

RECOVERY ADVOCACY

by Lisa E. Gladwell, Esq
lisagladwell@newjerseyrecoveryadvocates.org

On a Saturday morning in September of 2004, I walked out of the shadows of the Liberty State Park train terminal into unobstructed daylight. The brightness of the sun forced me to squint my eyes. What I saw transformed me much like the movement from darkness into light. Before me were thousands of people of all colors, ethnicities, ages, and sizes. They were smiling, laughing, talking, and dancing to the same theme ... celebrating RECOVERY from addiction.



Although sober since November 2001, I had felt shamed and isolated by this disease which relegated me to church basements where I met and shared my most personal feelings with others who had no last names. I was taught anonymity is the cornerstone of 12-Step programs; the programs that saved my life. My sponsor, who had over thirty years of sobriety, suggested I not talk about my addiction with others who did not share my affliction as the outside world judges us harshly. I had already known that from my experience with the "child welfare" system where I was torn apart, degraded and told my family was better off if I were dead. I had been sober long enough to know the consequences of my addiction, and taking full responsibility. Unfortunately, that was not sufficient, since many demanded "a pound of flesh" as well.

Since getting sober, I've worked hard on myself. I've examined my life through identifying rather than comparing. With a smaller group of individuals, I was able to look at my role in various situations, unravel resentments and clear some of the muck from my soul. With intention, I labored to change my behavior and redirect my thinking. Slowly, more slowly than I would have liked, I began to change. My actions and thoughts became less mechanical, positive affirmations and gratitude flowed naturally. My relationship with God changed as I felt His loving omnipresence. I was becoming the best Lisa I could be, one day at a time.

Why then, now that I am actively becoming the person I was created to be, do I have to hide the reason for the change? Honesty and authenticity are a significant part of maintaining sobriety. Why keep it a secret? I am no longer ashamed of who I am. As the strength of my recovery grew, I became less comfortable with my anonymity. Intuitively, I understood the reason why. I have known people who have lost their jobs when their employer discovered they were in recovery from addiction due to a belief that addicts are a liability. How can such narrow, biased thinking be changed? I knew if I was not part of the solution, then I was part of the problem. So, I forged my path forward.

Each time I advocated for recovery, be it a rally, walk, forum or just a conversation, I became more comfortable with who I am and the path I was on. I was eventually invited to join the Board of The Van Ost Institute for Family Living. I was admitted to and graduated from law school, and am now a licensed attorney in two states. I also serve on the Board of Vantage Health Systems. My advocacy includes bringing 12-Step meetings to the ladies in the Bergen County Jail as well as The Ladder Project, a therapeutic halfway house for men. I am President of the Father Jim McKenna Memorial Fund, founded New Jersey Recovery Advocates, a nonprofit that produces the annual New Jersey Statewide Recovery Walk and Rally. I take my Twelfth Step very seriously.

During the past fifteen years, I have seen a change in the nature of addiction. The opioid epidemic is killing our loved ones, leaving families in shambles and spraying buckshot through the fabric of our society. Fortunately, there is hope. The Recovery Movement is growing. Each day more recovering people and those who love them, are gaining the courage to stand up, add their voices, and be counted. Heads are turning and attitudes are shifting. The fear of judgment is giving way to authenticity. The walls of isolation are coming down.

So I ask, will you join us as part of the solution?

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS: ALUMNI PICNIC



On Saturday, August 6th, St. Christopher's Inn held our 20th annual Alumni Picnic. This picnic

was like no other. The day began with a tearful, heartfelt memorial to the Brothers Christopher who were lost to addiction over the past 2 years. Some 30 family members returned to the Inn expressing feelings of sorrow, but also gratitude for the compassion shown by the staff and Friars who chose not to forget their loved ones. A wall of bricks was unveiled in memorial for those who may have found peace at St. Christopher's Inn, but for whom the call of addiction returned. Their names were read, and flowers presented to their families.

Following the memorial service, a Mass was held in the Our Lady of the Atonement chapel, where members of our current choir joined together with alumni choir members in singing the SCL anthem **God is on This Mountain**. After an outdoor 12-Step meeting, the fun and festivities officially began. Over 1,000 hamburgers and hot dogs were consumed, and the rest of the day was filled with music, softball, volleyball, and fellowship.

Our mission was alive with vibrancy, as alumni who had recently graduated, along with those who have been sober for decades, returned with parents, wives, and children. A majority of the staff were present to bear witness to the miracles that recovery has to offer.

There is a reason why people call this the Holy Mountain!

