truck, a tent, and a few essentials for roughing it for a while. I also bought a few carpentry tools and started my own business doing remodeling. Business was good and with the used building material I got from the jobs I was doing, I was able to build myself a nice little house. Since I was self-employed I could start smoking weed again without having to worry about getting drug tested. Things were going great. I owned my own home and had my own business, and was getting ready to build a shop to expand my business venture, until December 1996. It was then that I fell on a job and broke my back. I was not able to work for 2 years and had to sell everything I had to pay the hospital bill of \$60,000. Once again I was homeless and broke. The State of

Tennessee would not offer any insurance and I thought I couldn't use any VA medical benefits because of my bad discharge.

I found out that Florida had a state insurance program that I could qualify for so I hitchhiked down to Orlando and got enrolled in their program. I managed to survive from food assistance and a makeshift shelter I made in the woods. Eventually my abilities returned and through a grant I was able to attend truck-driving school. Since DOT regulations required drug testing, I had to quit marijuana again. I am one of those people who don't really consider Marijuana as a drug. I drove a truck for 3 years, slowly building up a surplus of cash so that I could start again. I bought another piece of property in Tennessee and built a small cabin there. The only problem was that there was no electrical service there and no water. I basically lived in the truck I was driving. The company I was working for made me mad because the truck was a piece of crap and kept breaking down. I left the truck at a truck stop and went to live in my cabin in the woods. I managed to keep myself in food and weed by working with a friend hauling scrap metal until the truck we were using broke down and we sold it for scrap. Since there were no jobs around the rural area I was living in, I decided to head elsewhere to find work. I ended up in Temple, TX. It was there that I found out that I was eligible for VA medical services.

In 2003, I had a mental breakdown and was locked in a psych ward for 11 days. The diagnosis was Bi-polar Disorder. My doctor also diagnosed me as being a Dry Drunk (I had never heard this term before). As part of my outpatient care, I attended AA for the first time. Me being a devout Atheist, it didn't take long for me to realize that AA was not for me. In 2005, I went through a Substance Abuse Program and a Resident Vocational Rehab through the VA and managed to stay away from weed for 8 months. Once I was discharged from there I immediately returned to using weed and stopped all treatment. I did pretty good doing odd jobs and living in shelters. In 2007, I had another breakdown and once again was locked away for 11 days. This time when I was released I got hooked up with Oxford House in Tennessee. The Social Workers at the VA hospital in Nashville are very familiar with the local Houses. On December 7, 2007, I was welcomed into the Oxford House – Hilson as an emergency member sleeping on a couch. Five days later they found a bed for me at the Hamilton House. One day later I got a decent job and was able to start paying my share in the house. The job that I started was closer to the Oxford House – Hilson but they didn't have any beds. I waited for 4 months before a bed became open and immediately moved back into the Hilson House. November 26, 2007 was the last day I used weed and I have stayed away from alcohol and hard drugs since 1991. I am currently the Comptroller of Oxford House – Hilson and still undergoing out patient care for Bi-Polar Disorder. I have also been able to find my Higher Power so that I can work the AA Steps.

Today, I have over 13 ½ years clean. In March of 2008, I started my twelfth year working for Oxford House Inc. and I have the most wonderful, loving, caring girl friend in the world (Judy). My family fights over me and whom I am going to stay with when I visit them in Boston – not who has to put me up because I have nowhere to go. I own my own home; I'm in the process of buying rental homes and working on being able to retire very comfortably some day. I owe very much of this to Oxford House for being there for me.

Billy L's Story

Early in 1986-87, I had been on a long binge but had somehow managed to make and keep an appointment for intake into a rehab program at the VA Hospital. I finished the program but only managed to stay clean for 3 months.

Using again, I was back off to the races. I eventually ended up back at the VA Hospital but was put out for hanging with my new girlfriend. I HAD NO PLACE TO GO! Because I had befriended the guys in the VA they took up a collection and my instinct told me to go to the shelter. I took my one bag of belongings, and the \$5.00 they'd collected and found my way to the New Way treatment facility.

At New Way I learned a few good things about myself. I was actually a good speaker and very personable. This was amazing to me because I was always shy. There I attended my first recovery anniversary. Eventually I was asked to lead a meeting and found out that I was pretty good at it.

My skin cleared, I gained weight and started wearing nice clothes. During my time in the program I met another person in recovery who had a trailer out on Virginia Beach. He invited me to come out; I asked permission to go and thought it was granted. To my surprise, when I returned I was asked to leave the program. Again, I HAD NOWHERE TO GO! I saw a flyer at a meeting and interviewed with Oxford House Adams Mills. They only had 2 openings and I showed up to see that there were 5 other guys interviewing. To date I am still grateful that I was one of the guys selected. I had no job but had managed to save up a little money while in treatment. Man, did they ever motivate me to find a job and I did. That was the best group of guys I have ever met.

Not only did I find a good maintenance job but I also found a girlfriend. I was enjoying life.

Later I found out that Oxford House Inc. was hiring and I started working as an Outreach Worker. I was fortunate enough to go places and start houses in Minnesota, Illinois, North Carolina and New Jersey.

I left outreach when my daughter was born. My battle with cancer brought me back to Oxford House. It was affordable but, most importantly; I had the support of my housemates to help me through this difficult time.

Oxford House works! I am living proof. Even after 19 years clean, it is still working for me. My Oxford House experience has not only helped me to get clean but to stay clean as well.

Misty's Story

My name is Misty and I am most definitely an addict. I am 32 years old. I grew up with both my parents and a brother 3 years older than me. I had a fairly decent childhood. It wasn't perfect yet there wasn't anything major like physical or sexual abuse.

I first tried marijuana at age 11 and soon after that tried alcohol. Of course, I liked how they both made me feel. I started using both of the drugs on a daily basis at the age of 16. This was also when I had my first experience with crack. This landed me in a psychiatric ward at 16 and in the NC Department of Corrections at 17. After prison I continued on in my using.

I met my first husband-to-be in 1994. I was 18 years old. We had our first daughter in the latter part of 1995 and were married in 1996. Our second and third daughters came along in 1998 and 2000. During the marriage I was still using marijuana on a daily basis as well as drinking and taking pills as I felt it necessary. Although we managed to take care of our daughters and meet their basic needs, I can look back on it now and see how my addiction had the best of me. We fought a lot and ended up in jail for domestic violence more than once. Eventually, our life together would come to an end due to tragedy and from the direct result of our disease (addiction). This tragedy took place on May 15, 2002. I had left my husband as I had many times before, but this particular time he didn't take to it very well. He hunted me down, found me, and came very close to taking my life. He stabbed me 21 times with a butcher knife and left me to die in a pool of my own blood. By grace alone I survived. I was rushed to the hospital and sent in for emergency surgery. I had 8 holes in my intestines that had to be repaired, a punctured and collapsed lung, and an ear that was almost taken off which had to be repaired by a plastic surgeon. I would spend the next 3 days on life support fighting for my life. I was in and out of the hospital for the next month and was soon fully recovered.

Unfortunately, after recovering, I chose not to return to being a mother to my daughters but instead to cultivate a full-blown active addiction. At this point, my parents would take on the responsibility of raising my girls. I would stay strung out on crack for the next nine months until I was introduced to crystal meth. For the next year I would smoke meth everyday. It was being manufactured in my home so I had easy access to it.

On March 11, 2004, I had had enough. I got into a detox in Asheville, NC. I spent a short six days there, then was interviewed and accepted into Oxford House Wyoming. I would spend one of the best years of my life there. I got involved with my house as well as the chapter immediately. I loved it. Life was good. I left the Wyoming house after being there a year to open Oxford House Round Top. A month after the house opened, I started slipping. I wasn't making very many meetings, rarely talking to my sponsor.

Needless to say, I used again. Of course, I left the house almost immediately and stayed out in active addiction for nine months. Nothing had changed. I ended up back in my home town strung out on crack once again. I experienced being stabbed again, this time by a drug dealer whom I had robbed. My other lung was punctured, but I was released from the hospital the next day. I was right back at it-smoking crack with four fresh stab wounds and a punctured lung. Eventually, I ended up homeless in the cold month of January. It wasn't until I found myself sleeping on the concrete floor of an abandoned house in freezing weather, smelling bad from lack of bathing, and having thoughts of suicide that I realized that I had been taught a better way to live. I learned this better way from Oxford House and from 12 step programs.

I called some friends from my network in Asheville and, by grace, once again made it back into detox. This time I took it a step further and went into treatment for 21 days. Before leaving treatment I did and interview with Oxford House Church Street, which I moved into in February 2006. I almost immediately got back involved with my house as well as the chapter. I stayed at Church Street for a year then moved out and got married to a wonderful man (whom I met in treatment – please – don't try this at home, it doesn't always work). We left Asheville and moved back to my hometown. I stayed connected and involved with Oxford House since the minute I moved out. Today, I am over 2 ½ years clean and am employed full time by Oxford House. I regained custody of my beautiful daughters after 5 long years without them over a year ago. By the way, my wonderful husband and I are still together (it is working for us). We are one big happy family one day at a time. I am blessed. I couldn't be happier. I am so grateful to Oxford House. It taught me how to live again. Today I can be a wife, a mother, a daughter, a sister, and aunt, a friend, a sponsor, and an employee, and no matter what, I do not have to use. I could go on and on, but I'll stop. I just can't express enough how grateful I am for Oxford House for making all this possible for me and my family. Thank You, Jesus!

Patrick's Story

About 10 months into recovery my sponsor and I were working on my sex inventory. At the time I was living with a girl also in recovery. After completing this inventory I was pretty disgusted with my behavior in regard to the woman in my life, and I realized that living with her was not a good idea. But where would I go. I didn't know, and I was scared. I didn't want to be homeless again.

I had been going to AA meetings everyday, and even though I didn't really understand anything, I was able to meet a few of the regulars at these meetings. One man that I met was around my age, 45ish, and living in an Oxford House. I shared with him my dilemma, and he suggested that I interview at his house. They had an opening. I did interview there, but was rejected due to the fact that one of the other residents there had a friend coming out of rehab. So they accepted him.

I immediately got scared, and worried again, because I felt rejected once again. I mentioned this to my sponsor, and he promptly went to the Internet, found the Oxford Website, and made a copy of the directory of houses in our area. I didn't call right away, but after being frightened, and feeling enough pain, I did call. I got an interview with another house, and interviewed there, but was turned down there as well. I wasn't given a reason, just told that they only had one space, and that it had been filled. I got fearful again. I called another house nearby and was granted another interview.

At this house, the Lakewood House, I was told that there were two openings. I thought for sure that I had a chance now. When I got there the night of the interview, I was slightly early, and, much to my dismay the house was interviewing another candidate already, and well, you guessed it, I got frightened again. After he interviewed, it was my turn. I told them basically what I am telling everyone here. They knew I was scared, and assured me that even if I didn't get in here, that somewhere I would be taken in. I did feel relieved. After a short time, both of us interviewees were accepted into the house.

After settling in to the house for a while, I found out that this house was struggling. You see, the previous President of the house had been embezzling from the residents for quite some time, and I understand was also using in the house. He and others were promptly dismissed from the house as by Outreach. Unfortunately for the house, however, many of the bills for the house had not been paid, and some of the services for the house had been terminated. In fact the electricity had just been turned back on. As I remember, we all had jobs, and it wasn't long, just a few short months, that everything was settled, and our services were turned back on. I learned the value of gratitude from this experience.

I was made Treasurer of the house about 2 months after my arrival. I guess that the house members felt I would be too frightened to steal. They were right. Anyway, it was at this time that I familiarized myself with the Oxford House Manual. I read my job description, as well as others, and also found that many of the things that the house was supposed to be doing, the house was not doing. The main thing was that the house was not having regular weekly house meetings. We would do the books, but not actually have a meeting. You see, the President at that time seemed to be quite content with this system of running a house. I was not though, and I soon realized that the President might have been cheating the house out of money. I say this because he was saying to the house that he was spending money on items for the house, but was not providing the receipts. I doubted him and challenged him at the meetings that we did have, but to no avail. No one else in the house realized, or even cared, that this might be going on. I spent a lot of time with my sponsor at this time, and it took months of patience and tolerance to accept the President's behavior. Eventually, however, the house began to realize that I might be right, and finally it was brought under control.

Around this same time, I asked the house to pay for myself and another guy to go to the world convention in Washington, D.C.. After the convention I was very excited about Oxford, and was eager to share what I had learned in the house. Much to my dismay, most of the house residents weren't as excited as myself, including the guy I went with, and change seemed impossible. I was elected at this time to President, and I decided that the house could probably only handle regular meetings. I instituted the sample weekly meeting agenda, from the manual, made sure that the traditions were read, and helped other officers to learn their jobs properly. This was enough to bring the house closer together. After my tenure was over, I took no offices and relaxed from house officer duties. The current officers of the house are doing an excellent job. Was this due to my actions?

I really don't know. I'm sure that I helped. Clearly, however, I've learned through recovery that it was not only me. The path that the Lakewood house has taken over these two years, I believe, is the path that it was supposed to take. What I mean is, that only through powers beyond ourselves, is it possible for there to be growth. My ego and pride say that it was I who brought positive change to the house. That simply isn't so. I am not that great, although sometimes I feel that way. In fact, even the previous President brought positive aspects to the house, and myself.

This is what Oxford has brought into my life. First and foremost, it has brought patience and tolerance. I remember very clearly, when I was whining to my sponsor about the previous President, I was taught to pray for this sick man. I didn't want to, and didn't all the time, but I did enough to get more out of myself, to help another. I also realized that I needed to pray for myself. That's my second major lesson learned. I cannot judge. I'm great at judging others. Take their inventory rather than my own. Through these life lessons, I believe I do that less. Could I have learned these character defects without living in Oxford? Maybe, but probably, at least not as fast as when living the Oxford way of life.

One of the greatest qualities of the Oxford living is its diversity of men, or women, that you find in the houses. You have different ages, personalities, ethnics, politics, religions, etc. If I were living in another environment, then I would have more choice in finding people like me. Also, where else, but in an Oxford environment, will someone say to you, "You hold on now." Such honesty would only in some kind of recovery-based housing environment. I've learned much more, but I am getting long winded so I will close with this.

I've learned that as a sick, very sick man, that at Oxford I can become a sober man. That all I have to do is, not get high, pay my rent, not be disruptive. Is that really that hard? Not for this less frightened man. In fact it's easy. Through gratitude I can do these things with pleasure. To watch my growth, and others, I learn that my condition is treatable. And isn't that what I have been searching for all these years? Yes it is. Thank God for Oxford House.

Keith G's Story

My name is Keith and I am an addict. I want to tell you a little bit about myself, what it was like and what it's like now. My clean date is October 31 1996. To my Oxford family, as I'm sitting here trying to type my story, I must tell you that my emotions are all over the place. This is the first time I have written my story or let as many people into this very private part of my life so I'll say now I love you all, and I hope somewhere someone gets something from my story.

I was born in Trinity, a small town just south east of Greensboro, NC. I was one of two children, just my sister and me I had a loving family, a Christian family who loved and adored my sister and me. We did not want for anything. I need you to know when I say that we did not want for anything that my family was not rich with a lot of money but they were rich with a lot of spiritual gifts. We were a large family who were so close that we had family dinner cooked by my grandmother every Tuesday Night. I have to say just a little right now about my upbringing in the church. It seemed like I was there every day. Today, I'm so thankful for that foundation in the church.

I attended Trinity High School where I was an active student in academics and sports and had many friends. Around my ninth grade year I started experimenting with Marijuana. I loved being high. Everyone around me was getting high and it became a normal thing to do. Pretty soon I was using Marijuana and alcohol on a regular basis. I still felt that I was functioning as a normal member of society.

I started getting in some trouble with my parents regarding my grades slipping. They were unaware of my using. I, however, maintained a C average to allow me to play sports.

After four years of socially using, I was graduating from high school and my sister was in college. After my senior year, my mother suffered her first of two heart attacks. That was the first time that I can say now I did not want to feel what I was feeling. I used drugs and alcohol to escape. Being afraid of losing someone you love so dearly is overwhelming. Family was the most important thing in my life and in the lives of my friends.

I attended Davidson County Comm. College for two and a half years. While there I worked part time and partied a great deal. Somewhere along the way I was making money and could be more and more independent from my parents. By my second year at Davidson, cocaine was on the scene and that was the one for me. In those days if you had a bag of Coke there was no one and nothing you could not get. It was very alluring for a lot of women and this gave way to my wanting to have it around a lot.

After I flunked out of Davidson, my parents cut me off and I went to work full time and the partying took off. Sometime in the late 80's I met my first love. She was attending Greensboro College. At this time I worked for MCI. We hung out on the college scene a lot. It was all about the drugs and my girl. It was awhile after we got engaged that I realized I had a problem. Days and days of no sleep, chronic nosebleeds and I can remember when my using had some repercussions from my using. I could no longer hide it. She let my parents know that I had a problem. My family was not drinkers, so telling them that I was using drugs was a huge betrayal in my eyes at that time. Her explanation was that she loved me and wanted me to be OK. I told her that I could stop anytime. I did not think I was an addict. She called me an addict and said that if I did not get some help she would leave. I was truly devastated. Somewhere in that time period I met an American Indian man who introduced me into the drug world on a whole new level. I was using everyday and was missing for weeks on end. We would travel to Lumberton, NC and move large quantities of drugs back to Trinity. My fiancée realized what was going on; she could not handle it and this was the end of the relationship. After our break up it became gas pedal wide open. I was at my friend's house and the police searched it for drugs. He was locked up. My life had become full of risk for my friends and me. Shortly thereafter, I met my son's mother. During this particular time period nothing was off limits to me. I felt I could take or do anything. My son's mother and I had a very dysfunctional relationship. However, I have never, not for one minute, regretted my son in any way. I got a misdemeanor drug citation. This was my first trouble with the law. I beat the charges but my life was spinning out of control. The relationship with my father was very strained, my mother was always crying. To have any type of normalcy I would go to grandma's house. She loved me so much but was a great enabler. I would rest at her house then do some odd jobs for her. She would give me money then I would be off and running to buy drugs.

The dates are fuzzy even now. My son was born and I did get to the hospital a day late in Atlanta. The only reason I got there the next day was because my parents took me. Everything had gotten so bad. I began doing a lot of stealing/boosting. It was after a seven-day run staying up in a hotel, scared waiting for the cops to catch me I called my dad. He took me home and I rested up. Somehow they got me to a treatment center in Lexington, NC. This was my first experience with recovery. I stayed for 45 days at that treatment center, and then went to a halfway house in Asheboro, NC. I completed the program for six months. I worked every day, went to meetings, and had a sponsor. I met a good friend named Kenneth. We began our own drywall company. We were making a lot of money. At this time my Dad went through his first bout of cancer. I was clean for the beginning of his treatment. They would come see me on my weekend passes. All my family would come, aunts, uncles, cousins.

Shortly before I left the halfway house, I bought the car of my dreams – a Black 300 Z Nissan. The man at the halfway house came out looked at me and said Keith you have not suffered enough yet and you are going to use again. I told him he didn't know what he was talking about. I was working going to meetings and I met a women and we moved in together. I started using again with her and my business partner. The drywall busing was gone. Here is where I had my first serious encounter with the law. It was like the whole time I was I was clean my disease was laying in wait to emerge stronger and more devious this time. By then my criminal activity had escalated to keep up with my using. I started going in and out of jail.

My father told me if I continued to hurt my mother anymore he would kill me himself. I felt so much guilt and shame. Finally I found myself in the Asheboro jail with 12 felony counts. I knew I was through. I had spent 28 days in ADAT and then moved into the Christian Fellowship Home. On the day I moved in I began working. During that 6-month program I was working, going to meetings working with a sponsor but I stayed worried about the outstanding charges. I completed the 6-month program and I moved into Hearth Oxford House.

At this time I had to face my charges. My father and I went to court. When I got there I was once again arrested for an outstanding warrant. Amazingly I was allowed to go into the courtroom without being processed. I was the last case that day and I remember getting up and the Judge saying stand-up Mr. Gibson he told me he needed a five-minute recess just to go over my stack of charges. When he came back he gave me 3 years suspended sentence, community service and intensive probation. I don't know how I would have done if I hadn't been at Oxford House and those guys. They were all working strong programs of recovery. I lived in Oxford House for 2 years. Oxford House is where I met my wife. I need to say that at the time I met my wife, I had been in a bad car accident. I could not believe how genuinely caring she was. She really cared about the Oxford House and was always looking to put someone to work keeping them busy and out of trouble.

Today I realize that Oxford House not only helped me through early recovery but gave me a strong, comfortable sobriety that allows me to deal with life on life's terms.

Dan L's Story

I was a total nerd in school. I really didn't have any friends. I had a neighbor, Matt, who occasionally acknowledged my existence, if no other kids were around. Matt showed up on my 18th birthday. He'd snuck a 12-pack of Miller from his uncle. I'd never even thought about drinking. He handed me a bottle and I nearly chugged it. I've heard lots say how lousy alcohol tasted at first. Not for me. It was love at first swallow.

I was a klutzy kid. Two left feet, last chosen for baseball, dreaded gym. Everything a kid wanted to be good at, I stunk. Not just sports. At 13 I had my first crush. Her name was Kate. I idolized her and believed she was of a higher species. My cousin had me sit me next to Kate at his birthday party. She smiled and asked me a question. I looked at her and forgot the English language. I was too paralyzed to be embarrassed. It was like my first blackout, before my first drink. I resolved never to be seen in public again.

The only thing I was good at was video games. My talent was perfect for an anti-social life. At first, it was just Mario, Luigi and me. My universe expanded, but no more people, just more and more video games.

But that bottle of Miller changed my life. I drained it and had another, then a third. Matt said, “Wow, you can really put that stuff away.” It was my first compliment.

Matt drank one bottle, so there were eight left. I instinctively knew to monitor my supply. Matt said, “let’s go share it with my brother.” “Like Hell,” I said. I was a selfish drunk in my first forty minutes. I’d found something other than Nintendo I was good at. I was an absolute natural alcoholic.

I suddenly took a liking to Matt’s Uncle Frank because he had oceans of alcohol. He was a good, friendly and kind man too. He was divorced, his wife had the kids, but he had every luxury imaginable and he didn’t work. His station in life was based on two words: ‘Trust Fund’.

Frank was about 35. I was 18 but we totally hit it off. Frank was always drinking and hated drinking alone. I didn’t know any other way to get beer. In reality, we were both starved for human companionship. I essentially moved into his house. My father had left when I was three and my mother was a somewhat functioning alcoholic-addict. I don’t think my mother noticed I’d moved. She was immersed in her ‘Double-V Unreality’ – vodka and Valium – always. I guess she thought I was still living my usual life, up in my room, endlessly playing video games.

Matt’s older brother said he knew why Uncle Frank and I hit it off so well. He told me I was a ‘sycophant’. I was mad as hell; I didn’t have a clue what it meant, but it sounded disgusting. I looked it up and all was OK. The dictionary defined ‘sycophant’, as a ‘self-seeking, servile flatterer; fawning parasite.’ Sounded like an OK job description to me. And, that was my entire drinking career. I moved in with Frank at 18 and we drank. We were both alcoholics and that’s what drunks do.

One day I opened my mail and it was a 21st birthday card from my dentist. Three years had gone by? Two months later, I got up one day and Frank didn’t. I called 911 and cops and EMTs flooded the place. That was my longest day. I was crying and talking to cops and I ended the day in a detox. I was furious with Frank. He went away forever. And, he didn’t take me with him.

I landed at Connecticut Valley Hospital in a ward that was a combo rehab- nuthouse-jail. I figured I’d be there forever. But I was 21, the state was gutting human services and I hadn’t committed any crime, so 28 days later I’d be out. My counselor told me about Oxford Houses, said they’d drive me to an interview and pay initial costs. He also said he loved coffee, had been to a zillion Dunkin’ Doughnuts and saw ‘Help Wanted’ signs there daily.

I moved into Oxford House Hamden and they told me, “go to meetings, pay rent, do my chore and the rest was just life.” Amazingly, I thrived.

I knew I loved Frank. Always will. He was my true father. I was his surrogate son. Yes, Frank gave alcohol to an 18-year-old alcoholic. Illegal, but in the scheme of things, not really bad. I knew I was alcoholic from my first drink and would have been drinking no matter what.

Everything else Frank gave me was positive. I’d just done what he did. He read mountains of books, watched about every fine film made, loved all kinds of music, and regularly went to art museums from Boston to New York. And he loved baseball. We went lots to Yankee Stadium and Fenway and to lots of college basketball games. Me, the all time nerd, became a big baseball, basketball fan. Amazing! Frank’s money cushioned both of us from some consequences of alcohol. There was always someone to drive and someone to get us home safely and make certain our cigarettes were out.

Just sober, I still felt incredibly shy. In my first talk with my sponsor, he laid down the rules and emphasized no relationships my first year. Relationship! I wasn’t planning on a conversation.

Oxford House was no less than a miracle for me. I was totally alone in the world and I moved into a true family. That's just not supposed to happen. Seven-eight guys, 21 to 60, most all had very little money, but we were living in a great town, in a terrific old house and were bonded by our addictions.

We were immersed in a double fraternity, the program (AA/NA) and Oxford House. One complemented the other, beginning with the absolute bedrock of our existence; living free of alcohol and drugs. Then honesty, personal responsibility, concern for and consideration of others. And tolerance, empathy and gratitude.

Oxford House was an unexpected, virtually inconceivable gift and blessing in my life. And, as I continue along the road of sobriety, I am amazed to meet so many others for whom Oxford House was, and is, a miracle of sober community.

Xavier's Story

Looking back to my active addiction, I never would have imagined that I would ever be clean. I was always able to accumulate 24-hour key tags or the occasional 30-day chip. I was never able to stop and stay stopped. I couldn't even fathom such a thing as "not using." Before active addiction I considered myself a well-rounded guy. I was the son of a preacher, from a middle-class family, educated, highly skilled, fashionable, well traveled and a jack-of-all- trades. Crack cocaine began to take over my life and made me forget all that I was and once aspired to be. At the end I was worthless and purpose-less.

I would often hear in meetings, "I used to live and lived to used!" At my bottom, only the last part was true for me. I only stayed alive with the hope of my next fix. When the struggle to get more drugs became too much, I decided there was nothing left to live for. With all the energy I could muster up, at a 139 pounds at 6 feet 2 inches tall, I stole three bottles of Nyquil Cough Syrup, bought my last twenty of crack cocaine, and got high for what I thought would be the last time. After the crack was gone, I found a quiet spot in downtown Washington, DC; took all three bottles of Nyquil and the bottle of Percocet (about 40) I had gotten from the homeless health van, and settled in on a park bench and waited for the end.

To my grave disappointment I woke up in the emergency room of Howard University Hospital, mad at God and the world that my attempt at suicide had failed. From the emergency room, I was shipped off to the psych ward. After a couple of days, something in me decided that maybe another try at recovery wouldn't hurt.

I spent 4 months in a treatment facility and got physically and mentally better much faster than I anticipated but there was the impending fear of what to do once I was discharged. Fortunately, the facility allowed me to find a job during my last 2 months. I was able to save money. It was suggested that I go to an Oxford House. Not knowing exactly what an Oxford House was and being a pastor's son and theology student, I assumed that it was something religious and closely related to the Oxford Evangelistic Movement. I interviewed for my first Oxford House and, to my pleasant surprise, I found a group of individuals just like me!

It was in the psych ward that I decided to try recovery again. It was in treatment that I decided to accept my addiction. It was at Oxford House C Street that I *realized* that I don't have to use anymore – even if I wanted to. The support of the family that I found at my first Oxford House was exactly what I needed to build a foundation in recovery.

From Oxford House C Street I was asked to help start another Oxford House – Oxford House Deanwood. It was at Oxford House-Deanwood that I attended my first World Convention where I was elected to the World Council. It was at that same house that I celebrated my first year clean. It was at that house that I started working for Oxford House Inc. It was because of Oxford House that I established a recovery foundation, re-learned to be responsible and developed enough gratitude to motivate me to want to replicate this phenomenon.

Now I no longer live to use. I live with a real purpose and ministry. I live to show others by example that "birds of a feather" can learn to live productive lives and come back from living hell by

sticking together. YES I go to meetings. YES I have a sponsor, and YES I am working the steps. BUT - Oxford House was the missing piece to the puzzle that saved my life and for that I am eternally grateful.

The funny thing is, Oxford House has become a religious experience for me. I never thought that I would once again find a real purpose for living. Thanks to Oxford House, I am now fulfilling my purpose.

Tom's Story

My story as an alcoholic is not a whole lot different from millions of other addicts. My drinking began early in my teen years. It wasn't long before I realized that I drank differently than most of my friends. I drank more. The interesting thing was the high tolerance I had to booze. I could drink twice as much as most of my friends and still function. I figured that meant that there was no way I was an alcoholic. It turns out that a high tolerance of alcohol is the first sign.

My real drinking and drugging career became full blown in the late 60's. I was in the Army, overseas at the time where drinking and drugging became an everyday thing. When I got out of the Army, I went back to work at the Newspaper selling Advertising. What a perfect job for an alcoholic. They actually paid me to drink.

Some years later, I ended up in my first of four Treatment Centers. I managed to stay sober for a few years after my first treatment but that was in the 80's. Who needed booze when you could have cocaine? The only good thing about cocaine is that it brings you down to your knees real quick. I started drinking again to get off the cocaine (sound familiar?) The second and third treatment centers came shortly after.

I don't think I have to go into great detail about the destruction this disease not only does to us but to our Families as well. I was part owner in a small Printing Company at the time of my next relapse. It didn't take me very long to run that business deep into the ground. One good thing that happened at that time was that my former wife and family learned the term "Tough Love". Everyone stopped enabling me and I ended up on a "cot" outside the house. My former wife had Detox pick me up and I ended up in a County run 90-Day Treatment Center. After all this, my denial and lack of surrender was still in full force. AA had not yet become part of my life and recovery. When my 90 days were up, my counselor suggested I go to this new place called "Oxford House". I had been in "Half-Way Houses" before so you can imagine my surprise to see this really nice Home in this very expensive neighborhood. It was in this Home where I first learned what the word "Recovery" really meant. It was like living with 9 Sponsors.

The guys in the house made a game out of getting me to AA Meetings. Every night, someone would invite me to go with them to a meeting of which I had 100 excuses of why I couldn't go. Finally, they would invite me out to dinner, which I immediately accepted. We would get into the car, they would lock the doors and inform me that YES we were going to dinner, but we were going to one of those "Damn Meetings" first. It wasn't long before I was going to those "Damn Meetings" all on my own.

There were only two Oxford Houses in the State of Washington at that time. Every time we had an opening, there would be 9 or 10 applications to get in. I remember calling Paul Molloy, telling him he needed to get someone out here to open more Houses. His response was, "Open Houses yourself."

Myrna Brown, who opened the first Oxford House in Vancouver, came up to get us started. Pitching-in and helping open the Houses became an intricate part of my recovery. I was always told that service work is a big part of recovery. But I still feel that those 9 guys in that Oxford House, who had the patience and tolerance to teach me what recovery was really all about, that was my real "Gift".

I'm retired now. I'm back with my wife and family, and very grateful. When I hear people talking about Oxford House, they all say how "Oxford gave them their life back". I remember Sherry Burrows story about how Oxford House didn't give her life back, but that Oxford House "Gave her a Life". That's my feeling. Oxford House "Gave me my Life" and I'm very grateful.

Bert's Story

My name is Bert Hodges and I was born on July 12, 1965, in Washington, N.C. I have 2 sisters who are older than me. My childhood was ok. I worked after school in my Dad's shop from 2nd grade up and full time until 1998. I played football and wrestled in high school. In high school I always felt as if I didn't fit in even though everyone I met seemed to like me.

I took my first drink and smoked my first joint at the age of 14. It wasn't really love at first drink or toke. After that, for a while I drank and smoked whenever the opportunity arose which wasn't much. When I entered high school, things changed. Transportation proved to be great in the aspect of my partying. Then it was going out most every night and smoking weed and drinking. My grades didn't suffer as I always made good grades. I just didn't apply myself to living up to my potential academically. I managed to get through high school without getting into trouble, how I don't know. I graduated from high school in 1983 and went to work in my Dad's shop.

After high school, with a full time job, I began to drink and smoke weed on a nightly basis. It seems that was what all my friends were doing. I could come into work with a hangover and get away with it. There were more than a few times when I would be coming in as my Dad would be going to work as he went in a few hours early every day. He spoke with me about my late nights but I didn't care or change. I was about 21 when I was introduced to cocaine. Fortunately for me at the time, a few of my friends were selling, so I was around coke a lot. My first DWI came at age 21. I didn't see that as a problem. My dealer friends would come pick me up every night so I used every night. At age 24 came my second DWI. With that came my first taste of jail. At age 27 came my third DWI and my second taste of jail. Through all this time I never even considered that I had a problem with alcohol and drugs even though the people teaching the DWI classes told me I might.

I moved away from home at age 23. Shortly after I was introduced to my worst nightmare, crack. I wasn't in love with it at first; it took a lot of work. I could take a hit at first and walk away. Alcohol was my true love at that point of my life. In 1994 I was charged with a hit and run. To this day, I don't remember doing it. I was in a blackout. Anyway, legal problems began piling up. My first taste of prison happened in 1994 with probation revocation. In 1995, I went back to prison for the hit and run. Short stints but no red flags went up about me having a problem. Being the smart person I thought I was, I decided that drinking was a problem because I was going to drive, so I cut down on drinking to a beer or so a day. However, at that point my weekend occasional crack smoking began to be more frequent. In early 1998, my family confronted me about my drug use and, to get them off my back, I went to Wilmington Treatment Center. When I got out, I lasted about an hour back in town before I used and it was off to the races again.

In April 1998, I decided that I couldn't use and work so I quit my father's shop. Within a few months I was back in prison. When I got out, I was back on drugs within a few days. I went back to prison in 1999 because of probation revocation. Got out a year later and joined NA. That lasted for 24 months then it was back on. Again it was off to prison for probation revocation in 2002. Got out and used the first day. Lasted six months to the day of my release from prison and was arrested again with a lot of serious charges. 2003 marked my sixth time going to prison all because of alcohol and drugs. Along the way I abused alcohol and drugs but, in the end, crack was my true love.

My sobriety date is June 19, 2003. I was in jail sobering up and realized that my life was going backwards – all because of alcohol and drugs. I was in jail when, for the first time, I hit my knees and asked God for help with my problem. While in prison I went to meetings and got a sponsor and did step work. Getting closer to release meant deciding where I was going to live. I had already decided in jail that I would not go back to my hometown. Through a chaplain in prison I got an interview at an Oxford house. That is where I went after my release and is the smartest thing I have done in my sobriety. My family wouldn't have even considered letting me stay with them after my release, that bridge was still on fire and is not totally out today. I got a sponsor at my new home group soon after my release from prison and followed his advice even though I didn't like a lot of it. I became teachable and willing to do whatever it takes.

Because of the strong network in AA and my fellow Oxford House members, willingness, desire and the grace of God I am still sober today. Life hasn't been easy because it is not easy starting over completely at 40 years old. My new life is great. I was baptized in 2006. I'm now a volunteer and sponsor

at the same prison from which I left in 2005. Oxford House has graced me with a job as a trained peer advocate. That has helped me a lot and along the way, I think I have helped other alcoholics and addicts.

Keith M's Story

My name is Keith McRae, I was born on January 17, 1969 in Lumberton, N.C. to Joe Louis and Mary Magdelene McRae. I'm the 8th sibling of 10 who are my biological brothers and sisters. I was raised on a farm in a small southern town just 13 miles south of Lumberton, N.C. called Fairmont N.C. My Father was a sharecropper, and so were the majority of the families that lived in that community.

So all of my childhood life was spent working in the hot steaming fields on the farm that we lived on. And in my dad's house there's was no such thing as, "I'm not doing this or that." You worked. If you were sick or got hurt, you still went to work. I remember taking my first drink (Home-made wine) at the house of the owner of the house we lived in. They made wine quite often in this huge barrel and had the nerve to leave it on the outside! Of course, I always helped myself when no one was looking, or I'd sneak back up to the farmhouse during the night or whenever the coast was clear, and I always poured out enough for my sister and me. I included my sister to keep her from telling my parents.

I was one of those kids who could do anything but never gave my very best to nothing. I very easily became a thief at a young age because I always felt like the (white man) – whose farm I worked on – always cheated us because he never paid more than one dollar for a day's work. So I always felt like he owed me. At this point I would take money out of his wallet when he wasn't looking or any time I could to make up the difference. That went on for a very long time. Actually it went on until I left home.

School was never my favorite place, but I had to go to live in my Dad's house. He would beat me to the red meat. So I always feared my Dad and what I knew he would do. I became extremely afraid of my Dad; needless to say that we weren't good friends at all. I managed to get to the 11th grade before dropping out of High School. And my cycle began. From that day forth, my whole life up until the age of 37 has only been one of jails and institutions. I served approximately 13 years in prison and have been to jail probably a minimum of 25-30 times and even served jail sentences in the County for petty crimes. It took hitting rock bottom before I decided that I couldn't live like I was living any more. I didn't want to die, and I certainly didn't want to go back to prison.

My clean date is 8/27/06. I made the best decision I ever made in my life when I surrendered to the disease of addiction. Today I'm a grateful recovering addict who not only talks this talk, but also walks this walk. Almighty God, and Oxford has given me a life. Oxford House accepted me when no-one else would, and is still showing me a new way of life; they've even given me a job as a peer advocate here in Wake County to help others just like myself who wants to recover from the disease of addiction. I love, and enjoy my job today. There's no greater reward the end of my workday than to know that I've helped somebody! Since being clean I also got my GED.

Christopher's Story

This is my story. I was raised in a normal two-parent household. Life was great when i was young. I was a happy kid who seemed normal in all respects. My father was a closet drinker and my mother was bi-polar as I later found out later. Because the days were always different, you could not tell what kind of mood the parents were going to be in from one day to the next. "Was it me? Was it something I did or said? Who knew? A lot of self-doubt loomed in me as I got older. To trust my instincts was not a part of me. The feeling that there was something wrong with me followed me for many years and I lived my life to justify it. After all, if you hear that you must be crazy enough times, your going to start believing it so drugs and alcohol eased the pain. It allowed me to escape for a while but the next day there it was. It became a pattern I grew used to. Part of me hated me. The other part was looking for a way out.

The cry for help came in the form of legal issues. You see I couldn't do it on my own. Part of me didn't want to stop. The other part did. I was given me the opportunity to make a change and I did. I now am back on my feet thanks to the Oxford House. It gave me chance to live again and to get back on my feet. I now have a place where you don't have to feel alone

Marissa M's Story

Born and raised in Omaha, NE, I engaged in alcoholic thinking from the get-go. And by that I mean the obsessive desire to fit in and be 'a part of.' It always seemed like other kids didn't have the same paralyzing fear of 'being less-than' that I did. Like I said, it was all about "self" from the beginning and I would do anything for you if it meant you'd accept me.

My drug use started out with alcohol and marijuana at age 16 and quickly moved to ecstasy, cocaine and prescription painkillers by 17 or 18. I went to college in Los Angeles, where I majored in English and minored in Heroin Use. Any drug was my friend but heroin was my favorite friend and my only friend in the end.

I went to my first treatment center in 2004, in the fall of my senior year. My parents shipped me off to Minnesota and I was grateful, because I was ready to quit... heroin. I didn't believe I was an alcoholic and I certainly didn't think pot was a problem. After getting high inside the treatment center, I was kicked out and transferred to another treatment center on the East Coast. I had begun to believe that I might be "sick" – my first moment of clarity. I stayed in inpatient for 4 months, and lived in a 3/4 house for another 2 months. I was happily skating along, whistling in the dark, just as the Big Book says.

Then, at about 8 months clean, I drank. Like it was nothing. There began my descent back into hell. I eventually picked up crystal meth, which literally ran my life until February 2007. It made my decisions for me; it chose who I hung out with; what I did and didn't do; and who I had become. Between December '05 and February of '07, I lost the good job, the apartment, the boyfriend, the trust of everyone who knew me, and was charged with shoplifting. I was empty inside and the drugs weren't filling me up anymore. My "exciting" life in the drug world had become astonishingly mundane and predictable. I was just too tired to do it anymore.

I went back to treatment, this time in Texas, on Valentine's Day (which makes my sobriety date, February 15, 2007). I was promptly kicked out of treatment after 10 days for fraternizing. But I didn't drink or use. My experience in the past had been that I knew how to do treatment, but I didn't know how to live outside in the world AND stay clean and sober. I'd heard about Oxford House in Treatment Center #2 and I knew I couldn't go home to Nebraska for my own sanity and sobriety, so I interviewed at an Oxford House in Dallas. I was accepted and then kicked out 2 weeks later for missing curfew. But I didn't drink or use. I persevered, and got into another house (Oxford House Erie), where I still live today, a year and a half later.

Oxford House saved my life and taught me about the best high, the one I could never get when I was running around, using dope and people; that is, the high which comes from Service and Fellowship.

My life continues to shock me!

I am positively stunned at the immediate effects of helping others in my life. There is a magnitude about it that was absolutely beyond anything I could have anticipated. I don't know exactly when the "switch got flipped" inside me, but suddenly I have a purpose. Suddenly, I am attracted to healthy people. Suddenly, I am not constantly wondering how I can benefit myself or how I can stay in the good graces of others. Suddenly, I don't have to be who I think you want me to be to feel "good enough." Validation from others is a requirement that is drifting further and further away from me. Today I'm getting validation from within when I get the warm fuzzies by helping others. It's better than any drug, or any validation I've ever received from another person... EVER! I wish I had known this earlier. This is a world I didn't know existed for me. I saw it in others' lives and never thought for a second that I, personally, could experience such a freedom.

I am experiencing this type of realization often these days and I can't begin to describe the amazing feeling I get... though not for lack of trying, as you well know! I get so excited when we have new members and I hope they latch on to this thing with vigor and enthusiasm. And we get to be *the example*. We get to show them how good life gets... even when we're stressed out and overworked and busy as hell. They will get a chance to see the lights in our eyes.

More importantly, we continue to get a little more freedom than we had yesterday, or last week, or 6 months ago... just by helping those newcomers. Whether they stay sober 10 years or 5 days or they drink

tomorrow, I benefit from the experience with that person. I have been overcome with something that brought me back to my purpose, and to the rewards I can reap from being available to and for others.

Self-seeking will slip away as we lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows and we will intuitively know how to handle situations that used to baffle us.

It's nice when promises come true.

Bob's Story

Upon returning from Vietnam, where I was a combat medic I immediately went AWOL from the company at Ft Belvoir, Virginia where I was stationed. I was out on the streets of Washington D.C. doing everything I could do to destroy myself as quickly as I could. Eventually it was a father's call to the chaplain that reconciled me with the army. The consequences to my actions were minimal and I was able to finish the several months that I had left before discharge. Needless to say, there was not a night that went by that I was not obliterated by alcohol.

Upon discharge from the service, I moved to California where I became a bartender, bought a bike, and spent the next year in an alcoholic haze. I got married in a blackout in Reno to a trust fund baby, a fellow alcoholic. We moved back East where we had a turbulent year running from the law for various minor infractions. We split up shortly thereafter and I have not seen her since.

I was living on the strip in College Park, Maryland and working various odd jobs ranging from an ice cream man to sweeping floors. I earned just enough money to pay the rent and hang out at honky tonks. I ended up on the V.A. nut ward in 1973 where they dosed me with Valium and I would liquor up down at the local watering hole near the V.A. Alcoholism and/or drug addiction was never suggested while I was there. If they had been suggested preferred I would have preferred being crazy than being labeled a drunk.

After several more years like that, I finally ran afoul of the law and was charged with breaking and entering. I was charged with four felonies. I was twenty-six by this time, and I was scared about going to jail for a sustained period of time – even though my accumulated county time filled about a year of my life prior to this arrest. The Circuit Judge sentenced me on February 10, 1977 to a two year suspended sentence contingent upon the condition that I get help for my mental problems. Instead, I found myself doing a six-month stint at the D.C. Veteran's hospital in a drug and alcohol program where I went to my very first AA meeting on February 14, 1977.

I was scared, had indefinable fears, and very vague spiritual desires. I was open to anything, because I didn't want to go to jail or get any crazier. Finally, we were allowed passes to go to meetings and I went to many Northwest D.C. meetings over the following three months. I got a sponsor, Bill H., and met many other members in the program. I could not put two sentences together at the meetings but I remember people just patting me on the back and telling me to keep coming back. After six long months – and I imagine tens of thousands of dollars in treatment costs for V.A. – I had no safe haven to be discharged to. I ended up in Alexandria Va. with a former resident of the program. I remember standing in the streets of Alexandria wondering how I ended up so far from my support network. I called Bill H., my AA sponsor, and he told me he knew of a place called Oxford House on Huntington Street in N.W. D.C. They had one bed available, and I went over that night for a quickie interview and was voted in by the membership of ten – I made eleven. Thirty-five bucks a week, and all the coffee, cereal, eggs, and sausage I could eat was great – especially in those days when money was tight. Many of the guys from the first house were still living there – Lyle H., Bill W. Whit. H. and Walter B., as I recall. I stayed for a year, immersing myself in work, A.A. and service work. I became a coffee maker, which gave me that sense of belonging that we all lack when first coming around.

I eventually moved to Alexandria, Va. a year later with one of the guys from the house. We lived together three years. Then he went off to teach school in Thailand. I was still in the center of AA and worked the steps of AA as suggested and experienced the promises as promised. When I was five years sober, I decided to explore my spiritual side and ended up joining a religious community. Over the next

years I received a great education in philosophy and theology. I decided to return to civilian life even though I was almost ordained a priest. There were many reasons why I chose to leave but primarily I just wasn't ready to give up women.

I found myself in Saratoga Springs, New York, and I remembering seeing Paul Molloy testifying at a U.S. House Committee meeting on C-Span. I had not talked to Paul in over twelve years. That was when he put the bug in my ear about Oxford House going national. I opened the very first house in NY State in 1990, and opened many more in the following years. I even ended up buying a house in Schenectady in 2000 and used that as a base of operations.

The journey continues. I firmly believe living in an Oxford House was a graced period of my life to get some sober time behind me, and to have a chance to really immerse myself in AA and NA. I never remember watching T.V. – only the laugh of a toothless Lyle H. in the morning, and fresh brewed coffee from the always full coffee pot. Thank you God for giving a bunch of drunks the inspiration for renting that house on Huntington Street, and for those who have endured over the years and given their time, treasure, and talent. Paul, who has suffered so many setbacks with former employees, fire theft, and calamity after calamity, has never given up his calling. I only hope he votes me into his house when we both visit St. Peter sometime in the distant future.

The authors of the preceding stories hope that in some small way their personal stories of struggle and success will help communities at large to understand the value of encouraging the development of Oxford Houses in their communities. We know that alcoholics and drug addicts who are serious about recovery will use the opportunity Oxford House provides to become clean and sober and stay that way. With the availability of Oxford Houses, relapse does not have to be part of recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction.

Fellow citizens can help make space in an Oxford House available to more of the 25 million Americans suffering from alcoholism and drug addiction. Contributions to Oxford House, Inc. pay the expenses of outreach workers to help establish clusters of Oxford Houses throughout the country. Oxford House living can make the difference between mastering recovery from addiction or continuing down the path of personal destruction, family hardship and pain.

Each year millions of Americans contribute to many worthwhile causes through the Combined Federal Campaign [CFC] or United Way or the Network for Good. Oxford House, Inc. hopes that you will consider Oxford House, Inc. as a recipient. Every contribution is used to expand the network of Oxford Houses so that more individuals can become comfortable enough in sobriety to avoid relapse.

Tens of thousands of individuals have successfully made the journey to sobriety without relapse by living in an Oxford House with others on the same journey. Your support can enable many more to take the same path.
