

# The Ice Breaker

***Moms and Dads Against Meth, Inc.***

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Volume 3, Issue 1 July 2007

“Though a man go out to battle a thousand times against a thousand men, if he conquers himself, he is the greater conqueror.”

–**Buddhist proverb**

## Meth takes a toll on Baby Boomers

At 55, he embodies the quintessential skid-row bum: rotting teeth, pock-marked skin, a craggy face that shows the hard times he has seen. It's always surprising to newcomers meeting M. for the first time to learn that he lives in a home he owns, has been an over-the-road trucker for over 30 years, and became addicted to methamphetamine at the ripe old age of 45.

“I didn't like to think about getting older, maybe having a harder time staying awake for overnight hauls, so I tried it, and it seemed to work,” he says. “So I kept on using it, until I figured out I couldn't stop.”

So M., like thousands of other people in his age group, sought treatment for his addiction.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) found the number of people older than 55 seeking treatment for meth addiction increased from 44 in 1992 to 693 in 2003. Federal estimates assert that over 136,000 middle-aged adults sought alcohol or drug treatment in 2003.

The jump in Baby Boomers seeking treatment has overloaded a system that was already reeling from the numbers of young people who are addicted to meth.

Treating middle-aged meth addicts is uncharted territory for many AODA counselors. As a general rule, someone who has reached their mid-forties without developing a problem with drugs or alcohol would seem to be safe from ever becoming addicted. As is so often the case with meth, everything is possible, and nothing is implausible. Middle-aged persons who try the drug for more energy, stamina, or recreational reasons are often shocked to find that they can't stop using once they've started.

Not only do they seem to become addicted more quickly, their bodies deteriorate much more rapidly than those of younger users. The middle years are prime time for such maladies as high blood pressure, tooth decay, gum disease, and the increased risk of heart attacks and strokes; adding meth can accelerate or exacerbate any of these preexisting conditions. Prolonged use can also lead to liver disease, kidney failure, brain damage and chronic depression or other mental health problems.

People in their middle years are not prepared or motivated to change deep-rooted habits and belief systems, which makes them more difficult to treat for addiction. The health or legal problems that resulted from their meth use may have made them seek help, but convincing them of the presence of the disease, and the need for treatment can be a hard sell for the older person.

Imagine a guy like M., who never drank and never tried any drugs other than meth as he confronted his own addiction.

"I'm not the kind of guy who would be an addict," he said. "I wasn't taking the stuff to get high or anything . . . Well, at least that's not what I thought at the time. Now, I just don't know. . . I guess it just snuck up on me."

Three months into his treatment and rehabilitation program, M. attends meetings nearly every day and sees his sponsor often. He found it necessary to find a job that didn't keep him on the road overnight, so he took a cut in pay to deliver building supplies for a local distributor.

"It wasn't much of a decision for me," he said. "It was hard enough just getting back behind the wheel without wanting to use, so I knew I couldn't do long hauls anymore. It's still hard some days, when I get a craving. I have to tell my brain to shut up and get back to work. I still get tired, depressed, you know, all that bad stuff. I guess I wish I'd known ten years ago what I know now."

## ***Voices from the Butterfly House***

This month's theme is "Surrender." Willfulness and selfishness seemed to be ruling the residents of the house last month, so we gave them this topic to contemplate and write about. Elsie is our lone contributor this month.

### ***Surrender***

I am Elsie. I am an addict. Surrendering is a daily healing process for myself. When my brother chose to leave this world, bless his soul, I didn't give a F\*\*\* about much anymore. My daily battle became figuring out how to care about anything. I had to try to care about family and try to care about how I drove so I could make it back to them . . . To sooner or later face the battle of caring about how *they* felt. Fear had left me completely. I had tunnel vision on nothing, absolutely nothing, but tunnel vision on "it."

Surrender? What is surrender? Is it giving up? On what? On your past? On your problems? To your boyfriend/girlfriend? To God or H.P.? On life itself Is it giving up in court? Going to treatment? Just to get by? Or to change? Is it in a days-long hard battle yelling "I give up! I surrender!" while you wave your little white flag? Is it lowering your fist? Asking for help? Or just saying, "MY BAD"? Or is it when you've cheated? Or when you got caught red-handed? Or is it getting in the squad car when arrested instead of running? Is it in AA? I've heard many times that surrender is simply giving up or handing it over to God or H.P. What is it?

It is anything that may boggle you, stand in your way, push you down, or your wicked past . . . I think!

Someone once said to me "What up, Elsie? Heard the white man's gettin' ya down!" What really does that mean? I've been sober since January 8, 2007 and by the grace of God it was because of the damn "Osceola white men (cops) gettin' me down!" HA! Funny how that *saying* turned into my life *saving*!

In figuring out what surrender really means, you have to figure out "What's there to surrender?"

"You got this?" Right? Give what over? To who?

Let go? Let God? Well, my brother's suicide was my, what they call, rock bottom. Martin became my Higher Power, as well as my God and Jesus Christ. I've just recently told a girl, who seems to be in love, that after Marty's suicide and going to jail, I believe Marty took my ex away from me by doing all this. I believe I was given the strength by God to just say "no or nothing at all!" Surrendering took me out of an abusive relationship, (which went both ways) that I told Marty I thought I could never do. Love is slow suicide! I don't believe I'd be sober today and I know I wouldn't be writing this if I had not surrendered, at least a little bit.

Progress . . . not perfection.

Sometimes I ask myself . . . did Martin surrender? Did he surrender by just "giving up?" or by just letting go. I still today ask myself those questions and many more! Maybe they will go unanswered until the day I meet him again! Is surrendering saying "I'm sorry"? Or feeling it? Is surrender going to meetings? Or going from old habits to new habits? Is surrender a weakness? Is it a toy? Is it a talk? Or a walk? Can you pull it off? Or can you just let it go?

*Surrender is living to fight another day.*

## **Poem**

**In recovery I learned  
At anytime I could fall  
I can't be at one place  
At no place at all.**

**Seems everyone I accept  
Help from dies . . . Corey, Sammy  
Marty, my inspiration fades  
Away.  
Soon enough I will get through this,  
But soon enough is not today.**

**Why can't I admit I'm powerless,  
Why can't I admit I "need"  
Why can't I admit I'm "Addicted"  
Why can't "my addict" set on others  
To "feed."**

**When people open their mouths &  
Push out what they call words—  
Some call it help & advice  
But I say that sh\*\*'s for the birds.  
I found my Higher Power  
I know about where it lies  
But frankly I don't think I care  
& all my hope inside dies.**

**-Elsie**

### *Editor's Corner*

On a hot and humid Sunday evening, two residents of the Butterfly House had decided to rebel. Of course, it was a quiet rebellion, because Marshmallow Mary was in charge, and I am averse to noisy dissent.

One of the girls had decided that she was not going to attend that evening's NA meeting, since she had been to church that morning, which "should count as a meeting," and besides, she needed to mow the lawn, a chore she had been putting off for several days.

The other resident had promised another staff member that she certainly would be attending that evening's meeting, but now that her friend was refusing to go, she also said that she would like to skip the meeting and get some other chores done instead.

**A whisper . . .**

I told them that their recovery meetings are very important, that chores could be done later, but ultimately I left the

decision up to them, hoping that they would make the right choice.

**A voice . . .**

No gas for the mower. They walked nearly a mile in the heat to the gas station and back, carrying a heavy gas can (they were determined that they had a good reason to miss that meeting!). They pulled the mower out of the garage and filled it with gas. Then they pulled the start cord . . .

**A shout . . .**

No matter how many times they tried, the mower wouldn't start. . . . They had just enough time to make it to their meeting, making a sad little tableau as they trudged up the alley toward the Alano club.

It is said that God speaks first in a whisper, and if we don't listen, he speaks up louder, and if we still won't hear him, he shouts. I look back at the times in my life that I should have been listening, and I realize that in most cases, God was shouting the equivalent of "Duck!" If I didn't listen to that shout, I got knocked on my behind.

When the girls blamed the last person who had used the mower for "breaking it," I suggested that perhaps their Higher Power had arranged for the mower not to start so that they would attend an important meeting. "If it starts for Doreen, I'll believe it," one of them told me.

The next day, the mower started right up for Doreen. It may have been a clump of grass caught in the blades that kept the mower from starting, and it may have been that the girls were hot, tired, and lost their patience and problem-solving skills to get the mower to

start . . . All the same, I had to exchange a high-five with God, because the message had come through, loud and clear: tend to your recovery and let God handle the rest.

Unfortunately, for those two individuals, that rebellion was the first step on the way down a road of bad choices and unfortunate outcomes. As the week progressed, there was more defiance, disrespect, anger and dishonesty. The behavior resulted in loss of privileges, which the women did not understand as a logical consequence of their behavior. They went to their NA meeting on Saturday morning, and haven't been seen by Butterfly House staff since.

Our experience with these young women has taught us some invaluable lessons, and we are taking them seriously.

After nearly two months of ups and downs, we can't say that we're entirely surprised at this outcome, but it's still disappointing. During their last week in the house, both women said that "even jail would be better than this" when demerits were given and sanctions imposed; we suspect that now they will be able to put that statement to the test.

Recovery isn't for the faint-hearted, the half-hearted, or the "guess so" hearted. It takes guts, hard work, and HONESTY. It is not easy, by any means, to face the demons that drive addiction. You can't bluff your way through it for long, and most bluffers tire of the charade and go back to using.

The Butterfly House may be a lovely place to live, the name may evoke images of fragile creatures that float through their days, but nothing could be further from the truth. Inside that beautiful home, there is work going on, some of it simply the day-to-day chores that upkeep requires, the kind of work that is "good for the soul" because it requires effort and motivation. But much of the work is taking place inside the residents, as they strive toward a healing, an awakening, a recovery.

Monarch butterflies do appear fragile, but they fly thousands of miles to winter in Mexico on those delicate wings. Through the summer months here, they breed three generations with a life cycle that is nothing short of miraculous, and that last generation has an instinct to travel thousands of miles and survive until they can breed again in the spring. They are tough little creatures, and residents of the Butterfly House can learn a lot from them.

Hope

*Now that we have completed our study of the Twelve Steps of AA and NA, we have decided to study the power of words. We all use words to praise, to express love, to hurt, to vent our anger, and to try to make others understand us better. We've chosen twelve words that we think can have both very positive and very negative connotations, and we'll take a look at both sides each month.*

**“Hope”**

**Hope is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul,  
And sings the tune--without the words,  
And never stops at all,  
  
And sweetest in the gale is heard;  
And sore must be the storm  
That could abash the little bird  
That kept so many warm.  
  
I've heard it in the chillest land,  
And on the strangest sea;  
Yet, never, in extremity,  
It asked a crumb of me.**

**–Emily Dickinson**

The above poem explains hope more clearly to me than any other definition I've read. Through Dickinson's words, I imagine hope as a tiny, defenseless bird singing through the stormiest of times, its sweet song ceaseless and faithful, lighting the darkest corner of a soul in times of trouble.

When she says “And sore must be the storm / That could abash the little bird / That kept so many warm”, she is speaking of someone who would take pleasure in dashing another's hopes. We've all encountered people who would rather see us “face the truth” than live on “false hope.” I never can figure out how they know that my hope is “false” or that their “truth” is the immutable law for others. There are those who simply can't bear to see another person happy in their sense of hope, so they must force their pessimism on him.

“I'm going camping this weekend.”

“I heard it's going to rain both days.”

“The doctor says his outlook is quite good.”

“I knew a guy who died of it.”

The negative and mean-spirited remarks hurt the speaker as much as they hurt the listener (“sore must be the storm”).

Finally, she tells us that hope exists in the coldest, loneliest places, and that hope is eternal, like the sweet bird song. The last two lines assert that hope is there for all of us, and that even in the worst of times, it asks no price or favor in return. The song of hope can go on, as long as we allow it to be so.

**“Another Gift”**

**Another gift.**

**A parade of stuffed animals with smug faces stands at attention in my room.**

**The sweet yet sickening aroma of "get well" bouquets permeates the air.**

**As if these thoughtful gifts will heal me.**

**I'm in their prayers**

**and positive thoughts**

**but I'm still lying in this hospital bed.**

**My negativity is my savior.**

**Protecting me from the disappointment**

**that seems to hold hands**

**with lab results and second opinions.**

**Positive thinking is a cyclone**

**that tosses me up**

**into a cloud of false hope.**

**My burden is too heavy,**

**the hope is too thin.**

**So I fall slowly,**

**back into my hospital bed,**

**where I am met by a darker face of false hope.**

**It drips through my I. V. line.**

**Another gift.**

**This one from someone I have yet to meet**

**and probably never will.**

**I'm in her prayers.**

**It will probably be another animal  
or a box of candy.  
More chocolate coated positivity  
being forced down my throat.  
A journal.  
A journal?  
What could I possibly have to write,  
that would be worth saving?  
My days have no surprise beginnings,  
or happy endings that I would want to keep  
and read again later.  
If anything, I'd have to write fictional days for myself.  
I could write of the day I wish to have  
or the things I wish to do.  
I could go back and say the things I never said  
or take back the words that stung as they passed my lips.  
A journal.  
Something empty that I can fill with something other than false hope.**

**–Josephina:** “I wrote this poem at a time in my life where I was feeling very alone. I was terminally ill and I had lost my hope in ever feeling whole again. But [later] I realized the truly positive effects of the love and prayer.”

### ***A project that will have us “cooking with inspiration”***

We're cooking up a fund-raiser for M.A.D.A.M. and Butterfly House projects. We all have a favorite recipe, and nearly everyone has a favorite quote. (Mine tend to change with whatever movies I've enjoyed. Two of my current favorites are “Just keep swimming, just keep swimming.” –Dory, from *Finding Nemo*, and “Certainty of death, small chance of success . . . What are we waiting for?” Gimli, from *The Lord of the Rings, the Return of*



*the King.)*

It occurred to us that it might be marketable to put the two together into a fun and inspiring cookbook.

So, here's what we are asking of our *Ice Breaker* readers: Send us a copy of a favorite recipe (or two or three), and include an inspiring message you would like to share with others. The message could be what your grandma used to say, or a quote attributed to a famous person.

If you would like to contribute a recipe and a quote, please send them to M.A.D.A.M. at  
P.O. Box 172, St. Croix Falls, WI 54024.