

# The Ice Breaker

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

E-mail: [madatmeth@yahoo.com](mailto:madatmeth@yahoo.com)

Website: [www.methawareness.org](http://www.methawareness.org)

Volume 2, Issue 11      May 2007

*“The most remarkable thing about my mother is that for thirty years she served the family nothing but leftovers. The original meal has never been found.”*

Calvin Trillin (1935 –)

## Open House: Even the butterflies popped in!

We built it, and they came. Well, we didn't build it, exactly, but we cleaned, painted, repaired, and certainly felt like we had built something! The house was shining clean, orderly, and ready for company.

### ***A tour de force***

The meeting room at the front of the house was our display area, where visitors could find brochures about our group and the house, pictures of volunteers hard at work, and sign the guestbook (biggest regret of the day—didn't get Sheila Harsdorf to sign the guestbook!). Volunteer, Eve, had created favors decorated with messages of inspiration and hope, and filled with treats for visitors to take. From there, they could move to the stairs and explore the second floor, where two bedrooms are ready for our residents, as well as a guest room, a sewing room, and two bathrooms.

After touring the upstairs, visitors moved down the hall to the living room, peeking in at the office, and then to the dining room, where refreshments were available. (Thanks to the hard-working women who made pans and pans of bars, and a yummy punch for us!)

The kitchen, with its sunny yellow, blue, and white paint, garnered the most compliments and gasps of surprise. The table and chairs are painted white, with yellow and blue accents, and looked lovely with blue plates on a blue, white and yellow plaid tablecloth. A bright, colorful butterfly border adds excitement to a room that is cheerful and comfortable. We think it will be everyone's favorite room to gather, bringing to mind the old adage “No matter where I serve my guests, they always like my kitchen best.”

### **A garden party**

Just outside the kitchen, there are patios on either side of the house, plenty of spots to sit and enjoy sunny days and watch the birds and butterflies. Eagles can be seen soaring over the river from the patio, and we know our residents will be as moved by the sight as we are. Plants are popping up in the garden faster than we can identify them. Many have turned out to be volunteer maple trees, which will have to be removed, but Hostas have begun to poke through the dirt, clumps of Peonies have appeared at the back wall of the garden, and graceful ferns unfurl a little more each day. On the day of the open house, Emperor Red butterflies flitted around a blooming tree in the backyard (anyone know of a tree that blooms before the leaves appear? It's got white blossoms and the bees and butterflies love it). Many of our guests chose to spend at least a little of their visit out in the sunny garden.

**Welcome!**

Visitors often rang the doorbell, and it was such fun to hear that sound, similar to doorbells in movies from the 1930s, and to answer it with “Welcome to the Butterfly House!” We had mailed invitations, sent press releases to local newspapers (thank you, Karen!), and placed posters all around Osceola, Dresser, and St. Croix Falls, but many of our visitors were St. Croix Falls residents who had heard of the open house by word of mouth. Not one of those visitors expressed reservations about having a transitional sober house in their community. Every one of our guests told us that they wish the best for this project, the women who will enforce their recovery with us, and for our group in general.

## **Gifts from the heart**

Some of our open house visitors brought housewarming gifts, such as a Himalayan Salt Crystal, which is reputed to enhance feelings of comfort, serenity, and peace when placed in a room. It is also believed to absorb harmful and fatiguing electronic signals from computers. We’re anxious to put it to the test in the meeting room or one of the bedrooms. We also received a stack of homemade dishcloths (washable, reusable, and enough to last until the next millennium!). One visitor asked when we planned to have a housewarming party, and I had to admit that the open house was all the warming we thought we would need. . . however, I did pass on an idea that my sister is planning. She has invited our family to attend a “shower” for the Butterfly House in her own lovely butterfly garden. Guests will bring any items they wish to donate to the house, and we’ll all have a grand time with the family. For those wishing to do something special for our group or this project, that idea might be just the ticket.

## **Volunteers**

The open house would have been a pretty sorry occasion, if not for the efforts of our group of volunteers. Donna Stark did much of the painting in the house, and even on the day of the open house, was out scouring garage sales for things she thought the house needed. Her hard work was most evident in the painted table and chairs, walls, cupboards, doors, and ceiling in the kitchen. Randy E. put in many hours of spackling, scraping, sanding, planing, attaching, fixing, and whatever else was needed.

## **Luminaries**

State Senator Sheila Harsdorf attended the open house with her son, Ryan (see the sidebar). Members of the St. Croix Falls Planning Commission, St. Croix Falls city council, a person from Polk County Child Protective Services, a member of the St. Croix County Board, and lots of people from the recovery community. It was so gratifying to look back on the day and consider the support we have from two counties, members of local government, state government, and people in the recovery community. If they believe in our potential to make a difference to many people, one life at a time, how can we not believe in ourselves!?

## **Day’s end**

By five o’clock, Doreen had virtually lost her voice (combination of a bad cold and a lot of people to talk to!), I was incapable of putting two cohesive thoughts together, and it was time to lock up and relax. Yet, we lingered on the patio with my sister, Joan, who had come from Savage, Minnesota, and basked in the memories of a glorious day.

*Our first residents are in the house and seem to be very happy there. Next month, they would like to extend their own thanks to the community and volunteers.*

## **Don’t look now, but there’s a senator in the house!**

In the movies, politicians travel with an entourage of security guards, assistants, and publicists. In Wisconsin, they come incognito, disguised as just another pretty mom with her son. . . at least, that’s how State Senator Sheila Harsdorf arrived at the Butterfly House for the Open House.

“You look so familiar,” Doreen said, shaking the senator’s hand.

“I’m Sheila Harsdorf,” she answered. Later, she shook hands with Lorrie and me, saying, “Hi, I’m Sheila.” Political junkie that I am, I’m embarrassed to admit that I didn’t recognize one of our strongest supporters in Madison.

The senator toured the house, exclaiming over the décor, amenities, and our plans for the future. We know that she will spread the word that wonderful, hopeful things are happening in Western Wisconsin, and that we could use a little help.

As she said goodbye and headed toward the door, Lorrie was moved to tell her “you are a strikingly beautiful woman,” which is true, photos of our senator do not do her justice, and she smiled and said “well,

thank you,” seemingly unaware of how lovely she is.

After she left, we asked who that nice lady was, and were embarrassed to discover that we had a real live senator in the house and didn't even get her autograph!

## ***Now WHAT? Plans and hopes for the Butterfly House***

“O.k., so you get women trying to recover from addiction into the Butterfly House. Now what do you do with them? How do you make sure that they recover?”

Good question. The short answer is: we can't. The old axiom about leading a horse to water, but not being able to make him drink is true for chemically dependent individuals as well. At the Butterfly House, we will lead our little ponies to the clear, fresh waters of sobriety, but if they're not thirsty, they're more likely to skip stones in it. That said, we're hoping that with the peace and beauty of the environment, the responsibilities of household chores, holding down a full-time job, and attending the required number of NA and AA meetings, not to mention other group and individual activities, they will eventually realize that they are pretty darn thirsty after all.

People who become chemically dependent often lack any kind of discipline or structure in their lives. Their addiction has ruled their behaviors and choices and they simply don't know how to function without it. We plan to integrate them back into society by offering life skills such as working, budgeting and paying bills, keeping up with household chores and personal care. In addition to that, volunteers will teach yoga, massage, arts, crafts, and sewing; creative outlets that women often don't realize they need until they are introduced to them.

Every human being is born with great potential, but not everyone, particularly if she is female, is allowed or encouraged to explore what that potential might be. We want the woman who emerges into her life after the Butterfly House to be strong, to know who she is and what she wants from life, to embrace a sober and sane lifestyle, and to pass her serenity on to others. She will have hours of meetings, prayers, and lessons to fall back on. She will have a network of friends, sponsors, and wellwishers on her side. She will have learned to deal with her anger, resentment, shame, and guilt, and she will realize her own worth. She will be drug and alcohol-free, and she will be determined to stay that way. . . and she will have the keys to staying sober. She will be an asset to her family, her community, and the world. We will be glad that she found us; she will be glad that she found herself.

### **Step Eleven:**

*Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His Will for us and the power to carry that out.*

### **Closer Walk, (traditional folk song)**

#### **I am weak, but Thou art strong;**

**Jesus, keep me from all wrong;**

**I'll be satisfied as long**

**As I walk, let me walk close to Thee.**

#### **Refrain**

**Just a closer walk with Thee,**

**Grant it, Jesus, is my plea,**

**Daily walking close to Thee,**

**Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.**

Through this world of toil and snares,  
If I falter, Lord, who cares?  
Who with me my burden shares?  
None but Thee, dear Lord, none but Thee.

**Refrain**

When my feeble life is o'er,  
Time for me will be no more;  
Guide me gently, safely o'er  
To Thy kingdom shore, to Thy shore.

**Refrain**

–Author Unknown

. . . And that's it for Step 11. Same time and place next month for Step 12! See ya!

Oh, all right, I'm kidding. But surely there must be a reason that this song has stuck in my mind the whole time I've been researching and thinking about Step 11! To quote another hymn I dearly love: *God is Trying to Tell You Something*.

*Closer Walk* tells us about the ideal relationship with our Higher Power. It's not about a "minute of your time, when I have time to pray," it's about our walk on the road of life.

Think of taking a walk with a friend. You're relaxed, you enjoy the day, you talk, you see the same sights, and maybe you get different thoughts or feelings about what you see, so you share them. That's your life on Step 11. You're taking a walk with your Higher Power, keeping up a constant dialog.

In Steps 2 and 3, we learned the concept of a Higher Power and what it meant to turn our lives and wills over to that Spirit. In addition, self-will and stubborn defiance kept us from asking *anyone* for help, much less a Power we weren't sure we believed in. Once we made the decision to submit to a power greater than ourselves, we found peace in letting go of the reins.

In Step 11, we work to keep the reins in God's hands, asking only that He steer us in the right direction.

The Higher Power concept is difficult for many people to deal with. If they haven't had great experiences with God or organized religions in their past, they have a hard time giving up control to what they see as "that Mean Old Man" or "those hypocrites in church."

The AA pioneers described their Higher Power in this way, "To us, the Realm of Spirit is broad, roomy, all inclusive; never exclusive or forbidding to those who earnestly seek." They had no doubts that they sought a *loving* power that wanted to enrich their lives.

Certainly, if your vision of a Higher Power is a mean old man, or Mighty Thor, throwing down lightning and retribution on everyone, you're not likely to become close friends. The idea is to find a vision of your Higher Power that evokes feelings of love, acceptance, gratitude, and joy. Our own ability to love, to be loved, to appreciate and create beauty, to dance, and sing, and laugh, to wish, and to hope, all must have come from someone, somewhere, why not God? Why do we not see that we are a reflection of that spirit (albeit a tiny image in a dusty window)? Why can't we let that Spirit be our friend, our confidante, our guide?

There is a world of difference between praying to know what God's will is for us, and praying for what we want. It seems to come so easily in prayer "Please, can I have . . . ? God, let this happen, I need more money, etc." If you have a friend who constantly wants to borrow money, cigarettes, and CDs, you know what a painful friendship it is. You won't pick up the phone if you know he's the one who's calling. God's got a billion friends like that, don't be one of them.

Some people interpret God's will rather freely, and oddly enough, it often coincides with their own wants and needs. It would be easier if God would only set trees on fire, turn people to salt, and part seas the way he did in the stories depicted in the Bible. More often than not, God's voice comes quietly, in a good impulse, a feeling of resolve, or a sense of strength. The answers to prayers often come quietly, without fanfare and cheering angels. Inside, you just know what your Higher Power expects of you.

God already knows what you need, what you want, and what is best for you. Pray with gratitude for what you already have, pray with love for the spirit who loves you, pray with faith that what you need, you will have. Pray often, and listen for that tiny voice inside that whispers back.

### Editor's Corner

A major and tragic meth bust occurred just a few miles from where this newsletter is written. In a town described in newspapers as "a wide spot in the highway", Nye, at a house long suspected of being a meth hub, a teen girl was allegedly imprisoned and abused, physically, verbally, and sexually. The story was shocking to Twin Cities' readers, but it hardly came as a surprise to people

who live in the area. From them the only question was “why did it take so long for the police to take action?” The other common reaction was “I’m selling my house and moving away from the drugs.”

To M.A.D.A.M. members, while both reactions are predictable, neither is helpful. To blame police who suspected that people in the house were using, selling, or cooking meth is simply wrong. The police are subject to the same laws that govern the rest of us. Without cause, they have no right or law by which to search the premises, and the district attorneys and judges require hard evidence to make a case. Suspecting a crime and proving it are two different things, and too often, our courts are tied up with cases that have little or no merit. That’s why police work hard to get evidence, facts, and witnesses who will testify; without all that, they might just as well write the perpetrator a ticket and be done with it. In this case, both county sheriff’s authorities and local police did their jobs: they stopped in at the house often “for a visit” or “to check on the inhabitant’s welfare”. They talked, they warned, they appeared out of nowhere, and they found no hard evidence to justify arrests and prosecution. I’m sure now that this tragic case has come up, they wish they could have done more.

The second reaction “we’ll just move away” would be laughable, if it weren’t so tragically misguided. If we knew where “away from the drugs” was, we’d have moved there long ago. We’re in touch with people all over the world, and we’re sorry to report that there is no safe haven from drugs and people who are addicted to them on the planet.

I had a friend in the 1970s who was dealing with substance abuse, and he used to say, “If I could just move to Montana, I know I’d be o.k.” Ah, don’t we all have a Montana in our minds, where everyone loves us, and there are no substances to tempt us. I find his wish for Montana all the more ironic, as I know that Montana has a meth problem of epic proportions.

The thing is, whether we are chemically dependent or just want to escape from others who are, if we believe we can travel away and leave the troubles behind us, we’re going to be disappointed. There is no geographical escape from addiction. There is no place that is magically immune to drug use or trafficking.

M.A.D.A.M.’s solution has always been that we are not moving; we are standing our ground. We are teaching our communities about the dangers of drugs, encouraging young people to make good choices for themselves, helping families find ways to deal with addicted loved ones, and helping addicted individuals find sobriety.

We sympathize with people who are afraid to raise their children in an area where people have been arrested for drugs. We don’t know where they will go to find a place where that doesn’t happen. Maybe the answer is for them to have confidence in their parenting skills, to keep up a line of communication with their kids, and to get involved, with their children, in activities that reinforce the parents’ ideals.

## Motherhood and Methamphetamine

Other than the fact that she looks a little haggard for thirty-eight, one would never suspect what goes on in her home. She has been married for 20 years. Of her three children, two live on their own, the youngest is still in high school. Over the years, she has held a variety of jobs, and jokingly refers to herself as a “Jane of all trades.” She has done everything a mom is supposed to do and one thing a mom should never do . . . she became addicted to meth.

She had been a little wild in her younger days, and she had tried smoking pot before she was fifteen. Still, she was apprehensive when her husband tried to get her to try the meth a friend had given him. Meth already had a bad reputation in their small community, and she was afraid of the health effects. Nevertheless, she did try it, and she liked it so much, she looked forward to doing it on the weekends with her husband. As time went on, the weekends began to start a day earlier, and end a day later, until they were using meth every day. Not long after that, she realized that she *needed* meth every day, just to get out of bed, just to get to work, just to be a halfway decent mom. . .

“I guess I lost sight of being any kind of mom when I let my oldest girl try meth with me,” she says now. “I just didn’t think anything of it, at the time. It seemed like the most natural thing in the world to pass her the bubble. But she got hooked a lot faster than I did, and I got so I didn’t like sharing it with her, and she was stealing it and everything, so we put her in treatment.”

She doesn’t see the irony in that decision. “She was only seventeen! She didn’t need to be doing that crap.”

Two weeks out of a 30-day drug treatment facility, her daughter was using again . . . sometimes with her parents.

All too often, meth addiction proves to be a family affair. Addiction itself, with its roots in genetic predisposition and the codependence of family members, tends to run in families, so it should be no surprise that meth use among family members is common.

Even in these enlightened times, many people have a difficult time understanding how addiction can be considered a disease.

“Why can’t you just stop?” is the anguished question people ask an addicted loved one. “Why do you lie? Why did you steal? Why can’t I trust you?” The questions are often answered with promises to change, but the promises will be broken time and again until the addict herself understands that she has a disease of the body, mind, and spirit, and seeks help to recover.

Denial plays a huge role in the lives of addicted mothers. The behaviors and thought processes of an addict run in direct opposition to the natural instincts of motherhood. In the case described above, the mother shared her drug with her daughter; is that a loving mother sharing what makes her feel comfort, or a sick manifestation of the natural competition between mother and daughter? The mother’s denial made the act “the most natural thing in the world.” At that moment in time, she was able to shut off from her

conscience and her instinct to protect, and lead her daughter to a dangerous and deadly choice.

Many people find it shocking that addicted mothers can put aside their parental responsibility. One would imagine that the bond of motherhood would be stronger than any drug. When mothers become addicted, that bond can be stretched to its limits, and it often breaks. The nature of addiction is to let nothing come between the addict and their drug; children, spouses, siblings, and other loved ones don't stand a chance in that conflict. The addiction, the craving, and the euphoria of the drug conspire against mothers, causing them to hurt their child in ways they never would have imagined. In their disease, they are able to justify every awful thing they do, and even in recovery, many will make attempts to minimize the destruction they caused.

More than any other group who become chemically dependent, women with children have the most to lose, and that is often what keeps them from seeking treatment.

The woman we have described is a composite of mothers we have encountered in the two years that Moms and Dads Against Meth has been in operation. Some of those women are in prison, some continue to use, sell, and even cook meth. Some of their children are in foster care, or living on their own; some continue to use meth, others have found ways to stop. At times, it seems like a family curse, going on into two and three generations . . . which leads us back to why it is so important to get women into successful recovery.

*"The world is full of women blindsided by the unceasing demands of motherhood, still flabbergasted by how a job can be terrific and torturous."*

**Anna Quindlen (1953 – ), *O Magazine*, May 2003**

### **Some advice**

As you grow up, you learn that even the one person who wasn't supposed to ever let you down probably will. You will have your heart broken probably more than once, and it's harder every time. You'll break hearts, too, so remember how it felt when yours was broken. You'll fight with your best friend. You'll blame a new love for things an old one did. You'll cry because time is passing too fast, and you'll eventually lose someone you love. So, take too many pictures, laugh too much, and love like you've never been hurt, because every sixty seconds you spend upset is a minute of happiness you'll never get back. Don't be afraid that your life will end, be afraid that it will never begin.