

*Oxford House*  
*Meeting the Need*



*Commemorative Program*

15<sup>th</sup> Oxford House World Convention

**Washington Hilton Hotel**

Washington, DC

August 29 – September 1, 2013

# Oxford House 15<sup>th</sup> Annual World Convention

## Oxford House™ - Meeting the Need

August 29 - September 1, 2013  
Washington Hilton Hotel  
Washington, DC

Convention Schedule				
	FRIDAY		SATURDAY	SUNDAY
7:00-8:30 AM	<b>Continental Breakfast</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ World Council Nominations Due by Noon</li> </ul>	7:00-8:30 AM	<b>Continental Breakfast</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Voting until Noon for World Council by Houses attending the Convention</li> </ul>	<b>Continental Breakfast</b>
8:15-9:45 AM	<b>First General Session</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Invocation</li> <li>▪ Welcome</li> <li>▪ Convention Theme</li> <li>▪ Election Process</li> </ul> <p><b>Keynote Speaker</b> <b>Dr. Westley Clark,</b> <b>Director, Center of Substance Abuse Treatment</b></p>	8:15- 9:30 AM	<b>Third Breakout Panels</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Why Behavioral Research and Data Collection Matter</li> <li>2. World Council Update</li> <li>3. Report on International Houses</li> <li>4. Working with Treatment Programs</li> </ol>	<b>Closing General Session</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Remembrance of Members Who Have Died</li> <li>▪ Tradition Renewal – Alumni and Current Members</li> <li>▪ Conference Summary</li> <li>▪ Closing Remarks</li> </ul>
9:45-10:00 AM	<i>Break</i>	9:45-11:00	<i>Break</i>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CONVENTION REGISTRATION</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Registration for the annual Oxford House Convention begins Thursday, August 29, at 11:00 AM</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>GOLF TOURNAMENT</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Annual Oxford House Golf Tournament is on Thursday, August 29. Tee-off time is 8 AM</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>WOMEN'S CONFERENCE</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Oxford House Women's Conference begins Thursday, August 29, at 3:00 PM. Registration opens at 2:00 PM</i></p>
10:00-11:00 AM	<b>First Breakout Panels</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dealing with Medication</li> <li>2. Employment Issues in Early Recovery</li> <li>3. Oxford Houses and State Agencies</li> <li>4. Creating New Oxford Houses to Meet the Need</li> </ol>	9:30-9:45 AM	<i>Break</i>	
11:00-11:15	<i>Break</i>	11:00-11:15	<i>Break</i>	
11:15-12:30	<b>Second Breakout Panels</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Oxford House – Enhancing Treatment Outcomes</li> <li>2. Overview of Recovery Research to Date</li> <li>3. Oxford House and Veterans</li> <li>4. Educating the Public about Recovery</li> </ol>	11:15-12:30	<b>Fifth Breakout Panels</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Oxford House and Re-entry</li> <li>2. Oxford House – Civil Rights and the Law</li> <li>3. Oxford Houses – Keeping Connected</li> <li>4. Building Skills to Enhance Long-term Recovery</li> </ol>	
12:30-2:00 PM	<b>Lunch on Your Own</b>  Nominations for World Council elect to be turned in by 12:45 PM.	12:30 - 2:00	<b>Lunch on Your Own</b> [AA/NA meetings at hotel]  <b>Alumni Lunch;</b> Get Tickets at World Council table.	
2:15-4:30 PM	<b>Third General Session</b> <b>Keynote Speaker:</b> <b>Gil Kerlikowske</b> <b>Director, ONDCP</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Eligible WC Nominees give 3-minute speeches</li> <li>▪ Veterans Meeting 4:35PM</li> </ul>	2:15 - 4:30	<b>Fourth General Session</b> <b>Keynote Speaker:</b> <b>Phyllis Borzi, Assistant Secretary,</b> <b>U. S. Dept. of Labor</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Announcement of New World Council Members,</li> <li>▪ Vote on Resolutions</li> </ul>	
6:00 PM	<b>Friday Night Event</b> (5:30 - 7:30 PM) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Invocation</li> <li>➤ Board Member Remarks</li> <li>➤ Awards</li> <li>➤ Food</li> <li>➤ Movie: "The Anonymous People"</li> </ul>	6:00 - Midnight	<b>Banquet and Dance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Invocation</li> <li>➤ Dinner</li> <li>➤ Awards</li> <li>➤ Speaker: William Cope Moyers, Jr.</li> <li>➤ Dance; 9:30PM – Midnight</li> </ul>	
<i>AA and NA Meetings will be held throughout the convention. See Postings for room location at Registration Desk.</i>				

# Oxford House

## *Meeting the Need*

Welcome to the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Oxford House World Convention! The theme this year is “Meeting the Need” and throughout this convention we will be talking about what can do to enhance recovery opportunities for all those seeking to recover from alcoholism, drug addiction and co-occurring mental illness.

This is a year of transition for health insurance and health care in the United States – particularly in the realm of behavioral health. Throughout the country – through all sectors of the economy – people are trying to understand how both insurance and medical practices will change as a result of the Affordable Care Act, which extends insurance coverage more broadly, and the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act, which requires group health plans and health insurance issuers to ensure that financial requirements (such as co-pays, deductibles) and treatment limitations (such as visit limits) applicable to mental health or substance use disorder benefits are no more restrictive than the predominant requirements or limitations applied to substantially all medical/surgical benefits. In time the spotlight will shine on the fundamental question of benefits and costs. Where will Oxford House fit in this new paradigm? I believe it’s a good fit because the Oxford House program saves lives and money. The main issue we will face will be how to make the program available to more alcoholics, drug addicts and those with co-occurring mental illness to achieve long-term sobriety without relapse.

When the first Oxford House started in 1975, the men living in Alpha I – the county-run halfway house that was closing – knew that wellness for them required being able to stay clean and sober for the long haul. They also knew that the six-month time limit imposed by the county facility did not provide enough time to become comfortable enough in sobriety to stay that way. During the three months before the county-run house closed, eleven residents had been required to leave because of the six-month time limit. Ten of those individuals relapsed within the first 30 days following their exit from Alpha I. Their example taught those still living in the halfway house that people cannot become comfortable in sobriety on a fixed schedule. Everyone is different. Therefore, the first procedural change made when the men took over the facility and rented it to form the first Oxford House was to eliminate any time limit. Within a few months, the men in the House realized that more men wanted to live in the House but there were no vacancies. The men solved the problem pragmatically. They started a second Oxford House and some of the men in the first House moved into the second House to teach the newcomers the system of operation that had been established. Once that second Oxford House was filled, the men again ‘met the need’ for more beds by renting another house and then another one.

When Oxford House began expansion in 1989 as a result of § 2036 of the 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Act, the National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Addiction Directors [NASADAD] was promoting the slogan “Treatment Works.” Reality undercut the validity of that slogan. At best, treatment kept alcoholics, drug addicts and those with co-occurring mental illness out of the way for a short period of time. When individuals left residential treatment – or began to feel better as a result of temporary abstinence during outpatient treatment – most returned to drinking alcohol and/or using illicit drugs. Family members, the addicted and the community saw right before their eyes that a loved one had returned to addictive use. The practical need was – and even today for most – is to find a way to provide a living environment focused on recovery long enough for a person to develop sobriety comfortable enough to avoid relapse. Oxford House fulfills that need because it can be developed at low cost and maintained at even lower cost. That effectiveness has been recognized both in academic studies and in its 2011 listing on the National Registry of Evidence-based Practices and Procedures [NREPP].

Today, the need for more effective, low cost ways to help alcoholics, drug addicts and those with co-occurring mental illness continues to be great and is likely to become even greater as the Affordable Care Act and the parity legislation become operational. The ACA is expected to bring 30 to 40 million additional Americans into the health insurance pool and the latter adds behavioral health coverage for an additional 100 million Americans. This expanded coverage will put great strain on both the cost and provision of care. And it needs to be recognized that there are severe costs to not providing effective treatment; for example, today only about one in seven alcoholics, drug addicts, and those with co-occurring mental illness is getting formal treatment, and even they are likely to cycle in and out of treatment or prison. Society shouldn't accept these kinds of costs.

Oxford House was built on the premise that relapse does not have to be part of long-term recovery. By providing time, peer support, and disciplined, self-run, self-supported, sober households, Oxford Houses make staying clean and sober without relapse the norm, not the exception. In 2012, 84% of the 26,343 residents who lived in the network of Oxford Houses stayed clean and sober. Contrast this with normal outcomes. The TEDS data show that more than 50% of the few who get into residential treatment have been through such treatment 3 or more times. Each year, between 600,000 and 700,000 inmates will be released from jail or prison. Over half will return because they will commit a subsequent crime. Most such recidivism occurs because of addiction to alcohol or illicit drugs. Attorney General Holder's recent pronouncements concerning incarceration suggest that the need for cost-effective ways to minimize such recidivism is greater than ever.

Oxford House reaches out to recovering individuals returning to society from incarceration. Nearly 80% of residents have done jail or prison time. Once in Oxford House, most of them will transition from being a person cycling in and out of jail, prison or treatment to one in long-term recovery. The challenge facing Oxford House and the correctional system is to develop enough Oxford Houses to meet the need for those re-entering general society.

As the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Oxford House Convention celebrates Oxford House's 38<sup>th</sup> year, we know that this gathering of recovering alcoholics, drug addicts and those with co-occurring mental illness has good news to share. Long-term recovery can become a cost-saving driver for both health care and incarceration. Oxford Houses can help thousands achieve long-term recovery. Oxford House can be expanded to meet the need if government, business and society in general work together to encourage the development of thousands of self-run, self-supported Oxford Houses. Let's all work together to make this happen.

Learn from the convention. Spread the good news and enjoy the sobriety that Oxford House living has helped you achieve. Ask questions and think about what you and your fellow housemates can do to help give others the same recovery help that you have gotten.

While in Washington, DC this year, take notice that Martin Luther King, along with thousands of Americans of good will, marched here just 50 years ago. Visit his memorial and try to find time to visit the powerful new exhibits at the American Museum of History and Technology on the mall.

May everyone leave this convention with a mission and message sufficient to help transform health care of millions of alcoholics, drug addicts and those with co-occurring mental illness.



*J. Paul Molloy  
Co-founder and CEO*



# *Congratulations* *Oxford House Recognition Day*

August 30, 2013

A PROCLAMATION BY THE MAYOR OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



**WHEREAS**, Oxford House is celebrating its 38<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and hosting its 15<sup>th</sup> Annual World Convention, August 29 – September 1, 2013, in Washington, D.C. at the Washington Hilton; and

**WHEREAS**, Oxford House, Incorporated is a nonprofit organization with an international network of group homes for individuals recovering alcohol and drug addiction; and

**WHEREAS**, there are over 1,600 Oxford Houses across the United States, 29 in the District of Columbia, 32 in Canada, 6 in Australia, 1 in England and 2 in Ghana; and

**WHEREAS**, the Oxford House program has successfully helped persons living with alcohol and drug addiction to remain sober without relapse:

**NOW, THEREFORE, I, THE MAYOR OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**, do hereby congratulate Oxford House for helping to make a difference in the lives of individuals recovering from alcohol and drug addiction.



*Vincent C. Gray*  
Vincent C. Gray  
Mayor, District of Columbia

## REMEMBERING RILEY REGAN

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On December 7, 2012, Riley W. Regan died. With his death, Oxford House lost one of its most fervent friends and supporters. Riley was a true friend to Oxford House from its very beginnings in 1975 until his death. Riley supported the members of the first Oxford House, promoted the concept to other State Alcohol and Drug Directors, served as an expert witness on behalf of Oxford House in NIMBY cases numerous times over the years, attended most of the Oxford House World Conventions and was a true friend to all his fellow recovering alcoholics and addicts.

Riley learned about Oxford House in 1976 shortly after the first Oxford House started. As Montgomery County alcoholism director, Riley had gotten complaints about the new sober house. The conflict and Riley's response was chronicled by Peter Carlson in 1989 in an article in the Washington Post Magazine:

As that first Oxford House struggled to survive, unseen enemies were trying to destroy it. "People working directly for the alcoholism programs were making anonymous phone calls, sending in the fire marshals and environmental protection people", recalls Riley Regan, director of New Jersey's Division of Alcoholism, who was then Montgomery County's alcoholism director. "They were motivated by a concern that 'My God, this might be able to work without our brilliance, and they were beating up on me regularly saying, 'You gotta kick those guys out of there.'"

The harassment only served to psyche up the residents. They painted the place, put up curtains and asked Regan to pay a visit. He did, and he found that the place was clean and people were sober. "I told the staff that we should leave them alone," he recalls, "and they just might get some drunks sobered up."

The 1989 Washington Post story came about because the recently-enacted 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Act, had included a provision based on the Oxford House model and many of the State alcohol and drug agencies were as concerned about it as Riley's staff had been in 1976. Riley didn't share their concern and told them so. To set an example, he decided to encourage Oxford House to expand to New Jersey. Riley asked Paul to come to Trenton to discuss it and Carlson asked to tag along. Riley gave the new law and Oxford House instant creditability by telling stories about the first Oxford House and his overall experience with recovery. Peter got his story and New Jersey got Oxford Houses.

Riley knew a lot about the nature of alcoholism, drug addiction and recovery – and about alcoholics and drug addicts. He could relate; he was one of them and they knew it. But he was also a consummate professional and was able to build strong bridges between recovery folks and treatment professionals. He was able to do this because of the depth of his knowledge but also because he was a damned good storyteller. No drunk ever questioned his bona fides after hearing him tell about shooting himself in the foot while running away after robbing a store. And no one ever questioned his perseverance after hearing his tale of his long trek on the Long Trail.

Riley served as an expert witness for Oxford House many times and he always got the rapt attention of the Court. His knowledge, common sense, storytelling and rapport both educated and enlivened court



proceedings as he testified in support of allowing Oxford Houses in good neighborhoods. Getting to the court on time was sometimes difficult. Two days after terrorists took thousands of lives in New York, DC and Shanksville, Pennsylvania, a federal judge in Waterbury, Connecticut refused to “let terrorists determine my court calendar” and decided that the Fair Housing Act case against Oxford House –West Haven would go forward even though no planes were flying and our nation had just suffered its biggest enemy attack since Pearl Harbor. Despite the obstacles, Riley drove his little GEO all the way from Greentown, Indiana to Connecticut and arrived at court as the trial was beginning. Riley testified and, after the trial, one of the opposing attorneys asked if she could talk to Riley about her drinking problem. As usual Riley helped win the case and got another person headed in the right direction.

Whenever Steve Polin or Paul would ask Riley to testify, he would respond, “Where do you want me to go and when do I need to be there?” From one end of the country to the other, Riley Regan explained alcoholism, drug addiction and co-occurring mental illness and recovery to judges and sometimes juries. They listened and were persuaded that accommodation should be made to let recovering folks live together in order to help each other stay clean and sober.

Riley attended most Oxford House World Conventions and many of the State Conventions and Workshops. Whenever an Oxford House World Convention or State Convention or workshop was scheduled, Oxford House residents and alumni would ask, “Is Riley going to be there?” He usually was there and he was a star attraction. He knew recovery; he knew Oxford House. He knew he was beloved by Oxford House folks. He served on numerous panels on recovery and often told his own compelling story.



Riley missed the 2012 Oklahoma City Oxford House Convention and on December 7, 2012, he died. His death was peaceful and Oxford House folks visited him during his last few weeks on earth. For 77 years, Riley lived with love and concern for his fellow man. For more than half his life he was in recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction. He lived his life a day at a time.



Riley’s contributions to Oxford House shall be remembered forever. His dedication to 12-Step programs was second to none and he always was available to help the newly-recovering individual. Katie, thank you for sharing Riley with all of us. We know you miss him and we do too.

## Friday, August 30, 2013

### Continental Breakfast

7:00 – 8:30 AM

### OPENING GENERAL SESSION

8:15 AM – 9:45 AM

International Ballroom

#### Welcome

An invocation opens the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Oxford House World Convention followed by a welcome from Oxford House CEO Paul Molloy and a short video from Board Member Dr. Robert DuPont. Kathleen Gibson, Chief Operating Officer, will highlight the major events of the Convention. Board Member James McClain will welcome the attendees and explain the process for electing new members of the Oxford House World Council.

#### Opening Keynote Address – Dr. Westley Clark

Dr. Clark, Director of the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment [CSAT] is making his tenth presentation at an Oxford House World Convention. An expert in the field and an exciting speaker, he has gone out of his way to provide Oxford House moral support as he has worked to expand the field from treatment and certification to encompass a more broadly-based recovery movement.

Dr. Clark has changed the field from one that used to focus on acute care to one that emphasizes long-term recovery where time for healing from the ravages of addiction has a fighting chance. His support of Oxford House and its message of the possibility of long-term recovery without relapse is best exemplified by his taking the time to appear at our annual conventions – whether in Wichita or Washington, DC.

The theme of this year’s convention “Meeting the Need” is apt for Dr. Clark as he knows well how great that need is. He has been at the center of the Administration’s effort to implement the Affordable Care Act with respect to behavioral health.



#### FIRST BREAKOUT PANELS

Medication in Oxford Houses  
Employment Issues in Early Recovery  
Oxford House and State Agencies  
Establishing New Houses to Meet the Need

10:00 AM – 11:00 AM

Jefferson East  
Jefferson West  
Georgetown East  
Georgetown West

#### SECOND BREAKOUT PANELS

Oxford House: Improving Treatment Outcomes  
Overview of Recovery Research to Date  
Veterans and Oxford House  
Educating the Public About Recovery

11:15 AM – 12:30 PM

Jefferson East  
Jefferson West  
Georgetown East  
Georgetown West

#### Lunch and AA/NA Meetings

12:30 PM – 1:45 PM

*Lunch on your own – Immediate area has lots of places to eat in or carry out.*



**Keynote Address – Gil Kerlikowske, Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy**

Since May 7, 2009, Gil Kerlikowske has directed ONDCP. Earlier this month President Obama nominated him to become Commissioner of US Customs and Border Protection. Fortunately, before he leaves his present job, he is taking the time to address this convention. He has been a strong supporter of treatment, recovery and Oxford House. He has seen first-hand the problems caused society by alcoholism; drug addiction and co-occurring mental illness.

As the police chief of Seattle for nine years, he knows firsthand the trouble that addicts can cause both for themselves and society. He also knows that incarceration is no solution for the problem. Treatment and long-term recovery are needed more than ever as society turns away from the “lock them up and throw away the key” mentality that has led us to have more Americans in jail and prison than any other country.

Director Kerlikowske knows that Oxford House living leads to long-term recovery without relapse. His message should encourage us to open many more houses to meet the need that we all know exists. We congratulate him on his nomination but will miss his presence at ONDCP.



**World Council Candidates Present Election Speeches [3 minutes each]**

**Friday Evening**

**Program**

Presentation of Directors’ Awards  
Dinner  
Movie: “Anonymous People”

**6:00 PM**

International Ballroom  
Concourse Courtyard  
International Ballroom

**Hints on Getting the Most out of the Convention**

1. *Attend as many sessions as you can.*
2. *Participate in the election of World Council officers.*
3. *Go to different breakout sessions.*
4. *Individuals from the same houses or chapters should split up to learn as much as possible to bring home to others.*
5. *Get to know folks from other states to extend your Oxford House family.*
6. *Enjoy your sobriety. Learn and have fun.*

**Submit any proposed resolutions by 5:00 PM to World Council for review.**

## Saturday, August 31, 2013

### Continental Breakfast

7:00 AM – 8:30 AM

### THIRD BREAKOUT PANELS

8:15 AM – 9:30 AM

Why Behavioral Research Matters  
World Council Update  
Report on International Houses  
Working With Treatment Programs

Jefferson East  
Jefferson West  
Georgetown East  
Georgetown West

### FOURTH BREAKOUT PANELS

9:45 AM – 11:00 AM

Implications of New ACA and Parity Laws  
Oxford House and Drug Courts  
Women's Conference Wrap-up  
Dealing with Health Issues

Jefferson West  
Jefferson East  
Georgetown East  
Georgetown West

### FIFTH BREAKOUT PANELS

11:15 AM – 12:30 PM

Oxford House and Re-entry  
Oxford House Civil Rights and the Law  
Oxford Houses: Keeping Connected  
Building Skills to Enhance Long-term Recovery

Jefferson East  
Jefferson West  
Georgetown East  
Georgetown West

### LUNCH

12:30 PM – 2:00 PM

#### ALUMNI LUNCH AT

Buca Di Beppo Italian Restaurant, 1825 Connecticut Ave NW, Washington DC  
*[Tickets at World Council Desk: \$25 per person]*

### THIRD GENERAL SESSION

2:15 PM – 4:30 PM

International Ballroom

### Keynote Address – Phyllis Borzi, Assistant Secretary of Labor, Employee Benefits Security Administration [EBSA]

Thanks to the passage of landmark health-care reform legislation in March 2010, Phyllis Borzi and the Labor Department's Employee Benefits Security Administration have plenty of work to do. EBSA regulates about 2.8 million health plans, and a similar number of other welfare programs that provide benefits to 150 million Americans.

Chosen by President Obama in anticipation of such legislation, Borzi has an extensive background in both public health and retirement policy. She served as counsel for a Subcommittee of the House Committee on Education and Labor for 16 years, and played an important behind-the-scenes role in Bill Clinton's attempt to overhaul the healthcare system in the early 1990s, and has seen the successful passage of more modest reforms.

Ms. Borzi serves as a key player on the Administration's team working on implementation of ACA and the parity legislation that requires insurance companies to treat behavioral health the same as physical illnesses.



### Third General Session (Cont.)

Call out for States to share new growth and new events  
Report of World Council  
Introduction of New World Council Members  
Vote on Convention Resolutions

## Saturday Evening

### Banquet

6:00 PM – 8:30 PM

- ◆ Invocation
- ◆ Reggie Midget Award
- ◆ Founder's Award

### Recovery Speaker: William Cope Moyers

William Cope Moyers is committed to eliminating barriers to recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs. As Hazelden's Vice President of Public Affairs and Community Relations, Moyers leads the organization's policy and advocacy activities. From "carrying the message" about addiction, treatment and recovery, to public policy and philanthropy, Moyers brings a wealth of professional expertise and an intimate personal understanding to communities across the nation. He uses his own experiences to highlight the power of addiction and the power of recovery.

Moyers is the author of [\*Broken: My Story of Addiction and Redemption\*](#) (2006), a memoir that became a New York Times best-seller and is now in its third printing. His new book, [\*Now What? An Insider's Guide to Addiction and Recovery\*](#), was released October 2012 by Hazelden and is available for sale at the registration desk.



### Dance

9:00 PM – Midnight  
International Ballroom

## Sunday, September 1, 2013

### CLOSING GENERAL SESSION

8:15 AM to 10:30 AM  
International Ballroom

- Conference Summary
- Remembrance of those who have died
- Tradition Renewal
- Closing Remarks

## Summary of Breakout Panels

### FIRST BREAKOUT PANELS

Friday 10:00-11:00 AM

#### Medication in Oxford Houses

##### Jefferson East

Friday 10:00 AM – 11:00 AM

Panelists: Ken Hoffman, MD Chief Medical Officer, US Department of State  
John Majer, Ph.D. Clinical Psychology Professor, Truman College, Chicago  
L. Worth Bolton MSW Clinical Instructor UNC Chapel Hill

Moderator: Paula Harrington Alumna Oxford House, NC

Recovering alcoholics and drug addicts enter Oxford House with a clear understanding that a condition of residence is to stay clean and sober. About half of the residents of Oxford House may also have a mental health disorder that requires medication to control. Medication for some maladies is not only consistent with the clean and sober bedrock of Oxford House but is also essential to maintain the health of the resident. However, some medications have many of the characteristics of alcohol or mood-altering drugs that can trigger relapse either for the user or others in the house. This panel will sort through the medications that fit within an Oxford House environment and those that undermine the alcohol and drug free foundation for Oxford House living.

The panelists will discuss the use and misuse of medicines within an Oxford House. Some medications are not permitted because they may be illicit or cause mood-changing behavior and be addictive. On the other hand, some medicines are correctly prescribed and may be necessary for controlling serious mental illness or making a transition from addictive use to comfortable sobriety. The panel will consider how such situations are handled and steps taken by various houses to assure that the person with the prescription or others in the house do not misuse legitimate medication. Understanding different medications, their use and abuse is the first step to knowing how an individual Oxford House should monitor and control the presence of drugs within Oxford Houses.

#### Employment Issues in Early Recovery

##### Jefferson West

Friday 10:00 AM – 11:00 AM

Panelists: Sarah Callahan Researcher and Masters candidate, De Paul University  
Stephanie Nisle Researcher and Ph. D. candidate, De Paul University  
Chris Beasley Researcher and Ph. D. candidate, De Paul University  
Quinetta Womack, LAC, CCS, CCGC Office for Addictive Disorders, Louisiana

Moderator: Leonard Jason, Ph. D. Director, Center for Community Research, DePaul University

Employment issues affecting Oxford House residents early in recovery are often compounded because the individual is re-entering society after incarceration or has not been employed recently. This panel will examine the extent of the problem and discuss the research that has been conducted on the topic. The panelists also will identify various options for mitigating – if not overcoming – the employment barriers existing because of past incarceration and/or addiction, provide examples of strategies that have worked, and suggest strategies by which Oxford House residents might overcome employment hurdles. Oxford House residents are fortunate in that many of their Oxford House colleagues are employed and can serve as a useful network for Oxford House job-seekers.

DePaul University in Chicago has been awarded numerous grants by NIAAA and NIDA to support the study of various aspects of recovery from alcoholism, drug addiction and co-occurring mental illness. In addition, University researchers have studied a number of issues related to long-term recovery, including employment issues facing those early in recovery. Four of the panelists are associated with the DePaul program. Dr. Jason has studied recovery from addiction for more than twenty years including abstinence, employment and successful integration into society at large. Sarah Callahan is doing her Masters on the specific subject area. Stephanie Nisle and Chris Beasley are senior researchers at DePaul. Quinetta Womack is Executive Director of Workforce Development with the Office for Addictive Disorders for the State of Louisiana.

## Oxford House and State Agencies

**Georgetown East**

**Friday 10:00 AM – 11:00 AM**

Panelists: Steven Dettwyler, Ph. D. Director of Community Mental Health and Addiction Services  
Delaware Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Linda McKorkle Director, Treatment and Recovery Services, TN  
Philander Moore Texas Department of State Health Services

Moderator: George Kent Oxford House Outreach Coordinator, New Jersey

Expansion of the Oxford House network of houses has occurred fastest where Oxford House has the support and a close working relationship with the state agency. Expansion is particularly strong in those states where the state has financially supported both a start-up revolving loan fund and on-site technical assistance. This panel will discuss the ways that a close working relationship between Oxford House World Services and a state's alcohol and drug agency helps develop a meaningful network of Oxford Houses within a state. The benefits and barriers of working with a state agency will be examined with particular emphasis on the effect that new health insurance laws and criminal justice policy changes will have on the need for Oxford House development. Questions to be addressed also will include: Are state agencies fully utilizing Oxford House as a cost-effective best practice for promoting long-term recovery without relapse and, if not, what should Oxford House (or other State agencies) be doing to encourage greater support. Does the fact that Oxford House is listed on the National Registry of Evidence-based Practices and Procedures matter? Oxford House is a leader in developing long-term sobriety. Should long-term sobriety be the measure of treatment success? From the standpoint of state agencies, what could Oxford House be doing better to increase support? To what extent do NIMBY issues discourage state support?

Each of the panelists work in state agencies that foster development of networks of self-run, self-supported Oxford Houses. They are each in a good position to assess the working relationship and suggest ways in which it is effective and ways it might be improved. George Kent is an Oxford House outreach worker who has worked extensively with state agencies.

## Establishing New Oxford Houses to Meet the Need

**Georgetown West**

**Friday 10:00 AM – 11:00 AM**

Panelists: Johnny Roache Oxford House Outreach Coordinator, DE  
Stacey Levin Oxford House Outreach Worker, TX  
Daniel Fuchs Oxford House Outreach Worker, CO  
Jeff Hunt Oxford House Outreach Worker, NM  
Ricky Mogel Oxford House Outreach Worker, WA

Moderator: John Fox Oxford House Regional Outreach Coordinator, North Carolina

Today, there are over 1,600 Oxford Houses but there is a need for many, many more. This need for additional Oxford Houses will become more critical as the country expands coverage for addiction treatment under new health insurance and parity laws. These laws will be the focus of another panel; this panel will focus on what Oxford House and its residents can do to meet the expected demand.

Each of the panelists has front-line experience in establishing new Oxford Houses and chapters. They will discuss what it takes to open new Oxford Houses and identify practices that work and that don't work. They also will talk about how expansion can't and shouldn't be done only by Oxford House outreach workers. Oxford House expansion happened in the early years because existing Oxford Houses filled up and the residents felt guilty because they were unable to provide a bed for others who wanted what they had. The existing Oxford Houses found new houses to rent and some of the members of the existing Oxford House would move into the new Oxford House. That can and should still happen. Outreach workers will still open Houses themselves but can also be used as resource persons for individual Oxford Houses and Chapters that are willing to sponsor new Oxford Houses. The panel will talk about how many Oxford Houses could be created if each existing Oxford House started a companion house and how the existing network might be encouraged to endorse such a strategy.



## SECOND BREAKOUT PANELS

**Friday 11:15 AM - 12:30 PM**

### **Oxford House: Improving Treatment Outcomes**

#### **Jefferson East**

**Friday 11:15 AM – 12:30 PM**

Panelists: Ken Hoffman, MD Chief Medical Officer, US Department of State  
John Majer, Ph.D. Clinical Psychology Professor, Truman College, Chicago  
Ann Doolen Executive Director, Alcohol/Drug Council of North Carolina

Moderator: Jeff Hunt Oxford House Outreach, NM

Almost two years ago, Oxford House was listed on the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Procedures [NREPP]. That fact, combined with the research data available, clearly suggests that living in an Oxford House makes primary treatment far more effective – especially if long-term abstinence is the desired outcome. The panel will discuss the value of Oxford House for improving treatment outcomes and why it works. In addition, they will discuss their views on why many treatment providers are reluctant to incorporate Oxford House living as part of their treatment protocol and how this reluctance might be overcome..

Ken Hoffman, M.D. currently is Clinical Director for Mental Health Services at the Department of State and serves as a member of the Oxford House Board of Directors. He served 23 years as a medical officer in the US Army, retiring in 2004 as a Colonel and as the addiction medicine consultant to the Army Surgeon General. His last assignments were as staff Medical Director for a federal interagency Military and Veterans Health Coordinating Board and Medical Director for TRICARE Management Activity Population Health Improvement. Around that time, he learned of Oxford House and, after retiring from the Army, he became a member of the Oxford House Board of Directors.

John Majer, Ph. D. is a clinical psychologist now at Truman College in Chicago. He received his Ph. D. from DePaul University and was a key researcher on a number of NIAAA and NIDA sponsored studies of recovery in the Oxford House setting.

Anne Doolen is the Executive Director of the Alcohol/Drug Council of North Carolina. Previously she developed and implemented comprehensive services including behavioral health in Federally-funded Community Health Centers emphasizing services to those that are HIV positive. She developed and implemented the first comprehensive substance abuse treatment programs for pregnant women and their children in North Carolina and helped to expand services to more than 20 other programs in the State of North Carolina.

### **Overview of Recovery Research to Date**

#### **Jefferson West**

**Friday 11:15 AM – 12:30 PM**

Panelists: Sarah Callahan Researcher and Masters candidate, De Paul University  
Stephanie Nisle Researcher and Ph. D. candidate, De Paul University  
Chris Beasley Researcher and Ph. D. candidate, De Paul University

Moderator: Leonard Jason, Ph. D. Director, Center for Community Research, DePaul University

The dedicated team at DePaul University Community Research Center has studied Oxford House since 1991. Their work has been shared through the publication of peer-reviewed articles in various professional journals. This panel will discuss their latest publications and provide a preview of ongoing and upcoming research.



## THIRD BREAKOUT PANELS

**Saturday 8:15 - 9:30 AM**

### Why Behavioral Research and Data Collection Matter

#### Jefferson East

**Saturday 8:15-9:30 AM**

Panelists: Leonard Jason, Ph. D. Director, Center for Community Research, DePaul University  
Stuart Gitlow, M.D. Acting President, American Society of Addiction Medicine [ASAM]  
John Majer, Ph. D. Researcher and Clinical Psychology Professor Truman College, Chicago

Moderator: Paul Stevens Oxford House State Coordinator, Virginia

Oxford House has been in the forefront of encouraging Oxford House residents to participate in behavioral research and data collection. This encompasses both in-house research conducted by Oxford House and academic research conducted by researchers such as that associated with the DePaul program. Recovery research has been hampered by the historic focus on anonymity by 12-step groups. While anonymity has its purposes, it has also had the effect of limiting research on recovery and determining more definitively what works and what doesn't. This panel will discuss why behavioral research – particularly that related to addiction and recovery – is so important and why Oxford House residents should participate in such research. They will identify concrete conclusions that have been reached as a result of addiction/recovery research and the implications that such findings have for treatment.

Leonard Jason and John Majer has both conducted extensive research on the recovery process, with a particular focus on the outcome of Oxford House living compared to other types of residence during early stages of recovery. Their research has also focused on particular aspects of Oxford House residency and its effects. Dr. Gitlow, as the Acting President of the ASAM, recognizes the importance of addiction research for the effective practice of addiction medicine.

### World Council Update

#### Jefferson West

**Saturday 8:15-9:30 AM**

Panelists: Sheri Glisson [MD] Chair, Convention Committee  
Theresa Harris [DC] Chair, Legal and Standards Committee  
Gene Goodwin [VA] Chair, Alumni Committee  
Curtis Washington [MO] Chair, Fundraising Committee  
Stan Finney [WA] Chair, State Association Committee  
Tony Sowards [NC] Chair, Propagation Committee  
Gene Gammond [OR] Chair Chapter Committee  
Judy Maxwell Oxford House Coordinator, OR

Moderator: Eric Heber [LA] World Council Chair

World Council is the made up of elected Oxford House residents and alumni who serve three-year terms of office. World Council is an advisory Council that identifies problems and issues, develops solutions and resolutions and makes suggestions to the organization. The Council members will report to the convention on their activities over the past year. Gene Goodwin has prepared a short power point presentation and then current members of the Council will discuss the work of their committee during the last year. Moderator Eric Heber, the Council Chair, is also Chair of the Charter Committee.

At this 2013 Oxford House World Convention six new Council Members will be elected to serve three-year terms of office. The World Council is an active partner with Oxford House, Inc. in providing suggestions and advice of how Oxford House can best carry out its mission to provide enough Oxford Houses to afford every recovering individual with the opportunity to develop comfortable sobriety by living in an Oxford House.

## Report on International Houses

**Georgetown East**

**Saturday 8:15-9:30 AM**

Panelists: Tony Brown WC Member & Founder Oxford House - UK  
Edwin Ahadzie Oxford House Ghana  
Dan O’Laughlin Hopeful Way Foundation  
Ron MacMillan Foundation President, Oxford Houses of Canada

Moderator: Debbie Dungee Oxford House World Services

Oxford Houses now exist beyond the United States – in Canada, Australia, Ghana and Great Britain. They operate just as well as the U. S. Oxford Houses. The panelists will discuss their experiences in establishing Oxford Houses internationally and report on their successes, challenges and future prospects.

Tony Brown started and lived in an Oxford House in Great Britain and currently serves on the Oxford House World Council. Ed Ahadzie has been President of an Oxford House in Ghana and Dan O’Laughlin has been the main force behind the creation of Oxford Houses in Ghana. Dan has really introduced addiction treatment to Ghana through his Hopeful Way Foundation and House of St. Francis. Ron MacMillan was instrumental in creating the strong Canadian network of Oxford Houses, which have been going strong for nearly twenty years.

## Working with Treatment Programs

**Georgetown West**

**Saturday 8:15 – 9:30 AM**

Panelists: Johnny Allem Aquila Clinic, Washington, DC  
Eve MacMillan Executive Director, Sunrise Native Addictions Services Society, Calgary  
Jeff Hunt Oxford House Outreach, NM  
Mark Stovall Mississippi Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Services  
Linda McCorkle Director of Treatment and Recovery Services, TN

Moderator: Ed Smith Oxford House Outreach, OR

Most individuals recovering from alcoholism or drug addiction initially go through formal treatment programs. For many individuals, the time allowed for residency in formal programs is an insufficient base for sustained long-term recovery. Individuals who get into an Oxford House following formal treatment are generally more likely to achieve successful long-term recovery than if they go directly back to the community after treatment. Some treatment programs encourage clients to go to Oxford House following treatment and they have found that clients who do so tend to avoid relapse. The panelists will discuss how treatment programs and Oxford Houses can work together to support long-term recovery without relapse. In particular they will also discuss what treatment programs can do to foster the expansion of Oxford Houses through their own sponsorship of Oxford Houses or other means, and also what Oxford House residents to establish and foster good working relationships with treatment providers.

The panel consists of both treatment providers and Oxford House Outreach Workers. Johnny Allem, former President of the Johnson Institute is now with a Washington treatment provider. Eve MacMillan is Executive Director of the Native Addiction Services Society in Calgary, Alberta, Canada with a long history of treatment providing to Native Americans. Jeff Hunt is an Oxford House outreach worker developing a network of Oxford Houses in New Mexico. Mark Stovall and Linda McCorkle are with state agencies focused on treatment for alcoholics, drug addicts and those with co-occurring mental illness.

## **FOURTH BREAKOUT PANELS**

**Saturday 9:45-11:00 AM**

### **Implications of the New ACA and Parity Laws**

**Room Jefferson East**

**Saturday 9:45 AM to 11:00 AM**

Panelists: Leonard Jason, Ph. D. Director, Center for Community Research, DePaul University  
Stuart Gitlow, MD, MPH, MBA, FAPA Acting President, ASAM  
Steve Detmeyer Ph. D. Director, Mental Health and Addiction Services, DE

Moderator: Gino Pugliese Oxford House Outreach Coordinator, WA

The Affordable Care Act and The Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (MHPAEA) are expected to engender significant changes in insurance coverage and costs and in medical treatment. Most Oxford House residents currently do not have health insurance, mainly because of their pre-existing conditions and the high cost of coverage. Under the ACA, most Oxford House residents are likely to find insurance more available and affordable. The MHPAEA requires group health plans and health insurance issuers to ensure that financial requirements (such as co-pays, deductibles) and treatment limitations (such as visit limits) applicable to mental health or substance use disorder (MH/SUD) benefits are no more restrictive than the predominant requirements or limitations applied to substantially all medical/surgical benefits; however, defining parity between health and physical health treatment is difficult. The panel will focus on the changes to be made and their expectations of how the new laws are likely to affect treatment and recovery for alcoholics, drug addicts and those with co-occurring mental illness.

Dr. Leonard Jason, as head of DePaul Community Research Center, has spent two decades studying ways that society can help those with addiction and co-occurring mental illness. Specifically he has published more than 165 articles in peer-reviewed academic journals and written several books based on NIDA and NIAAA sponsored study of recovery among Oxford House residents. Steve Detmeyer, Ph. D., is head of the community mental health and addiction services in Delaware. Dr. Gitlow is the Acting President of the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM). He is now dividing his time between his clinical practice in New England and his academic work in New York City. He is on faculty at both Dartmouth and Mount Sinai. Dr. Gitlow formerly produced both Health Channel and ABC programming at America Online.

### **Oxford House and Drug Courts**

**Jefferson West**

**Saturday 9:45-11:00 AM**

Panelists: Hon. Arthur L. Burnett, Sr. National Executive Director  
National African-American Drug Policy Coalition  
George Kent Oxford House Coordinator, NJ, PA  
Linda McCorkle Director of Treatment and Recovery Services, TN

Moderator: Joe Chavez Oxford House Coordinator, HI

In 1990, there were only one or two drug courts in the country. Today there are more than 2,300. The practice and theory of drug courts is simple. It is better to route an alcoholic or drug addict into treatment rather than send him or her to jail. In jurisdiction after jurisdiction, drug court judges have found that drug court participants tend to do much better if they live in an Oxford House. The NADCP is the national nonprofit organization that has promoted, developed and educated judges around the country of the value of drug court intervention. Not only does such intervention motivate alcoholics and drug addicts to begin and master the recovery process, but it also saves taxpayers the costs of incarceration or repeated cycling in and out of detoxification and treatment.

Panelists are each very familiar with the workings of drug courts and will offer their observations and experiences with them. They will also discuss how Oxford Houses can best serve drug court clients and the expectations of drug courts working with Oxford Houses.



## Women's Conference Wrap-up

### Georgetown East

**Saturday 9:45-11:00 AM**

Panelists: De Wallace  
Lori Holtzclaw  
Deb Greenhalgh  
Christy L. Ferguson

Oxford House Outreach, NJ  
Oxford House Outreach, LA  
Oxford House Outreach, OR  
Oxford House Outreach, DE

Moderator: Judy Maxwell

Oxford House Coordinator, OR

Oxford Houses for women encounter different problems than do Oxford Houses for men – both in establishment and in subsequent operation – but work equally well. This panel of women experienced in Oxford House living and long-term recovery will discuss the challenges and successes of Oxford Houses for women. Each of the panelists has lived in an Oxford House and each has established houses for women, and houses for women with children. They will discuss the ways that new houses for women, or women with children, are established and how the women who move in deal with the challenges and opportunities they face. They will also discuss the role that the pre-convention women's conference has with respect to Oxford House living.

### Dealing with Health Issues (e.g., HIV, Hepatitis C)

### Georgetown West

**Saturday 9:45-11:00 AM**

Panelists: Sean Hughes  
Sally Marks  
Sheri Glisson  
Ann Doolen  
Gino Pugliese

Oxford House Outreach, PA  
CSAC  
Resident and World Council Member, MD  
Executive Director, Alcohol and Drug Council of North Carolina  
Oxford House Coordinator, WA, WY, NE, CO, NM

Moderator: Darryl Joiner (moderator)

Technical Assistant, OH World Services

Many Oxford House residents have a variety of health issues in addition to addiction or mental illness, including HIV, AIDS, Hepatitis C. Others are undergoing chemotherapy for cancers. This panel discusses how residents of Oxford Houses deal with these issues while living in an Oxford House – both those afflicted and the house in general. All panelists except Ann Doolen are Oxford House residents or alumni. Ann has worked to provide specialize treatment where needed and in her current position as Director of the ADC in North Carolina refers individuals in recovery afflicted by other illness to appropriate services.

## FIFTH BREAKOUT PANELS

**Saturday 11:15 AM -12:30 PM**

### Oxford House and Re-entry

### Jefferson East

**Saturday 11:15 AM – 12:30 PM**

Panelists: Hon. Arthur L. Burnett, Sr.  
  
Ken Robertson  
Marty Walker  
Chris McGuire

National Executive Director,  
National African-American Drug Policy Coalition  
Public Health Advisor, SAMHSA  
Oxford House Outreach, LA & TN  
Oxford House Outreach, TX

Moderator: Kurtis Taylor

Oxford House Outreach, NC

Over three-quarters of the Oxford House population at any given time has done jail or prison time. This is a natural consequence of the fact that addiction to alcohol and/or drugs impairs judgment and leads to violence or other

actions causing arrest, conviction and imprisonment. In America today, 2.2 million individuals are incarcerated. Approximately 80% of those in jails or prison are addicted to alcohol and/or drugs. Often their last crime that led to their conviction and incarceration is directly tied to their being high or intoxicated. Each year, between 600,000 and 700,000 of those who are incarcerated re-enter society. Within one year of re-entry, about half will commit another crime and be headed to conviction and re-entry to incarceration. The experience of those who enter an Oxford House following incarceration is usually long-term recovery and crime-free behavior. This panel will focus on the ways and means to encourage more recovering individuals leaving incarceration to immediately move into an Oxford House to protect against relapse and criminal recidivism.

Five themes will highlight this panel: [1] the need for post-incarceration recovery opportunities in light of the high incidence of addiction among prisoners; [2] the effect of Attorney General Eric Holders' evolving position on incarceration, [3] the value of Oxford House as a transitional residence; [4] practical ways to motivate returning prisoners to get into Oxford House; and [5] practical ways to integrate post-incarceration and Oxford House admission practices.

Kurtis Taylor has led an innovative program for prison outreach in North Carolina. Marty Walker and Chris McGuire have successfully transitioned from incarceration and through Oxford House living to long-term recovery. Judge Burnett, Sr. has been an advocate for treatment as an alternative to incarceration whenever possible. Ken Robertson has been involved with a Federal intra-governmental task force considering how to lower the prison population and enhance treatment for addiction among existing prisoners.

### **Oxford House Civil Rights and the Law**

#### **Jefferson West**

**Saturday 11:15 AM – 12:30 PM**

Panelists:	Steve Polin, J.D. Andrew Wainwright Greg Heafner, J.D	General Counsel, Oxford House, Inc. Recovery Housing Expert, St. Paul, MN Attorney, Chapel Hill, NC
Moderator:	Keith Gibson	Oxford House Outreach, NC

From its establishment in 1975, Oxford House has sought good houses to rent in good neighborhoods. Until the 1988 Amendments to the Federal Fair Housing Act, zoning laws kept group homes out of the better residential neighborhoods. When Oxford House began expansion following enactment of the recovery home start-up loan mandate in the 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Act, it took advantage of the Federal FHA to rent houses in good neighborhoods. The FHA extended the prohibition against discrimination to “handicapped” individuals. Since everyone in an Oxford House is utilizing the group home to overcome alcoholism, drug addiction or co-occurring mental illness, they qualify as handicapped and thereby a protected class under the FHA. As such, local governments must make a “reasonable accommodation” in their zoning laws to avoid discrimination against Oxford Houses. Oxford House served as the trailblazer in seeking court definition and affirmation of the 1988 Amendments to the FHA including the US Supreme Court in *City of Edmonds, WA v. Oxford House, Inc.* decided in 1995. In spite of that favorable decision, localities continue to try to avoid accommodating Oxford House residents trying one barrier after another.

This panel will discuss the current state of the law and explain how Oxford House has successfully applied the law to thwart insurance companies that try to discriminate against landlords renting to Oxford House as well as jurisdictions that dream up new tactics to satisfy those who continue NIMBY discrimination.

Steve Polin is an alumnus of Oxford House and is the leading lawyer in the nation with respect to application of the Federal Fair Housing Act to protect rights of the disabled. He has handled housing civil rights cases throughout the country and has coordinated most of the Oxford House litigation to assure that Oxford Houses can be located in good neighborhoods. Andrew Wainwright is a nationally recognized addictions consultant and has 16 years of experience in the behavioral healthcare field. Greg Heafner, an Oxford House alumnus, is an attorney in Chapel Hill and has represented Oxford House in Fair Housing Act cases. Keith Gibson is an outreach worker in North Carolina.

## Oxford Houses: Keeping Connected

### Georgetown East

Saturday 11:15 AM – 12:30 PM

Panelists: Lars Shirey  
Ted Vieber  
Jackson Longon  
Shaun Bossen

Oxford House, Washington State  
Oxford House Washington State  
Oxford House Coordinator, TX and OK  
Oxford House Outreach, OR

Moderator: Stacey Levin

Oxford House Outreach, TX

Oxford Houses keep connected in a variety of ways – the Oxford House web site and the ‘Houses only’” section of it; various State and individual Facebook Pages, Linked-In, You-Tube, individual e-mail accounts and the telephone. Members also use the web to access information useful to them in recovery. The panelists will talk about how Oxford House residents can use the various media to good purpose – to foster their own recovery and to help others understand the program and get access to it. Part of the discussion will focus on the need for all Oxford Houses to maintain current vacancy information on the Oxford House web site and respond promptly to email or telephone inquiries about vacancies. In addition, panelists will discuss how Oxford Houses have used social media successfully (and unsuccessfully) and identify websites likely to be of interest to Oxford House residents.

The panelists are all residents or alumni of Oxford House.

## Building Skills to Enhance Long-term Recovery

### Georgetown West

Saturday 11:15 AM-12:30 PM

Panelists: Marisha Johnson  
Michael Doolen  
Yvette Torres

Mental Health Planner, OR State Agency  
Behavioral Health Care Specialist, NC  
Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT)

Moderator: Julie Ellis

Consultant OHI, Oxford House Alumna, NC

Residents of Oxford House master long-term recovery in part because Oxford Houses provide the opportunity for them to become responsible by doing household chores, paying an equal share of expenses and accepting leadership positions in the house. They also support their own and their housemate’s sobriety. Helping fellow addicts stay sober is 12<sup>th</sup> Step work that supports the sobriety of both the donor and the recipient. As demand for recovery services become greater, additional opportunities arise for Oxford House residents to strengthen their own sobriety and to be of service to others. These other opportunities include learning how to mentor those re-entering society from incarceration, becoming a recovery coach to newly recovering individuals not in Oxford Houses, learning the best practices for drug abuse prevention, and helping to expand the number of Oxford Houses. This panel will explore the things that residents can do to improve their own skills and to help others achieve sustained recovery.

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## Oxford House Stories

*The next segment of the program contains a selection of autobiographical sketches by current and former residents of Oxford Houses. These recovering individuals are sharing their stories in order to help others afflicted by alcoholism and drug addiction to understand the hope afforded by Oxford House. 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 illicit drugs. Few are able to master such behavior change alone. Together with the 12-Step 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 House has come of age. All members of the Oxford House family hope that by sharing these personal stories of hard-won recovery, they will contribute to the growth of the Oxford House network, guide those not yet in recovery toward an effective program, and foster the understanding and support of the broader community. Many Oxford House stories of the transition from addiction to sobriety – comfortable enough to assure long-term recovery without relapse – are on the Oxford House web site ([www.oxfordhouse.org](http://www.oxfordhouse.org)) under “About Us/Stories.”*

## **2013 OXFORD HOUSE STORIES BY RESIDENTS AND ALUMNI**

### **A. J.**

My name is AJ and my sobriety date is Aug. 27, 2012. My sponsor is James, and I have a home group. I guess I will start briefly from the beginning. I grew up in Caldwell NJ where I would say I lived a fairly normal childhood looking in from the outside. My father was never around but, besides that, everything else seemed to be fairly normal. Except, on the inside, everything was the furthest from normal. I must say, the first thing I ever became addicted to was anger. I loved it! It gave me at the time what I thought was a sense of power. If I was upset, or my feelings got hurt, or even embarrassed, I automatically turned it into anger. At the time, I was unaware that being angry all the time was not powerful at all, but instead demonstrated my lack of power. It wasn't until I got sober and did some work on myself that I realized the real issue was that I lacked coping and communication skills, which, when accompanied by so much fear, led me to not be able to live in the so-called regular world.

To speed it up a little, I will fast forward to my junior year in high school where I took my first drink and drug. The first drug I ever did was smoke weed. Some time in that year, I started hanging out with the kids who really didn't care all that much. I began to smoke weed, and drink when available. I can say that my progression was really quick. From the start, I began to drink before school, during school, and after school. Unlike many other alcoholics, I did not get that ease and comfort when I drank. Instead, I was an angry drinker, plagued by hate and depression. Because of this, I had to seek out other types of drugs, and by the summer before senior year, I found them.

When I first started with hard drugs pills were not as popular as they are today. So I started with heroin right off the bat. Like most, I started sniffing it, but eventually progressed into shooting it. By age 19, I had already been to a few rehabs, detox's, psych wards, and jail. My mother kicked me out at 19, and from then on I was on the streets. It got so bad that she had to put a restraining order on me because I would break into her house and steal. Eventually she moved away, and I no longer knew where she lived. Also, at 19, I overdosed was the first time. I was found in my car, and pronounced dead; thankfully, they brought me back to life. However, I was in a coma for a week or so. After that, I would go to meetings and try to get clean, but I would always relapse. Eventually I overdosed again, this time in a stolen car while driving. I fell out with my foot on the gas pedal, and crashed the car. Once again they had to revive me. Overall I have been brought back to life three times from overdoses and survived two suicide attempts as well. I guess GOD wants me here for a reason.

Anyway, for the next few years, I either lived on the streets, eating out of dumpsters and stealing in order to get high, or was in Essex County Jail in Newark. I don't want to go into a war story; it was a typical life for an addict. Stealing, manipulating etc.. I have had guns to my head, knives to my throat, basically anything you can imagine, I experienced.

Eventually, in the summer of 2004, I went to jail again. I was released right after Thanksgiving and went to a sober house in Asbury Park. I stayed there for a few months, but ended up getting high again. I was sleeping on the boardwalk, stealing to get high like I always did, when my life changed. I was sitting in Belmar at a meeting high as a kite, when a woman walked in and ended up driving me to the psych ward. When I got out, I got a sponsor and started working the steps. My life began to change. I made friends, I became a better person, I was now able to hold a job, and slowly my family came back in my life. That was March 2005. I started sponsoring guys, and eventually went back to school and became a counselor. My life was great because I did what the program told me to do. In 2010, however, I started to get my priorities wrong, and got stuck on material success. I stopped helping people, and started backing off meetings and eventually I relapsed, shortly after I celebrated 5 years.

As usual, my life got bad fast, and within a few months I lost everything again and became homeless. I tried to get clean for almost three years, but the guilt and shame, along with self hatred kept me going back out. I was running

the streets of Newark getting high, and on August 27, 2012, a friend picked me up and drove me to the hospital. I stayed there for a few weeks, and when I got out I was accepted into the West Orange Oxford House in early September 2012. It is now July, 2013 and I will have a year in September 2013. I have been in this house now for almost 11 months. I started in the two-man room, and have now worked my way up to the point where now I am the President of the house. I have had pretty much all the jobs in the house, from chore coordinator to comptroller, and everywhere in between. I am also now Chairperson of Chapter 8. I truly feel blessed that I am in a position to be able to be involved in Oxford house, and be able to help others as well.

Oxford House, along with A.A. and a higher power, has saved my life once again. I know I would not have been able to stay clean without the structure and help of this Oxford House. Some days when it has been hard to stay clean, just knowing that I cannot use because I am in this sober living house, has sometimes been what has kept me clean for that day. Today, through Oxford House, A.A., a sponsor, and the Steps, I have once again been given another chance at life. I am now able to have a job, good friends, family, and, most important, self worth and respect.

I just want to thank GOD and all the people from Oxford House and A.A. who have helped me get sober again, and helped this hopeless addict once again find recovery, and some peace.

### ALVIN

My name is Alvin and I am in long-term recovery. I was born in Mount Holly, N. J. I have traveled around the world with my mom and dad and two brothers. Dad was in the army for 26 years. Mother was from Ivanhoe, NC. Neither parents smoked or drank or did drugs. I grew up in Chislehurst, NJ. Chislehurst is a German name meaning small town. As a child I was always into something. My mother raised me and my two brothers in church, knowing who GOD was, but too young to understand the true meaning of inner peace strength and hope. My mother always said to stay away from people, places and things. This also is in N.A. & A.A. guidelines. This took me many years to understand.

My first drink was in 1968, first sneaking beer, then going to forty-ounce beers, then to liquor, then to smoking pot. This was starting to be a part of my life. My life was one big party. This continued through high school. Because of my addiction, I neither marched with my graduating class nor took advantage of a football scholarship. However, I did get my high school diploma. Still not realizing I had a problem, I went to the Army National Guard where I continued in my active addiction. In 1980, I started working at Anchora State Hospital. That is when I ran into a new drug – meth or speed. My addiction was starting to take control of my life. Then I started shooting speed and coke. I worked there for four years and my sick thinking told me I was in control. However, from 1980 to 1989, drugs slowly made my life unmanageable. I was working more to do more. I started doing more drugs while at the Army National Guard and at the hospital. I quit the Army National Guard and moved from Chislehurst, N. J. to Sicklerville, N.J., then started smoking crack cocaine. I got a new job doing construction, where coke and drinking was more accessible. At this point I was headed for slow destruction. I stopped working construction and moved to Lindenwold, N.J. I got a job with American Shower and Bath and stopped shooting drugs, but I continued smoking crack and drinking heavily. My health began to get bad. My mother died while I was in my addiction. Then my addiction became truly unmanageable. I did all sort of things to support my habit and I left Lindenwold because if I stayed I would surely die from drugs.

At this point I became serious about seeking help. I moved to Hampton, Virginia with my best friend and cousin. I stayed there one to two years and got into a mission for addicted men, but I was not ready to stop. When I finished the three month program. I still wanted to get high. Not realizing that I was powerless over my addiction, I moved from Virginia to Camden, NJ. There my addiction continued; my time in jails and hospitals also continued. At this point I was a full blown addict. From Camden, I went right back to Lindenwold. This was my last run. By September 5, 2009, I had been in and out of jail and hospitals so many times I was spiritually broken and physically hurt. Many times I looked forward to jails and hospitals to stop using drugs. But this time was different. I stayed in the hospital for one week, and at this point was homeless. I had nowhere to turn but to GOD. I stayed at the Atlantic City Rescue mission four to six months. Then I went to IOP and Detox program for treatment of my addiction. My life style of doing drugs had taken everything of value in my life.



At the Atlantic City Rescue Mission, I was introduced to Oxford House, a recovery environment with no drinking or drugging. It was just what I needed in my life to help make that 360 degree turn. Today I realize I am powerless over my addiction – one is too many and a thousand never enough. I will never forget the pain my addiction caused in my life. I follow suggestions today. I live life on life's terms today and it's okay to be clean today. I make N.A. and A.A. meetings regularly to remind me of who I am. The pain I experienced helps keep me clean today. Also, I thank GOD for Oxford houses.

If I can live clean today you can too. You do not have to suffer like I did. So much progress is being revealed in my life. We do recover; we never have to use again no matter how we are FEELING. All negative feelings will eventually pass. My recovery works from 12-step programs and being accountable for my actions. So, live just one day at a time.

I thank the GOD of my understanding for my recovery today. P.S. This is a small part of my story

### **AMANDA H.**

My name is Amanda H. From the time I can remember, I have been an addict. I was born into a family full of addicts; my mother and father both were in active addiction when I was a child. Growing up, the disease of addiction was very prevalent in my life and I had the same addict behaviors and thinking as a child as I do now. At a young age, I experienced physical, mental and emotional abuse. I started stealing my Mom and Dad's drugs and alcohol when I was 9 years old to hide the pain and feelings that I had. My older brother and I would use when my parents were home. When my parents divorced when I was 10 is when the real insanity started in my life. From that point on we would move at least once a year, sometimes 2 or 3 times. I never spent more than a year in one school, so I never got to know people; I was always an outsider and never wanted it any other way. I used that as an excuse to use more, fall further into my addiction. My mom wasn't around much after my parents split and my dad was on the other side of the state, so it was just my brother and I left to do what we would like. My mother was still in her active addiction and kept moving us from house to house and city to city. By the time I was 13 my brother had fallen deep into his addiction and left on his own, leaving just my mom and me, both heavy into our own addictions. It wasn't long after that that I was expelled from school for possession and, after that, my mother did a massive geographical location change to help her and I went along on the trip.

While we were all the way across the country my mom found the rooms of NA and got clean. All of the sudden I was 15 years old I had a mother in my life. She had found clarity for the first time in many years and wanted to be a part of my life. However, to me it was horrible. I didn't want her in my life, even more so because she was clean and I was still using. At that point I shut her out of my life and fell deeper into my addiction. Since I could no longer get my drugs or alcohol from my mother and I was still a kid, I went to any means to get what I wanted. I had no self-value or self-worth and I got into abusive relationships because that was what kept my addiction going. I got in trouble with the law because I was out running with gangs and breaking and entering and getting in fights, because that's what I took to feed my addiction.

When I was 17, I had got into trouble with the law for theft and I didn't want to use any more; I saw that it was destroying my life. So I got clean for the first time. I stayed clean for 19 months, but I didn't work a 12 step program, I just didn't put drugs in my body. I ended up relapsing and going back out. I spend the next 9 years trying to get back into the rooms to get clean, I'd come in and pick up a few month and then go back out. I wasn't ready to give up my addiction yet; I thought I could control my disease. I got into a relationship that was fed off addiction in its fullest; he hit me and talked down to me, and I allowed it because I was so far into my addiction I truly believed that is all I was worth until one night when he beat me so bad that he could have killed me. I had finally hit my bottom. I had a moment of clarity to stand up and do something different. I called the cops and had him arrested.

I got clean and I realized that in order for me to stay that way I had to do things much different. I packed what I could and moved 2,500 miles from anyone that I knew. When I got to where I was going, alone, in a city that I knew nothing of, the only thing that was there for me was an Oxford house. I had been accepted into this house while I was on my road trip here. Had my higher power not put that in my life, had these houses not been here, I would have been on the streets. Since coming here, I have been surrounded by women in recovery who have lifted me up and showed me I can heal and overcome this. Oxford has saved my life. As I became more aware of that

early in my recovery, I began being of service to this great organization. I now have a role within my chapter because the most important thing is making sure that our Oxford Houses are here and healthy for the next person needing help to do something different in their life.

### **ANGEL**

My name is Angel and I'm an addict. This is my story. I was welcomed into this world by two very young parents. My mother was an addict. I tried pot, acid, and alcohol around the age of twelve but it was all in the name of experimentation. I started using on a daily basis when I was seventeen. During my senior year of high school, I discovered ecstasy, which became my first real drug of choice. I used it religiously and exclusively for the next two years. Coincidentally, at the start of this love affair, I also began a relationship with my high school sweetheart/dealer that would last for the next six years. During these six years, I moved through the vast drug spectrum of whatever my boyfriend happened to be selling at the time...meth, cocaine, molly, ketamine... and of course, there was a lot of drinking. I loved it all.

In 2004, one of my little sisters passed away from cancer only 9 months after her diagnosis at the age of 18. I would say this was a big turning point for me and my using went from being enjoyable to being completely miserable and unmanageable. I broke up with my boyfriend. I moved out on my own and continued to use mostly cocaine and alcohol. I got into an abusive relationship and caught some charges. I bounced around to a few more apartments with a few different guys and was at a point where I would do anything I could get my hands on and I could not be sober for more than a few hours without going into some kind of hell on earth withdrawal. I literally could not function anymore.

Thank God my Mom got clean seven years before and knew that I needed help and where I could get it. I didn't get it the first time like she did though. Between 2009 and 2010, I went through treatment three times and lived in an Oxford House unsuccessfully twice. When I got out of treatment for the third time, I moved into an Oxford House for the third time. But, with two and a half months clean, I relapsed on painkillers and went on to use in the house until I was caught and evicted. During my stay, I began a relationship with the extremely abusive junkie I was with for the next two most miserable years of my life to date. After our evictions from Oxford, we bounced around from this hotel to that rent-a-room; from this job to that job to no jobs; and to stealing for a living. Eventually I ended up in the psych ward for seventeen days. Shortly after I got out, he went to jail for 4 months. When he got out, I had my life back together. I had a new job, a new townhouse and some self esteem. We started dating again and I relapsed after seven month clean. I spent three awful weeks in a hotel room with him and finally called my mom & begged her to take me in until I could save up enough to get back into an Oxford House.

With seventeen days clean, I moved into Piccadilly Oxford House and I have been here ever since. I had eighteen months clean on August 3, 2013. The longest I ever had before that was seven months. It's been a rough road with a lot of growing pains. My biggest struggles have been the eating disorder I've had since I was young and letting go of this last relationship that I was in. I went through a lot of insanity with him – trying to get back together; trying to save him; him overdosing multiple times along with a few stints in jail and rehab. He's still in active addiction but I'm finally in a good place with it. I've had to watch a lot of girls I've gotten close to get evicted and I have had friends die over the past few years. This disease is awful and I didn't know if this would work for me the fourth time around but I gave it a shot and here I am. That's my story.

### **ANGELE W.**

My story starts like many others. I found the place I could escape to through drugs and alcohol as a comfortable and wanting place to be.

At a very young age my sisters and I suffered severe physical and mental abuse. I've learned now it was what it was and that's just it "was". I was raised in a different time and culture where things were looked over and tucked away in the dark. I began smoking at age 8 and naturally sipping from beers and booze. At age 12 I consciously tried to kill myself on pills. However, nothing happened – no ambulance, no hospital, and no death. Nobody knew, so that opened the door for everything. Since it didn't kill me then (in the mind of a 12 year old), it never would.

I was very functional until the age of 39. I had family, a house, cars, a great job and then everything fell apart. I lost everything in the span of 8 years – house, cars, family and finally my job. When that happened, criminality set in. Just like every other addict I didn't care what I did or whom I hurt to get what I needed to get loaded.

My first exposures to any type of recovery were through my boyfriend. He had reached the end of his road, and had to complete the Criminal Substance Abuse Program (CSAP), an inpatient treatment program, or go to prison for a very long time. Part of the program requirement included him living in a Men's Oxford House for 6 months. This is where it all began for me as of course I was still using and lying about it.

It didn't take very long for one of his housemates to help him through the process of holding me accountable; he was lying to himself as well about my sobriety. It was a straightforward question, "Can you pass a UA?" I didn't even try to lie I got up and walked out the door.

Alone in the middle of the night walking across town through alleys back to my apartment, I knew then that this is what the rest of my life would be like if something didn't change. It would take me months of sleepless nights for me to process the seed that had been planted – "Oxford".

Somewhere in the midst of everything, clarity came and I quit using drugs. I slept for about 90 days, then I tried to begin putting the pieces back together. I began seeing my boyfriend again but only after I went to a sister house in their chapter and produced a passing UA (accountability, another seed planted).

I moved in with my sister and with her help I started a little coffee shop (something to keep me busy). As much as our families love us, they can be the biggest enablers or triggers to our recovery. I had to learn how to walk, talk and behave in a pro-social manner all over again.

My clean date is 4/30/2010 and, as much as I appreciated what my sister was doing to try and help, when that first holiday season hit I could feel it (the addicts in my head – a set of bipolar passive aggressive twins trying to break free). I was not working a program; I had no tools to deal with these emotions and life. I thought if I spent the night at my boyfriend's Oxford House and sat next to him after he returned from his men's group that somehow magically all the things he was doing to change his life would just rub off on me, but that was not the case.

In January of 2011 I had a meltdown at his house. I didn't know what to do because I knew inside something bad was happening. He and the men in his house were amazing; they immediately started making phone calls and the next thing I knew I was interviewing at an Oxford House of my own. I was scared, petrified. They said: "Trust us, Angele. Follow this one suggestion and you will see how your life will change. Just a little suggestion to follow: live with some other women who have what we have and will to give it to you, freely." Though I didn't believe them (because I was still in my old way of thinking), I took this blind leap of faith. There had to be something to what they were saying, right?

I moved into the Canyonview Women's Oxford House in Oregon City, Oregon in February 2011. Just like other women, at first I felt isolated, afraid to talk and not sure what to say if I did. This went on for a few months and then one day I was coming home from church with my sister and her family and out of the blue had another meltdown. In front of my 10-year-old nephew, I tried jumping out of the minivan at about 60 mph on the freeway. They drove me straight to my boyfriend's house.

It was then suggested that I make some drastic changes. I was not just renting a room. I needed to attend some meetings, especially a women's group and get a sponsor. It was also suggested that I attend some chapter meetings and see how other members were getting involved. I was assured that if I got involved "more would be revealed" and, boy howdy, was it ever.

I've never been more blessed in my life. The ladies in my house loved me until I could love myself. They pointed me in the right direction to participate in my own recovery.

I was hooked after my first chapter meeting and started attending chapter meetings every month because anyone could attend. My motives: to help other women's houses stay functional and be successful, to keep those beds

available and to create more. I inserted myself into my chapter and quickly became a chapter officer, secretary. After serving that position I became co-chair and then chapter chair as well as holding a state officer position.

I began mentoring struggling Women's Oxford Houses, in Clackamas County Oregon. We only have 7 Women's Houses and for me it's a priority to keep those houses open and healthy and open more.

Did I do this all on my own? Absolutely not, others saw in me what I could not see in myself at the time and guided and invited me to participate with love, gently nudging me in the directions where I could grow. Inviting me to all kinds of functions and meetings showing me that yes Oxford is fun, we are a family; no matter how many miles separate us, we are here for each other "No Matter What".

I was asked to share my story, about a page long. If you've ever met me you'd soon realize that's not really possible. I'll be honest; I have a motive, to share with other women that you can come from "ANY" background of addiction to an Oxford House.

I'm 50 years old and never believed in my entire life that I would have the relationships I have today with others, especially women. I cannot express the feelings of gratitude I have for Oxford, with tears streaming down my face for the past hour while I type this. Please, please, please share my thanks, gratitude and love for the existence of this concept!

Did Oxford save my life? Absolutely!

#### **BECCA H.**

Before Oxford House I tried to get sober 4 times. My name is Becca Harris and I am 23 years old. I started drinking and using drugs when I was 14. When i was a little older than 20, I decided I didn't want to live the life of an addict in active addiction anymore. I tried God alone, and AA alone. I also tried them both together. It wasn't until I participated in activities that I had promised myself I would never participate in that I was willing to go to any length to be sober.

My father was an addict who had 10 years clean when he passed away, and my uncle has been in recovery for 25 years. When I spoke to my uncle about being sick and tired of being sick and tired, he remembered a conference at UNC in 2007 where Ms. Gibson spoke about Oxford House. When he asked me if I was willing to go to any length for my sobriety, I said yes and he guided me to do the footwork to find an Oxford House. I chose North Carolina to be closer to my aunt and uncle.

I interviewed at the Sharmack Oxford House. It has been here that I have gained responsibility, accountability, spirituality, a sponsor, a support group in AA, and independence all together. It has also been here that I have learned the meaning of a true friendship. Without Oxford House, I don't know that I would have ever learned how to be responsible for my actions, or had an opportunity to focus on myself and who I want to be, and be honest with myself. This is why I think I needed Oxford House to be a part of my recovery.

#### **BILLIE**

My name is Billie. I am a 35-year-old recovering heroin addict. I grew up in rural Pennsylvania. I have three younger brothers. I had a normal childhood and a good relationship with both of my parents. I did not start drinking or using drugs until I was in my late 20's. I had my first child when I was 26 and started using pain pills almost immediately after that. For me, there wasn't a significant life-changing event or traumatic experience that I feel caused my life to spiral out of control but over the next eight years that is exactly what happened.

Almost immediately after I began using prescription pain pills my life became unmanageable. I was a full-time college student with a great job and also a single Mom. I started dating a guy who I had been friends with my entire life. He moved in with my daughter And I soon after we got together. He had a promising career and gave me the option to stay home and raise my daughter. At the time I thought this was the best thing in the world. I wouldn't have to miss out on all those "firsts" that I was worried about missing while my daughter grew. What I didn't know was that his brother was prescribed pain medication and was sharing them with him and he would soon share them with me as well. For the next couple of years, my daughter's happiness and well-being depended on those pills as much as I did. We were not only mentally and physically addicted to opiates, we were also selling them and helping

to get others addicted. My disease progressed and I moved on to crack cocaine and IV heroin. At the peak of my addiction, I found out I was pregnant with my son. My boyfriend went to jail and I went to the methadone clinic. Soon after my son was born, I went back to shooting dope. I continued going to the clinic for three years. Methadone was just another thing I had to have every day. Over the next several years, I lived in hell and misery, unwilling to take action to change my life.

On September 27, 2012, about two weeks after overdosing in front of my children, I decided to go to rehab. The next day, which was also my Mo's birthday, I checked into Gateway Rehabilitation Center. I had been there before but this time was different. I had given up on life and was either going to die or save myself. I considered this my last chance. While I was in treatment, I decided that I didn't want to go back to the mess I had created. I looked into several places where I could my children and continue with my recovery as well. My brother had been a member of an Oxford House for two years at this time. He came to visit me and told me of a Women with Children's Oxford House in his area. This made my decision easy. I would get to be with my children and my brother!

On my 35<sup>th</sup> birthday, I moved into Donna J. Oxford House in Butler, Pennsylvania. I have remained clean and sober for 10 months. I credit this to my having taken action to change my life. I go to 12-step meetings. I have a sponsor. I have a full-time job and I'm a productive member of society. I am currently the secretary of Oxford House Chapter 1 and I am planning our second annual fundraising picnic. I'm in the process of becoming state certified and I am looking forward to the upcoming Oxford House World Convention. Keeping active in my house and chapter has been a big part of my recovery but what helps me the most are the relationships I have built with the girls I live with. We ultimately all have the goals. We go through good times and bad but we're all learning to live life on life's terms, together. We are not only each other's support group; we are a family.

#### **BRANDI B.**

To God be the glory! I'm the child of an alcoholic mother and a bar-tending father. From a very young age I saw the effects of this disease, not knowing it was that, a disease. I vowed never to be like her, always drinking, with brief spouts of sobriety when attending church, followed with, as the Big Book says, "a still worse relapse" when we didn't go. Daddy was never around both because he owned two bars, and she drove him crazy...as we do. Oh how I wish I knew then what I know now about the solution. Divorce happened eventually.

At a very young age, say maybe 6, I became the victim of sexual abuse. It happened on a regular basis, so much so I began to expect it or even look for it from all the men that dated Momma. What they saw was a pretty little girl and a drunken woman oblivious to what they did. Predators see this as a great opportunity. As long as she had beer, they could do as they please. I, of course, I liked the attention; starved for affection, I said nothing for years. Once, I told her and she confronted him with me sitting right there and he denied it. It continued. I never told her again for fear of her disbelief or that uncomfortable situation. Then, another time, I told my father about the next guy and what he did. The next thing I knew, a few days later, my dad busted through the apartment door with a gun and this guy takes off out the back window, and gets away, thank God, because Daddy was going to shoot him. I never told Daddy again for fear of him going to jail for killing a man. I accepted what always happened to me and eventually I liked the attention from men. I believe, at this young age, that I became addicted to changing the way I felt...just not by drugs or alcohol, yet. I also thought that was all I had to offer was sex. I've learned a lot different now. Thank you, Lord.

Well, Mother could no longer take care of me, so I thought, and she left me when I was about 9 with my dad. Now I see – because of my very own actions of abandoning my children, and becoming like her – why she did it...selfishness, fear, guilt, shame, so many others things and all WE wanted to do was numb the pain. Thank God for the 12 steps! I didn't see or hear from her for years. I thought she was dead because I remember numerous times my forehead met the windshield on our nightly drives, or the new dents on car due to saying hello to the bridge over the lake.

Daddy was very strict on me growing up. I wasn't allowed to wear makeup or date until I was 16 and that was limited even. I smoked weed once and it scared the crap out of me because I just knew he was going to kill me. I didn't do that again for a few years down the road. Then Mom showed back up in my life and Daddy agreed to let

me go to Texas to see her. What does she do? She shows up at the house to pick me up drunk. He wasn't going to let me go but I talked him into letting me go because I had just gotten my license and could drive us safely there. Woo-hoo – 80 to nothing all the way there! Freedom!! She let me do whatever I wanted while there with her...I see now she was trying to make up for lost time because I do the same with my children today...to an extent. I got drunk with her once and threw up in bed that night in my sleep. It wasn't for me but I enjoyed the feeling. Smoking cigs became a normal thing as did staying out all night with different boys roaming the streets. She didn't care, she was passed out when I'd come in to say "hey."

I always hated coming back home to Daddy's because of his strictness. One day I was complaining to my sister about how I didn't understand why he was so strict and what she told me next rocked my world. She told me that when she was 16 she had a baby and that this baby was me. Wow! So my sister is my mother and my father is my grandfather and to this day I don't know who my biological father is. Back in the day this is what they did – adopted the baby to keep them in family. We moved from one town to another in hopes of no one knowing this secret, which everyone but me knew. He raised me with care so I wouldn't do like she had done. So, all of a sudden, my nieces and nephews become my brothers and sisters; I'm a big sister now and not the baby of the family anymore, and all my brothers and sisters are now really my uncles and aunts. I kept this secret for years. He had told her to never tell me or she couldn't see me again, and she asked me not to tell. So I didn't. I didn't want to hurt Daddy. He will always be my Daddy.

What a disappointment to Daddy I thought I had become when, instead of at 16 like my 'sister', I got pregnant at 17. I got married and we had the family life to make Daddy proud for about three years. Then I got divorced and on to the next one. I got pregnant again and married again because I wanted to make Daddy happy. I was about 21 years old and this is when I was introduced to everything and the devil. First was weed and pills, then came meth, finally my devil – cocaine. I loved to smoke it and shoot it. We blew through his 401k and inheritance from grandfather in under a year and I was miserable. I went to behavioral unit a few times and got no relief. I then left and went back home to Daddy, leaving our child with him and the house and taking my oldest with me. A geographical change should work, I thought. I started stripping to help pay the bills round the house, because y'all know how I love getting some attention! It was just right up my alley. And I stayed drunk.

Before long I met a guy and, guess what, – pregnant again. Today, I believe that there is never a reason to have an abortion, but back then I had one for the wrong reason – selfishness. I had met back up with friend from high school who I was crushing on and I was afraid he wouldn't want anything to do with me if pregnant. So I hooked up with him and guess what? Pregnant again times two. Twins! Are you seeing a repetitive thing here? I never did until this past year and half. I moved back home though while about four months pregnant because he was cheating on me with someone who later became their stepmother and now is the only mother they know. My life had gone full circle and I see my life in my children's lives; what happened to me with my mother and the disease had happened to them.

When the twins were about 6 months old and the oldest was 9, I began using cocaine again. My Daddy/grandfather was old in age and was dying. I couldn't handle watching him die. The moment he took his last breath I was in the bathroom at the VA hospital smoking crack. I don't remember the funeral other than that I wanted to drive his truck and not ride in a limo with the rest of the family because I wanted to numb my pain. MY pain. My 9-year-old then had to grow up and take care of not only me but also be the parent to those twins. Feeding and changing and bathing them while all I did was use. You don't think of them being hungry when you're not. Neglect in its worst way. We all four stayed isolated from the world. Me on the top bunk so I could shoot and smoke my dope and them on bottom so they couldn't "see" or interfere. I then left all of them to go stay with an enabler and, when he was broke, I began stealing in order to supply my dope. Finally there was nothing or no one left. I was so hopeless and whooped.

A police officer in my hometown suggested I go to steps detox so I did. From there I went to 30 day treatment...then to live in therapeutic community for 6 months. From here I went back to club stripping but remaining "sober" and did a lot of the things they suggest not to do, like relationships, for example, and, you guessed it, it wasn't long before I was pregnant with #5. Before I got pregnant I had had surgery and abused the pain medication without telling my sponsor...only to relapse on crack cocaine while 7 or 8 months pregnant. Don't keep secrets from your sponsor.

I went to behavioral unit again then to treatment only to leave early because I just wanted everyone off my back. I had my 5th son and he is healthy to this day, thank the good Lord. The relationship was sick between his father and me. We both began to use due to untreated alcoholism and we became very abusive to one another. I was sickly codependent and he had become my god and my new drug....my obsession. I abandoned seeing my other boys on visitation days due to being worried about him and where he was.

I started using suboxone and stealing his things and money to get it. I drove him away...once again just like my mother. I picked up a Schedule III charge and became a convicted felon on probation for having half of one of those in my purse during a traffic stop. I also got a theft charge two days before Christmas. I was trying to save dollars so I could buy more dope. He left me and I fell off hard. I had nowhere to go and nothing left to steal but his checks. Desperation and hopelessness consumed me. Then one night, as my dope sat on the table, I cried out that simple but powerful prayer: God help me. Being afraid that when he realized his whole checkbook was gone because I got greedy and I was running from other consequences of my use due to not going to check in with my PO or going to court for theft, I ran. I ran to the behavioral unit again so I thought no one could get me and everything was going to be made better. I stayed two weeks. From there I went to the therapeutic community again. I was kicked out after 30 days for, guess what? I was messing with men again. I was still afraid of consequences so I went to 30-day treatment. While in this facility I had the opportunity to work Steps 1-5 and felt the results of doing so. I had a new sense of freedom. Many things were revealed to me as I thoroughly reviewed my past and became honest with myself and others. I was the problem, not men, drugs, my mother or circumstances. It's me! I then saw the relentless cycle of pain I played the victim role in and affected everyone in my path. I graduated from this program and thought that since I'd completed 2½ months of treatment and got better, all consequences would be forgiven. I lived in the mission for two days and went to go check in with my PO. Investigators were there and I suppose that because of the honesty I gained working the few steps I had, I told them everything! All they wanted to know was about the checks.

To jail I went on July 8, 2011. I am grateful for this because it was the first time I sat still. While sitting still for 7 months, I built a relationship with God. It was a beautiful thing. At first I was always on the phone calling anybody I could, trying to get out because, "Don't you people realize who I am? Don't you know that I went to treatment and I'm better?" LOL! I was far from better and I still have a long way to go today. Anyway, one day I was making a daily call when I heard a voice say to me. "Take your hands out of it." So I did. And I experienced the most freedom I'd ever felt, and this was behind locked doors! I had a peace within me that made it possible for me, who had never been to jail before for more than two hours, to tolerate the place. I don't recommend it at all by the way. I'm grateful for it but don't want to do that EVER again.

So, my consequences caught up with me and I was looking at 5-25 years. My ex dropped charges upon my promise to pay restitution for all I had taken. So, I got a 90-day turnaround, then 30 here for court costs and 30 here for something and 30 for this and that...while all along going to 3 different jails in 2 different parishes. By time I was released I had paid my dues for all my actions while high or trying to get high. On January 13, 2012, I walked right down the street with nothing but the clothes on my back and a trash bag over my shoulder full of jailhouse stuff....y'all know.....my jailhouse mail from my "lover" in a MAN's jail who wrote me daily..LOL. It entertained me while there at least.

Well, having yet to complete the suggested program of recovery, the 12 steps, I went straight back to some old people, places and things. Guess what? No! I didn't get pregnant. I did use again though. My sponsor tells me that if you have God in one hand and AA in the other, you've got to drop one to pick up the other. The hopelessness had returned. I didn't know where I was going to go and, fortunate for me, my ex suggested Oxford. So here I am.

My sobriety date is January 15, 2012 and I moved into an Oxford House on January 22, 2012. To God be the glory for it has taught me something I didn't know....well a lot ... but Number 1 is being how to LIVE sober. I never knew how to do that and, treatment after treatment, I always returned to same people, places, and things and ended up with the same results. Mind you, I had nothing. I started from the bottom and now I'm here! Ha! Within two weeks, as my house suggested, I got a sponsor whom I called EVERY DAY and a job as a barber February 5, 2012.

To show you God has a plan before you are even aware of it, here is a story in a story. Back when my last baby daddy and I were together, he was on my back about getting a job when all I wanted to do was live off him and stay home and take care of our baby. So, to make him happy, I thought I'd go to hair school and put off getting a job for

another 9 months or so. I received my license and then I went to jail. I never had any experience in the salons. Oh, man, how good God is. Two weeks after moving into Oxford, I got my dream job (not a strip club) at a local old-fashioned barber shop and, within a month, my name was on the sign at the street for the world to see! What? A convicted felon? A crack-headed junkie who lied and stole? I had a real job that I love. Within 6 months I bought my own car!

The house voted me President and I feel that this alone taught me great responsibility and accountability. I had to grow up. This I have done and continue to do. I'm 34 years old and never before in my life had I done so. I always depended on a man for everything...even for self worth and confidence. Not today. God's grace and mercy show me so much more. I began working the 12 steps with my sponsor and applying the principles I am learning in all my affairs. I've learned so much about me this past year and a half. I'm no longer playing that victim. I am a survivor who has been to hell and back and lived to tell another, in hopes it may help the still suffering. I am a strong independent mother today who has recovered from a hopeless state of mind! Who would have thought I could depend on only God instead of man? I never knew till now.

I have been voted Presentations chair and have been doing presentations for almost a year. Time flies when you LOVE what you do. I get to help people find out there is another way, a place to go to learn to live sober. A place with the support and love that I've always searched for, that the LADIES have given me. As I share my experience, strength, and hope, I've seen eyes light up with hope and this is an awesome high – a new high that I enjoy more than any other. I've received more abundantly than I've lost and I have regained relationships with people and family that I had never imagined was possible. I went from being a 'hopeless dope fiend' to a 'dopeless hope fiend' almost immediately as the promises were being fulfilled in my life. They continue and it keeps getting better. I see all of my boys except for the twins and even had the opportunity to get custody of my youngest, turning our home into Chapter 1's first women and children's Oxford House! My twins – I've been blessed that God chose wonderful women to take my place in all of my boys' lives when I wasn't there. This is true for the twins as well and she loves them as a mother loves her own. I have faith today that they are taken care of and that a reunion will occur in God's time, when He thinks I'm ready.

While living in Oxford I can afford to make financial amends to all I owe. It's a beautiful thing! Some even forgiven – my ex, for example – the restitution that I promised to pay. I started paying it and when my Sponsor and I reached Step 9, I asked him what the total amount was that I owed so that I could make it right with him. He said not to worry about it and to just keep doing what I'm doing. So I do. I do today what I did yesterday – one day at a time. I call Oxford my training wheels that keep me on this path of self discovery. It's not about the destination anymore and what can I get – now it's about the journey and what can I give. I just picked up 18 months sober and that's the time I've lived in Oxford. I'm grateful to God, for the 12 Steps, for Oxford, and for you, my fellow Oxford brothers and sisters, for helping me every step of the way. I LOVE OXFORD AND MY LIFE. More will be revealed. I can't wait. Much love, Brandie B., Chapter 1 Shreveport, Louisiana

#### **CARLA SEYLER**

My name is Carla Seyler; I am a member of the Coeur d'Alene Tribe of Idaho. I am 37 years old and my drugs of choice are alcohol, meth, and weed. I have been an addict/alcoholic all of my life, but I didn't truly start using and drinking until I was twenty. Both of my parents are alcoholic/drug addicts. My failures have been many, though my biggest failure was a five year journey with a meth addiction. I became an empty shell of a human being. It was as though the person I was, got up and walked out, and in her place a demon with no principles or morals appeared.

My addiction started out as "social using," but then I had to have it every day. I weighed 220 pounds when I started using, then my weight went down to 140 pounds. I shaved the hair from my head and plucked the eyebrows from my face and where once I had flawless skin, scabby sores began to appear. I was lost to my family and God; my life was non-existent. I had a job, a car, a home, and a bank account that kept me living comfortably. I lost my job, depleted the funds of my account, and drove my Blazer into my home. I gave my son to my mother and brother because I didn't want to stop using, I didn't want to go to treatment, and being a mother took too much effort. I was homeless and on foot, couch surfing where I could. I had nothing and no one wanted me around. I blamed everyone but myself for my bad luck in life. The guilt and shame I felt over abandoning my son was quickly forgotten once the pipe hit my lips. Once I took that first hit, I didn't have to face the wrong I was doing, all of my defects floated away in a puff of smoke.



My father's sister came to me and told me that she wanted me to move in with her so that I could help her take care of her mom; my grandmother. She knew I was an addict, she knew that I drank and yet she wanted me to live with her. While I stayed with her, my son was allowed to come and spend the weekends with me. My aunt loved me when no one, not even myself, loved me. She got my gears turning and my heart changed. I found myself in treatment a few months after moving in with her. How crazy it was to find out that I was the cause of all of my downfalls. Sundown tore me down and made me see what a tragic mess I was and had made of my life and my family's. Sundown also built me right back up. My transformation is like a building being demolished and a new one built in its place.

I was advised to move into an Oxford House. I didn't want to relocate my life to Yakima, Washington. I didn't want to live with a bunch of other women. My mother was all for it, and so, I did it. I was accepted into Portia Park Oxford House in September of 2011. This house, along with the A.A. program, saved my life. Living here I have learned to have relationships with other women. I have learned to balance a check book and pay bills on time. I have respect for others and have gained the respect of others. The women in my home are my family and I love them all. In March of 2013 I had a heart attack and died right here in my Oxford House. My best friend did compressions on me until the paramedics arrived. My own family came from Idaho to be with me during my stay in the hospital and the women in my house were there to see me almost every single day. I have relationships with my mother, father, brother, and son that I never had with them even before my use. My mother trusts me in her home and with my son. My brother has allowed me to be part of his daughter's life and he likes having me around. Instead of doing nothing with my life I am a student at the local community college, where I am studying to become a Chemical Dependency Counselor.

Thanks to Oxford House I have a home and friends that I can count on and who can count on me. Oxford created for me a safe haven full of women with the same goals, trying to live clean/sober. Just as I am thankful for Bill W. and his program of A.A.....I am equally thankful for Paul Molloy and his creation of Oxford House. I love Oxford!!!!

#### **CASEY B.**

My name is Casey Burley. Almost 2 years ago, my life was out of control and unmanageable. I was in a vortex of drugs, chaos, filth, and greed. I started using drugs at a very early age, which soon turned into me selling them and running around with gangs, my "new family." I had left my real family behind and didn't care to look back.

After years of use and years of jail, I finally found myself right where I needed to be...CSAP!! That program totally changed my life, not to mention saving it as well. It was there that I found who I really was, put in altogether 16 months of hard work, through all the shame, guilt and tears, and blossomed into a beautiful, honest, and now, a trustworthy, person. After completing the program, I moved into Oxford. I have been here a year now and I love it!! I love the stability, the friendships and the comfort of knowing I have a home to come back to every day; my belongings are still there and safe, and I am safe. With hard work and dedication, I can and am going far in life. Because of me and because of Oxford, my life is valuable as well as I am. I thank Oxford for being part of my journey in my new, clean, meaningful and, oh yeah, did I mention HAPPY life.

#### **CHRISTINA STUBBS**

My name is Christina Stubbs. I am 34 years old; I live in Yakima, Washington at Portia Park Oxford House. I have been a black-out drinker since I was 12. My disease progressed over the years and by the time I was 20 I was a daily heroin and meth user. By the time I was 25, I had been to 7 inpatient treatment centers, completing all of them, but when I was released I didn't follow any suggestions, like going into an Oxford House or going to 12-step meetings, so I would always use again. By 2005, I was tired of fighting and constantly thinking of suicide. I begged to get into treatment again and got into the middle of a 12-step program. I stayed sober for four and a half years and had a life that beyond anything I dreamed of, but I still didn't know how to ask people for help or talk about my feelings. I sponsored a lot of women but did not have real friendships with them or anyone else and it was easy to go home and isolate.

In August 2009 I had a brain tumor removed and then found out that it was cancer, Stage 3. I was told by the first doctor that I had 3 years to live. My mind played tricks on me and I told myself and everyone else that I was OK but deep inside I was terrified of dying. The doctors gave me a prescription for anxiety and within days I was abusing it and within a month I was shooting heroin again. The insanity in those choices still amazes me. I was afraid to die so during chemo, a couple months after 2 full craniotomies, I relapsed and start doing heroin again. Everything in that 4 ½ years that I had built up for myself and my family I threw away. My family and friends were terrified of what would happen to me. When I first picked up I told myself I would go back to treatment because that is what I always did before but I couldn't do it on my own this time. On July 2, 2011, my house was raided and I was put in jail for 2 months and then went to treatment. The treatment center suggested I go to an Oxford House and I was ready at that time to do whatever anyone told me to.

Moving into Oxford has given me everything that I missed the first time around. The women I live with have become my family. I get to practice asking for help and talking to other women about my feelings, both good and bad. Even when I want to hide out and not talk about them, the ladies won't let me. I have MRIs done every three months to see if the cancer is back and because of the support I have gained in this house and Oxford House as a whole, I don't have to walk through it alone. I know that no matter what, I don't have to get loaded again. Oxford House has given me my family back. I have an 11-year-old son who loves to stay at the house with me and the ladies here are his family also.

Oxford House has also given me many opportunities to give back. I have been helping people who are in prison get released to an Oxford House in the Yakima area for over a year and a half. I love watching people who think that their life is over be given another chance by Oxford House and how Oxford changes their lives as well. I just got to celebrate 2 years clean and sober and I will be celebrating 4 years cancer-free on Aug 19<sup>th</sup>. None of this would have been possible without the 12 step program I am in, and Paul Molloy bringing Oxford House to life for all of us. I can't even put into words how much my family and I appreciate this new chance at life. Thank you!

#### **CONNER**

On May 2, 2012 I entered my first Oxford House. I had just been released from jail and there was no other place for me to go. I ended up in jail due to one of those arguments that no one ever wins. I was an alcoholic through and through; the disease had taken over my life and was about to leave me for dead. The 99 days I spent in jail became my treatment center and my new way of thinking. So many diverse groups lived in the same unit all controlled by our wonderful Department of Justice. I was raised in a home full of addiction. I attended Al-Anon at the age of 14 always saying I would not be the alcoholic that my father was. Here I sit, 36 years later, my life in a pile with nowhere to go but up.

Oxford has given me a place to learn who I am for myself. Not for family or husbands. The codependent behavior I learned at a young age carried me to the top of all the things I never wanted to become – an alcoholic. With the help of my sisters in Oxford House I am beginning to see that I do have value as a person and as a friend. The Twelve Steps of AA that I thought I already knew now have new meaning and I am learning them with a greater appreciation. I am learning to live and let live and finding the truth about self and that I am not alone in the bitter cold world.

I have lived in Oxford going on 15 months and I do not see me going anywhere anytime soon. I am currently the Chapter President for NM Chapter #One. I hold the office of treasurer in my own home group. I work with outreach to help others who are where I have been and want help on the road to where I am going. Hi. My name is Conner and I am an alcoholic.

#### **COREY Y.**

Being addicted to crack cocaine for over 17 years and trying to stop many times on my own with no luck led me to a suicide attempt. I found a new way of life. That new way of life came about while I was at a treatment facility. Being at that facility gave me a chance to be open-minded and learn about recovery. One of the things that I learned was that there were others out there like me. While sitting in the day room of that facility, I would hear people talk about the Oxford House. I was curious to hear and to learn more so I decided to attend one of their weekly presentations. While at that presentation, I heard a lot that reminded me of myself and once again it showed

me that I was not alone. After that presentation, I spoke with one of the members of that house who assured me that anything was possible and that Oxford House would be a good start for that new way of life. The things I was told that needed to be done to become a member and to stay a member at any Oxford house did not seem hard.

The next day, after getting my hands on a list of all the Oxford Houses in the area, I began to make phone calls. After calling house after house I wasn't having any luck but, instead of giving up, I remembered what I was told at the end of that presentation: "that anything was possible." At that point, I realized that there was only one house left on that list and that was Oxford House New Bern. I called and had an interview with the guys from Oxford House New Bern and was voted in. Since moving into the New Bern house on February 21, 2012, the men there have made me feel like a part of their family. With that came a feeling of happiness and a peace of mind. I was a part of something bigger than myself. I learned to pay my rent on time which I had never done before. I learned to trust others and how to gain other people's trust. I learned to be a better partner in my relationship and that it is okay to be wrong as long as you admit it when you realize it and work on that. From that day, February 21, 2012 until now, I have learned a lot and I'm still learning from being a part of Oxford House.

So, if I had to use one word to describe what I have learned, it would be RESPONSIBILITY. So what I was told at the end of that presentation is true: "with an open mind and the willingness to try something different, anything is possible." Corey Yancey Oxford House New Bern

#### **DAN P.**

I'm a 37 year old recovering addict. My story is a lot different than most other addicts. In 2009, I had my leg amputated due to complications from an overdose that hospitalized me and left me in a coma for about a week.

When I was in high school I was very athletic and played varsity football and also was on the varsity wrestling team for 4 years. I secretly sold weed from the time I was 16 and progressed to harder drugs as I got older. Never did I plan on using any of these drugs for anything other than making money. Not until I was 28 did I graduate to heroin – after a surgery on my mouth that got me hooked on Percocet – and not until I was 30 did I end up behind bars.

By the time I was 33 and had lost my leg, getting arrested and sent to jail became an acceptable lifestyle for me to live. After my OD and having my leg removed, I signed myself out of the hospital to go get high and, a few short months later, I was back behind bars. Still making all the wrong decisions in my life; continuing to sell drugs in order to maintain my habit and running around driving with no driver's license, I got arrested once again. This time they told me that if I tried to fight the charges I would end up in prison for the rest of my life. The sick thing is I really didn't care until people I grew up with who worked in the jail would take the time to remind me of the person my mother and father raised and not the monster I'd become. So I decided to fight, not so much the prison sentence but for some kind of rehab to fix my brain. After 6 months of appealing denials from the superior court, I was finally accepted into the drug court program, was granted treatment at a long term in-patient rehabilitation center followed by a stay at a half-way house. Once I completed treatment I moved into an Oxford House, back in my home town.

I overturned every stone available during treatment and found out that due to my lifestyle, impulsive behaviors, and not being able to accept grief and loss, I had become a monster using drugs to mask my feelings. The main reasons I acted out and got high were to avoid the feelings of grief after my mother's death, shortly followed by my best friend's Christmas morning suicide and my other best friend's motorcycle accident causing his death as well. Mind you, I held good-paying jobs and ran a concrete company most of my adult life. I just chose to make the wrong decision during a crucial moment in my life that I paid dearly for. I just don't think people know enough about what that stuff can do to your life. I hated it prior to my use and loved it once I got it in me. I have a little brother who did this long before me and I hated it. Not until the day he talked me into doing it did I love it.

I've been drug and alcohol free now since June 29, 2011. Since then my life has changed drastically for the better. I'm active in a 12-step fellowship as well as Oxford Houses, not for any other reason than to stay clean and help others just like others helped me in my recovery. I walk on prosthesis and am in the process of obtaining my driver's license and starting a business. I live with my girlfriend and help with a mortgage. I own a boat and, most importantly, my family respects me again and trusts me when I tell them I'm going to be somewhere or do something. I can honestly say that my life is wonderful and only because I'm clean and help others. Dan P., Addict

## **DARRYL J.**

Here's a story of a man named Brady, who was busy with three boys of his own...Oops – that's from my favorite sitcom. My story is this:

I was born and raised on our capital city known as Washington, DC to what began as a beautiful love story between my mother and father that quickly turned into a messy separation of my parents due to his drinking and gambling issues. It never occurred to me that I as his seed would not fall far from his tree. With my mother having the brunt of the responsibility of rearing me, she did the best that she could with what she had. As an only child, I can't remember ever wanting for anything; I had clothes on my back, shoes on my feet, and toys by the boxfuls. I attended the best schools as a child (be they public or private/Catholic schools).

My first experiment with alcohol was at the age of 4 when my aunt would allow me to sip on her Miller Pony beer bottles (what a tonic; this always kept me quiet and eventually I would fall asleep), next I would sip from the remains of alcohol that my mom would have after she had a party or event in our house. No further tasting or sipping happened until my teen years. Growing up as an only child, I kept myself engaged with things to do until the day I went to a classmate's house and we shared a joint of marijuana with his older brother and then his brother gave us our own. I was off to the races with this joint; scared and hyped from the euphoria this joint gave me, I had find a way to come down before going home to my mother. I promised myself that I wouldn't smoke another joint for as long as I would live. This promise was kept until the age of 18 when I was legally able to drink and smoke. My next joint felt like the first one I had experimented with at the age of 12. I wouldn't drink or smoke around my mother thinking that she had no idea of what I was doing with my friends on the weekend, so I "chilled" from doing it with my friends all together fearing that my cover would be unmasked by my mom. It wasn't until upon my mother's death in 1984 that I was re-introduced to alcohol and weed use. That "crowd" my mother ALWAYS warned me about became my road dogs; we would puff & drink our weekends away!!!

Fast-forwarding my full bore into using narcotics drugs and drinking happened in 1988 when at the age of 25 my downward spiral took off; I didn't come up for air until 1999. During my drug use, I found out I came up HIV Positive – on November 26, 1989. Having been newly diagnosed, I thought my life was over so I attempted to assist in this process by going harder. MY THINKING had been counting my days down as I figured I'll live to see my next birthday (in February) and then I'll be gone. Well, my God has His own plan for me; not only have I seen my next birthday but He's afforded me the opportunity to see 24 more birthdays since I've been diagnosed. He also sent an angel to me in the form of an addiction counselor who got me into treatment on August 5, 1999. While in treatment I must admit I missed the piece about alcohol is a drug; my clean date is actually March 18, 2000!!!

I was introduced to Oxford House upon my return from treatment. I went to the first interview brimming with confidence that I was going to get voted in because during my interview I was completely open-minded and willing to change my life around. Well, the first house didn't vote me into their house, so I returned to my addiction counselor office and told her of the vote. Without missing a beat she suggested that I try another house and so I did, only to end up with the same results that the first house gave me – rejection. So now, without her allowing me to stew on my own pity pot, she suggested I try a brand new house that was scheduled to open the day before my 38<sup>th</sup> birthday. How does that saying go, the third time is a charm? I was elected into this house and become an original member of this house. When I got to Oxford House I had already obtained my first year of clean time but being a member of an Oxford House has been an extremely vital part of my recovery. My open-mindedness has led to my obtaining a lot of the things I lost while I was drinking and drugging. Being an Oxford House member has given me an entirely NEW family of brothers and sisters I've never had. It's given me my self-worth back and it's still growing; I'm still under construction!!! Being a member of Oxford House has allowed me to become a part of society again, and, oh, that HIV thing: how about I've been undetectable for the past 13 years and I'm praying that my God will allow me as many days that He feels fit for me!!! I hope that I offered a piece of hope for the next recovering addict.

## **DEANN**

Hi! My name is DeAnn and I'm an alcoholic. My story begins at home. You see I'm an alcoholic and my family business is a liquor store. The family business started as convenience store and then became a beer and wine store

and then a liquor store. My family is full of addicts. Some acknowledge their disease and some don't. My father was a controlling individual who wanted all of his children to follow in his footsteps and took action to make it happen. I came back home to work 14 years ago to get the business organized and help get it through IRS troubles. Things went well for a while but, the more the family relied on me to solve their problems, the deeper I got into depression. It always seemed that I wasn't good enough. Soooo – since I over the books and accounting, what cheaper way to resolve my problems than in a bottle – my addiction at wholesale prices.

My drinking increased greatly after the death of my father and I was responsible for the family. Everyone had just "one thing" for me to do for them and none of it included taking care of me. I was the functioning alcoholic who functioned fairly well - that was until my body told me otherwise. While going through the legal aftermath of a DWI, my health deteriorated. I was over 225 pounds and was diagnosed with bleeding ulcers for which surgery was required. I had less blood in my body than a child so they filled me up with 6 pints of blood. After surgery I had no use of my hands at all. My family decided to go against medical advice and placed me in a free rehab two days after my dismissal from the hospital. Even though I could barely walk, couldn't write, carry my tray of food or feed myself, I tried to make it work. While there I fell three times resulting in a sprained ankle and two head injuries. By the time I landed in the hospital, I had contended with bed bugs and scabies. After two days in the hospital, it was determined that I had e-coli in my blood stream! I spent the next two weeks in isolation ICU. My family didn't even know I was there for five days. I had only one visitor. So, there I was in bed and watching TV. The facility I had been at placed all of my belongings into the trash because I hadn't returned within 48 hours so I had nothing to read and no identifying documents.

When I returned home things hadn't become better - they were WORSE! I was living with my brother in a filthy house and, once again, I was supposed to make it better. I started drinking again. I was going through rehab on my hands (my son works in physical therapy so it was free) and filing for disability so I might be able to eat and survive – so forget going to any kind of rehab for my addiction. Well, I finally made it to the required DWI class and out of the blue my psychotherapist ran out of her office and asked if I still needed help with my addiction. My answer was YES! Thinking I would get a few free sessions with her, I followed her into her office. There she showed me a pamphlet of a new facility, The Ranch at Clear Spring, not too far from home. They were just opening and had a few scholarships available. I jumped at the chance.

At that time, I signed over all of my rights to the family business so there wouldn't be any conflict with rehab and recovery. When I arrived, I made the statement that I would never leave. It was absolutely beautiful. I was the 6th client admitted and the 12th to walk out the door. We were a small group of addicts who were responsible for learning about our disease, finding coping skills, learning to take care of ourselves yet at the same time we were required to help set up the new facility. There, I learned where my Miss Fixit came into play - at age 6. My mother (an alcoholic herself) left me and my younger brother at that age. The cycle of addiction begins again. I was much older and my son was a grown man prior to my downfall. (Thank God!) Trying to convince my family that what I was suffering from was a disease, not a choice, was quite difficult. I didn't believe it myself at first. My poor counselor had to deal with my "but-itis." Every time she would show me something I would say, Okay - BUT! That woman taught me a lot. Like she always said, "We're ALL sick!"

I was scheduled to be there for 45 days and, as the day approached for my discharge, I was terrified. They didn't want me to go back home so they were looking at homeless shelters, etc. for me to live at. I didn't want to go to Dallas but Fort Worth was okay (not preferable, but okay). While my counselor and several of the staff searched for living arrangements for me, the CEO of the facility came and talked to me and told me that they wouldn't let me go until they found a suitable place for me. Guess what opened in Fort Worth just a week prior to my discharge – the first Oxford House for women in Fort Worth. After a phone interview and several phone calls, I was accepted into the house. I had no idea what to expect. I arrived at the house on Monday, October 15, 2012, TERRIFIED! Not only was I away from my family but it was also the night of their house meeting. I sat in a chair away from everyone and in walked our outreach representative, Chris McGuire. I would have never known how Oxford House and that one outreach rep would change my life.

Oxford House has given me the support on a daily basis to handle the good and bad each day brings. Knowing that to talk to another addict, all I have to do is knock on a housemate's door. There you can laugh, cry, complain, or eat any flavor of ice cream for comfort. Going to meetings together and learning the bus system has made this all a new adventure. After being in the Fort Worth House for four months, I was given the opportunity to help in opening the

second women's house in Fort Worth - Oxford House McCart. It didn't take long for the house to become full. Now, along with Chris, I find myself looking for more houses in the Fort Worth area. We are very fortunate that in Fort Worth, we will be splitting off into a chapter of our own which will give us all the opportunity to advance our participation at a chapter level. Going through this experience I have learned several things – the people at my "The Ranch" I will always call my friends and the people of Oxford House I call FAMILY!

### GERHARD

At age 7, growing up in a small town in Pennsylvania, things around the home seemed pretty normal. Then my father died. The family drifted apart and we spent less and less time doing things together. At age 12 and 13, I was mentally and physically abused, frequently in trouble at school and with the law, and more or less taking care of myself (cooking, laundry, etc.). My mom was either working or “playing”. I hung out with those I could relate to, which almost immediately got me started into drugs and alcohol. By age 15, my home became the party house. I supplied the drugs and my mom supplied the kegs and bottles. Slowly but surely, I began spiraling out of control – intense car accidents that should have ended my life; repeated and, each time more intensifying. run-ins with the law. By age 18, the State of Pennsylvania gave me a choice: 10 years in jail or leave the state for 5 years.

We left. My mother and I moved to Germany for 6 months where my relatives and I drank every day and most every night. Drinking alcohol excessively was acceptable in my family and I never thought twice about whether I was an alcoholic or not. We left Germany and somehow ended up in Hawaii where I still live to this day. I got married, had our first-born son, and continued to drink heavily. I ran a landscape business and supported my family so I saw no problem with my drug or alcohol use. But after about 5 years, as a drinking and drugging family man, I started getting into trouble again. I ended up with multiple DUIs and other alcohol related problems. Gratefully, another nudge from another judge got me involved in AA and not kicked out of Hawaii. But, of course, I thought the judge was the one who had the problem with the way I drank – because I sure didn't. Years went by and a second son was born and my thinking started to change, a bit. But the quality of my marriage started to change as well. It changed to bad, and then from bad to worse. Needless to say, my marriage ended in a divorce.

I heard a lot at the AA meetings but never applied myself or truly listened. I started getting 3 months here, 6 months there, but I couldn't stop drinking. It was after a number of these spurts that I *finally* realized I couldn't stop. But I also finally realized that I *needed* to stop. What changed? I started listening. I began applying myself to the program. Then, right before I got 5 years – “BAM!” I lost my job with the City and County of Honolulu. I drank on my 5-year birthday... and once again, I got a DUI. I lost my driver's license, and my thinking went stinking.

With one and a half years under my belt, I knew I needed more than just AA so I went to Oxford House and was immediately accepted into the newly-opened Oxford House Coconut Grove in Kailua. I was trusted to get this new house going and felt responsible for the wellbeing of nearly a dozen other men in the same boat I was in. I became the chore coordinator and, boy, did I become the most disliked person in the house. The funny thing is what did it for me. It was hard to do the right thing when everyone was against me. I thank a certain individual for the trust he put in me because I felt more accountable than I had ever before. I thank my friend and Oxford House for believing in me so I could believe in myself. It's exactly what I needed.

Gerhard Kailua, Hawaii

### HEIDI

My name is Heidi and I'm a 25 year old recovering addict. I struggled with opiate addiction for 5 years from the age 16-21. I was a younger teenage girl who hung out with older crowds to escape my life at home. I was physically abused for two years before I got enough courage to tell someone and get help. By that time I was already hooked on oxycontin and drinking heavily. I was hooked on the oxy's within a week. Using them daily and feeling sooo numb helped me cope with life. I lost all interest in sports, school, close friends, and even family. I graduated from high school through an alternative program that my parents thought was a good idea. It only led me to party more and cheat my way through school. After graduating I got pregnant and had my first child by age 19. I tried to raise her to the best of my ability which at that time wasn't much considering that I started using again two days after having her and moving onto heroin. I left her with my parents when she was 2 because I felt it was best for her. When she was 3, I got in a lot of trouble with the law and sat in jail for a few weeks. This was nothing new considering I was already a felon by age 18 and had a long rap sheet meaning that I was in and out of jail a lot.

Something hit me though this time in jail. I felt I was sick and tired of being sick and tired. I wanted sooo badly to get clean but the physical withdrawal killed me. So, while sitting in jail, I asked if I could be in the drug court program. I was accepted and the second I got out of jail I asked for help to get into rehab. After going to an inpatient treatment far away, I came back to the town where all I knew was how to get loaded so I asked around and found out about Oxford housing. I lived in an Oxford House for almost two years before I felt I was ready enough to be on my own again. While living in Oxford with only 3 months clean, I got my daughter back and she lived with me and still does. I got pregnant as well when I lived in Oxford and had a beautiful healthy baby boy. He has never known the drug addict mom and never has to.

I have been clean for 4 years now and feel that if I hadn't stayed in Oxford ,I wouldn't have learned about all the different steps to recovery, met people who were going through the same thing as me, found different NA programs and, most importantly to me, was always having people to hold me accountable for my actions. To this day I still recommend Oxford to my friends who are struggling with addiction. That is my story.

### **J. J.**

I was born Raymond Virella III on January 20, 1981 to Raymond and Christine Virella on Kadina Air-force Base in Okinawa, Japan. My mother was of Italian descent and my father was Puerto Rican. Shortly after my birth, my father enlisted in the army and we had to relocate to Germany where he was stationed. I was about 3 years old at that time. This is where my earliest childhood memories developed. I remember one day I was playing in my dad's Kiwi boot polish and I got it all over my hands. When my dad saw this he was extremely upset. He proceeded to put a pot on the stove and boiled the water. Once it started boiling, he made me stick my hand in it. My father was court marshaled and sentenced to six months in a military prison. My mother, who was pregnant at this time, and I moved back to the States, to Chicago, IL. Shortly after my brother was born, my dad got out of prison and we moved to Lake Charles, LA. This was just the beginning of the many years of abuse that my mom, as well as myself, would suffer at the hands of my father. I won't go into the depth of the abuse, but I will say that I was starved to the point of having to sneak out my room at night to eat dog food. I was beaten to the point of where I was hospitalized many times and literally feared for my life as well as my mother's on several occasions. My mother finally found the courage to leave him when I was about 9 years old. My father was a very unstable man. He suffered from Bi-polar Disorder and tried several unsuccessful suicide attempts.

After living with my grandparents for a short time, my mother landed a good job and we moved into an apartment together. I was about 10 years old. This is about the time I started acting out. I started experimenting with alcohol and marijuana occasionally. A very violent side of me began to surface. At the age of 13, I was arrested for the first time for burglary, battery on a police officer, and simple battery. I was placed on probation and a year later it was revoked for 2nd degree battery, simple assault, and another battery on a police officer. I was given a juvenile life sentence to be served at LTI (juvenile prison). I was released shortly before my 18th birthday to a halfway house where I obtained my GED and, upon release from there, I attended a couple of semesters of college. I pledged and joined a fraternity where my drinking and drug use was able to prosper. During my 2nd semester, I was kicked out of my fraternity for selling drugs at work and on campus.

A few months later, my adult criminal career began. I was arrested for burglary, possession of CDS II (Valium) with intent to distribute, possession of marijuana with intent, and aggravated battery. I sat in jail on a \$50,000 bond for 17 days. Then I got a call from the coroner's office telling me that they had my dad's body and needed to know what to do with it, because I was the next of kin. I had no idea what they were talking about, but after calling my mother, I found out he shot himself with a 20 gauge shotgun. I was bonded out the same day and, truthfully, his death did not even phase me. So, I thought. It wasn't until I got sober that I realized that I had been numbing the pain of my father's death and my past by self-medicating. From that point on my alcohol and drug use increased and so did my criminal career. The charges got more and more serious, ranging from kidnapping to pimping prostitutes to robbery and aggravated batteries to multiple drug charges. I was sentenced to serve 8 years hard labor in DOC in 2001. I served 4 years at Elayne Hunt Correctional Center and was paroled out in 2004.

I stayed clean for almost 4 years and decided I could have a drink one night at the gentlemen's club where my ex-wife danced. I was able to drink successfully for about a year and I can remember one night it just seemed like alcohol wasn't enough anymore. So I reintroduced myself to heroin and pain killers. It felt like I picked right back up where I had left off. Within weeks, I couldn't stop without being sick from withdrawals. Within months, I had



lost my great-paying job. And within a year, I had absolutely nowhere to stay and had lost the will to live completely. In 2011, I was arrested again on more drug charges, as well as a charge of robbery, and was sentenced to probation (only because I had managed to complete my parole successfully). I left the courtroom loaded on Xanax and Methadone and remember thinking that I am just glad to be able to go back home and not jail. I wasn't considering the inevitable fact that I was still getting high and would never be able to adhere to the conditions of my probation. I was arrested again for (PWID) Possession with Intent to distribute CDS I (2 counts), CDS II, CDS III, and CDS IV. On the 2nd day of being in jail, an investigator with the District Attorney's office came to see me and informed me that they were seeking a multi-bill under the Habitual Offender Act and that I was looking at 15 years to Life in prison, which meant that I would serve a minimum of 15 years and go up for parole every year after I served the 15, but was not guaranteed to make parole until the board deemed fit or until I died whichever came first. I went back to my cell and basically just decided to give up. I seriously thought maybe this was my purpose in life.

I started attending AA meetings that they offered in jail, not necessarily because I wanted to go, but more so because I wanted out of my cell. The first few meetings were pretty routine. I didn't hear anything that I was willing to receive and was completely close-minded. Then one day this guy comes in and shares his story which sounded a lot like my own, but his story included instances of hope and faith, where as mine did not. I had lost both. He really inspired me to not give up. Six months down the line, I was still attending meetings while I was awaiting court proceedings. I thought, "What do I have to lose?" I was completely honest with my attorney and told her exactly what I wanted to do with myself, where I wanted to go in life, and what I felt I had to offer to society if I was ever given that chance again. She believed in me. That was a huge change for me, because no one, other than my mom, ever believed in me before. She said she would help me if I was willing to give back. She later told me that she was a recovering alcoholic and that she understood what I had been going through. This lady represented me for free. She took my case up until my last trial date and was able to have all but one charge dropped. That charge was even reduced to a misdemeanor possession of marijuana. I was released the next day and immediately checked myself into substance abuse treatment at Briscoe-Cenikor in Lake Charles, LA.

After a couple weeks, I called a local Oxford House, got an interview set up, and was accepted. Six days after being in Oxford House Prien, I was picked up in the front yard for an incident that happened 2 years prior only to find that I had only recently been indicted on a felony charge of Possession of CDS II (Methadone). I was able to bond out because the actual incident happened prior to my being placed on probation. I was released on bond and went back to Oxford House. Still facing the consequences of my drug use, I made many court appearances in my first 9 months of living in Oxford. Only this time, I was clean. I had some humility in my life at this point and was willing to practice some spiritual principles in the face of adversity. Living in an Oxford House and working a program of recovery went a long way with the court and the CDS II was dismissed.

Oxford House has been a life-saver for me. It has given me a sense of self-worth and helped me to understand and value my purpose in life. I've gone from illegally sponsoring prostitutes to spiritually sponsoring fellow alcoholics and addicts; from a gang member to a leader in the Oxford House and recovery community; and from a low-down junkie to a recovering addict with 20 months of sobriety. I have been a state officer with the Louisiana State Association for nine months and am currently serving as the State Chairperson for Oxford House of Louisiana. As I said before, I owe Oxford House everything and whenever I am called upon by Oxford I will never say no, because when I was in need, Oxford House was truly there for me. Thank You, Oxford House, for believing in me when I didn't even believe in myself!!! Raymond "J.J." Virella III – Sobriety Date: 11/27/11

### **JASON B.**

Subconsciously, I had given up on the notion that I would ever remain clean and sober. I thought I would just use drugs until it killed me. Fortunately for me, I was arrested and that never happened. After 15 years of off and on use (Mostly on), I decided to enter inpatient treatment for the second time. I had tried to attack my addiction from every possible angle. For the longest time I was convinced that I could beat that monster.

After all these years, I finally surrendered and was ready to make a change. I went to inpatient treatment for 28 days, graduated, moved into an Oxford house, attended 90 meetings in 90 days, and attended nine months of outpatient/relapse prevention. I was given some great tools in treatment and the individuals in the houses offered me the best support system in the world. Without the steps I took I am convinced I would be dead or in prison for the

rest of my life. Rehabilitation was good but those in the Oxford Houses helped save my life. They offered me love and support when I was trying to figure out how to love myself.

Today I am very grateful for the life, friends and co-workers I have in sobriety. I fight hard for those wanting to find a new way to live, just as many others fought hard for me. My life continues to be richly rewarded by the service work I do in the recovery field. As a result of all the above, all take another 24. My name is Jason Bliss and thanks for allowing me to share my story.

### **JESSIE**

My name is Jessie, and I'm an alcoholic. I remember having my first tastes of alcohol at 5 years old; by the time I was 12, I was a full-fledged alcoholic. I grew up in the small town of Toledo, Oregon. I lived there for 40 years. Through the years, I had 2 kids, a few failed marriages, 4 DUI's, jail time, and numerous medical detoxes. I lost many, many jobs, because I could not stay out of the booze long enough to pull off a shift. Everybody in my family had lost all respect for me. My kids wanted nothing to do with me, and were embarrassed by me. I was the town drunk, lost in the black hole of alcoholism, and just wanted to die. Not one of those things kept me sober, not even pregnancy.

In November of 2009, I almost died from alcohol poisoning; I was in the hospital for 4 days, in a coma. I thought I was only there overnight. After the 4 days, I went to a detox facility in Eugene, and from there, to a women's sober living house in Lincoln City. While at the sober living house, I was introduced to my first AA meeting, where I soaked up the steps and traditions, and loved my sober life. In January of 2011, with 14 months sober, I left my hometown and my family to come to Portland to start my new sober life and to go to school. I had arranged to stay with a good friend who opened up her house to me and, long story short, she drank, I isolated, neglected my program, and inevitably I relapsed. I got sober again May 22, 2011.

On June 1, 2011, with barely a week sober, I moved into my first Oxford House. I have been in Oxford ever since. I was asked to move into another house to be a core member recently, and I jumped at the chance to get another house on its feet. I love Oxford and everything it stands for. I love being the welcoming face when a new member moves in, and being there for support for those new in recovery. Without Oxford, I know I would not be where I am today, with over 2 years sober. I have made many lifelong friendships here, and am so grateful every day and for the accountability and support the Oxford community offers me. Oxford gave me my life back.

### **JOHN B.**

I grew up in a very-drug addicted, abusive home. I do not remember when I was first introduced to drugs. They were just always around. I remember living in constant fear, never knowing when violence would break out. I carried this fear with me, day in and day out. Once I realized the drugs could take away this fear I quickly became a fan.

By the time high school rolled around, drugs became my life; I was constantly searching for ways and means to get more. I bounced in and out of friends' houses; parents would soon catch on to my addiction and kick me out. Who wanted a dope fiend in their house anyway? I lost all trust of friends and I had no family to turn to. My life became one big downward spiral. Rehabs and psych hospitals became my new norm. Each time being put back on my own I would quickly return to active addiction.

In August 2011 I was sentenced to six months in a treatment facility. I was tired and decided to pay attention for a change. I began seeing the patterns of my self-destruction and, for the first time, I wanted a better life for myself, but I knew that if I went back on my own I would be back. I kept hearing talk about Oxford Houses and how they were a place of support, structure and accountability. I knew I needed structure and accountability; it was the one thing I had never tried. , I set up a phone interview and was accepted. I could not believe that these guys were going to allow me into their home. I was excited, scared, and hopeful. Upon my release I moved directly into Oxford House Beacon Hill.

In the home I found love and understanding for the first time in my life. The guys knew me; they shared my story and understood my struggles. They encouraged me to work a program of recovery, to grow, to be a better person. I

was home. I quickly realized the true meaning of family for the first time. I was beginning to come out of my frightened shell. I did not have to be afraid any more. If I needed support I had seven people to turn to. If I began isolating, I had seven people more than happy to pull me out of it. At our first chapter meeting, I realized how big my new family actually was. I not only have guys in my house to turn to; I had everyone in Oxford. It was a great feeling. These people had so much hope and love. I saw something in their eyes. I began seeing changes in myself. I began attending unity events and helping with presentations. Being of service and giving back what was freely given to me in my Oxford House community has become a huge part of my recovery. On August 25, 2013 I celebrated two years away from active addiction. I owe a great amount of gratitude for the structure, love, and accountability that Oxford has given me. Thank you for being a part of my recovery. John B. San Antonio

### **JON EDWARDS**

When I walked through the front door of an Oxford House in Colorado Springs, I had no idea that I had taken the first arduous step down a long road. After years of battling alcohol and two DUI's, I had reached the end of my rope and knew that I needed to make significant changes in my life. I tried to stop drinking on my own many times, with little or no success. I even relapsed out of Oxford House, but knew that I had to do whatever it took to get back in and continue my recovery. It became quickly evident that the Oxford House structure was one that would hold me accountable for my actions, and would make me a part of a close-knit family. With this came a sense of belonging and an awareness that we were all there to help each other through our addictions. For the first time in my life I felt like I had a strong foundation, and, as time passed, I found that I had something to offer newer members.

As I took on more responsibility within Oxford House, I began to feel great pride in what I was doing. This was big for me, considering that years of drinking had stripped away my feelings of self worth. Being given the chance to take on new jobs and positions put me back in a forward-thinking frame of mind. With some time under my belt, I began to make amends to the people I had hurt during the numbing years of putting alcohol before everything else.

When the time came for me to move out of Oxford House, I left with a strong set of tools to continue in my sobriety. In fact, my leaving was strictly physical. I still stay in touch with my house, and work with the state coordinator on occasion. It is my obligation to help other struggling with addiction, as I had support from others when I was struggling. In the small amount of time I have been back on my own, I have made more progress than I had in years combined. I know that each person is different, and that there are many avenues one can take in fighting addiction. For me, Oxford House was the answer that I desperately needed. Jon Edwards – Oxford House Ft. Carson Alumni

### **JONI C.**

I have been asked to share my story in the hopes that others suffering with addiction to either alcohol or drugs can relate in some way, and come to believe that there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

My story is not much different from anyone else's. I grew up with parents who were both alcoholics. My father was a functioning one and my mother was a party girl. I spent a lot of my childhood being shipped off to other family members. I married right out of high school, and started having a family, looking for the love and security I had not felt as a child. Life was good for about 9 years and then we started moving to different states for "career opportunities" for my husband. During this time my security was shaken; loneliness set in, and trouble with my oldest son started. I had always said that I never wanted to be like my parents but, unfortunately, the bottle became my most precious friend.

After 24 yrs of marriage, we divorced and I went on an adventure that did not end for 13 years. I had alcohol-related seizures and been hospitalized 3 times for problems related to alcohol consumption; the last one resulting my being in a coma for over 2 months and their almost pulling the plug. I had mastered the art of repeated DWI arrests until I finally got into a 4-car accident on an interstate and received my 4th DWI. While sitting in the back of that car, I had decided that when I got out of those cuffs, I would put an end to it all. Instead, I went into jail, prayed to God, and dealt with the mess I had made for myself. I went into the ATP program they offered in jail, graduated from the program and met another inmate who told me about Oxford House. I applied and was accepted to Oxford House Candelaria.

From the first day I stepped into my new home, I knew that I was finally in a place where there was security, support

and wonderful open arms to help me rebuild my shattered life. With the help of these understanding women I got re-introduced to the rooms of AA and now listen and appreciate what I can learn in them. Coming into Oxford House was something God put into my path and I am so very grateful for it.

### **JOSSIE B.**

For seventeen years I used meth and lived in chaos. I had lost everything...my family, my soul, my desire to live. I left home at the age of 15, and spent most of my adult life either in jail or too high to remember much of anything that happened. Eventually I ended up in prison, and even that didn't keep me clean and sober. After countless treatment centers, followed by countless traumatic events (including the death of my little brother from a drug overdose), and losing custody of my child, I felt desperate and hopeless enough to make a change. I went to treatment and from there...directly to Cannon Oxford House.

Today I have a life I could never have imagined. I have almost 3 years of sobriety. I graduated with my first college degree; I have my child back with me; I am off of probation; I have relationships that matter to me, and, mostly, I have a life of value. I think that is the most important thing Oxford has given me – a life that I value. This keeps me sober. I still live in Oxford and will continue to live in Oxford. I am a part of something that is bigger than me, and I have found a place where I belong. I am the Chapter 3 Chair and will continue to give my time and energy to Oxford. After all, all that I have today is a direct result of my recovery without relapse. CANNON OXFORD HOUSE!! Jossie Brown

### **KAITLYN W.**

My name is Kaitlyn Williams. I am from Springboro, Ohio. I live in the Steeds Run Oxford House in Raleigh, NC. This is my story of my addiction and how it led to my recovery. November 28, 2012 was the day I realized that I can't live this way anymore. Two excruciating long years had gone by since my addiction whispered its first words into my ears, "Why not?" I remember it like it was yesterday. Clearly in my memories, I remember that moment of complete serenity and peace when I sniffed that first line. April 28, 2012, my 18th birthday, was when I first tried heroin. At the time I didn't know what it was that I was doing. I believed that it was a safe, non-addictive powder called "Opana" – similar to a Vicodin. Little did I know, it was raw heroin.

In the beginning of my addiction, things weren't bad. I graduated from high school with good grades. I had a part-time job, a car, savings. Everything was going well until my use went from twice a week to every other day. Then, within just 2-3 months, I was withdrawing \$200 out of my savings every 3 days to get my next fix. Even at this point in time, I didn't realize what I was doing. I figured that this was okay and "normal" to do. The way my brain worked was, "Oh, it's not a harmful chemical drug like meth or crack. No dangerous effects on the physical body like losing your hair or teeth. It's okay." It wasn't until the beginning of 2012 that I realized I had a problem. I went through weeks of withdrawals, until I got all my tax return checks that lasted me a good few months. All the days and weeks I dealt with it went right out the window. All that mattered was that I was high, was happy with my boyfriend, and felt good about myself. Mentally, physically, emotionally, I felt good about life in general. The months of October and November were the worst months of my addiction. With no money, no job, and continuing to hide my addiction from my friends and family, my addiction took full control. I stole money and things from my dad, manipulated money out of friends and family members, and lied about what I was doing away from the house for hours, sometimes days, until it got to the point where I couldn't take it anymore.

My boyfriend went to a rehab center called A Forever Recovery up in Battle Creek Michigan. He went through the detox treatment and once he got to the rehab center, the first thing he did was call me to let me know what a great place this was and how I needed to come there. I was still using heavily when he was in detox and he told me, "I cannot stay with you if you are going to continue to use. I'm done with this awful drug. Please, come here and do this with me." I knew what I had to do. He was the only person I had left who really truly cared about me and wanted to be with me. And I could no longer live with myself in these conditions. So it came the time for me to confess and tell my family and friends what is going on.

On November 29th, I packed a month's supply of clothes and made my trip from Dayton, OH to Battle Creek, MI. It was a long and difficult journey. I went through detox which was great. The staff at Tranquility was fantastic and really cared about how you felt and did whatever they could to make the detox process easier. A Forever Recovery

is one of the best treatment facilities I have ever seen. They have personal one-on-one sessions to tackle what the underlining effects of your addiction are. They use the MRT (Moral Recognition Therapy) book to help you better understand your addiction and they work with you on the Twelve Steps to help you better prepare for the real world.

On January 25, 2013, my boyfriend and I graduated from the A Forever Recovery program. And through that program we came to realize that, in order for us to stay clean, we needed to keep active in our recovery. First off, we needed to relocate. We had met someone in the rehab who was from Raleigh, NC. He had nothing but positive things to say about the city – wonderful weather, wonderful people, jobs, and lots of recovery. So, we both decided to call different sober living houses and that is when we came across Oxford House. It was actually the first sober livings we applied to and we were both immediately accepted.

Between January 26-27, we made our long journey from Michigan, to Ohio, and then to North Carolina. I will admit, having to change everything was very stressful and scary. We both got settled in our new homes. I wasn't very comfortable in my home at first. It felt like it didn't have the right people in it. But that didn't take long to change. Within the second day of living in an Oxford House, I had a full-time job – a job that I am still currently working at and enjoy very much. Although the first couple of months are the hardest for a newly-recovering addict, this house really helped me get through it. By having boundaries of what is okay and what's not okay, I feel safe here. People make mistakes sometimes but we can also work with them to help them improve. If I was feeling a certain way or feeling down or even feeling happy, I could share it with the house and they would be there to listen. If I needed help, someone would be there for me. I was never alone.

Going to an Oxford House was the best decision, next to getting treatment for my disease, which I have made in my entire life. I feel like I have control over my life again. I'm slowly starting to feel like a human being. Over the past 6 months that I have been living here, this house has changed so much and grown into a real family. It makes me sad whenever someone moves out to be on their own, but I know that one day, I will be in their shoes as well. I'm coming up on 9 months clean here on September 5, 2013 and every month that goes by and I stay clean is a wonderful victory. I would have never guessed that life could be this good clean and sober. I wouldn't have it any other way. And now that I am clean and sober, attending meetings regularly, and working, I can dream of a brighter tomorrow. I can actually plan a future without an awful substance standing in my way. But I always have to remember, in the toughest of times, when I feel like I can't make it, I have to tell myself, "Just take one day at a time. It will be okay" – because it will be. You just can't go down the same dark path. Taking that first drug will not solve anything. Taking action will. There is hope for me and for any recovering addict.

#### **KANDY**

It was about April 2010 in Seattle, Washington when I found out I was 19 weeks pregnant. I was a full-blown addict and raging alcoholic. I was referred to an OB doctor who specializes in treating addicted mothers. At 20 weeks I decided to keep the baby girl I was carrying. I went through a few Drug Treatment Programs during the rest of my pregnancy. However, I was unable to abstain from using drugs even for my baby and could not stop using any longer than two months at a time. My OB visits were hard because I had to tell my doctor about my continued drug use during this high-risk pregnancy. At six days overdue I gave birth to Ailani Ceceliz Elizabeth at Swedish Hospital in Seattle on August 10, 2010 at 6:14 am. I knew there would be a Child Protective Services referral and that they would take her from me. I received two visits from a Child Protection Services (CPS) caseworker. I had no choice but to voluntarily give my daughter up because of my drug and CPS history. After three days of bonding and breastfeeding, I gave my baby to CPS temporarily. I went home and resumed outpatient treatment. I was allowed two visits a week with my baby, Ailani, but I kept relapsing.

Two months later, while my baby was living in central Washington with my sister, I had finally had enough. I was miserable; all I wanted to do was to stop using and to reunite with my daughter. I asked my counselor for an inpatient referral and was given a bed date at a long-term inpatient facility for mothers with children at Casita Del Rio. I was admitted on October 25<sup>th</sup>; it was a life changing experience and I am forever grateful to the staff and counselors. During my stay, an Oxford House panel of women came to the facility to educate us about Oxford Living. I loved the concept and the way Oxford Houses were peer run and peer supported, so I made a decision to live in an Oxford House with my baby upon graduation.

I was in treatment for seven months and was discharged the day Ailani was supposed to be placed with me. I learned a lot in treatment and was determined to make a good life for Ailani and me. I already had a sponsor and was working a strong recovery program. My CPS caseworker recommended that I stay in Yakima, and told me that if I got into recovery-oriented housing, I would then be reunited with my baby girl. I had nowhere safe to go so I was dropped off at the Union Gospel Mission. I stayed there 12 days, attending 12-Step Meetings, church, and working the 12-steps with my sponsor.

I was accepted into the Chestnut Oxford House on May 30, 2011, and moved in June 2<sup>nd</sup> with seven and a half months clean. I got into an intensive outpatient treatment program and stayed in full compliance. I have since then graduated from all phases of treatment and I have always had negative UA's throughout my intensive inpatient and outpatient treatment. After a month of living in Oxford House, my visits with Ailani resumed and then I was allowed to see her even more. Ailani was voted in as an Oxford House member on September 9, 2011. I now have a loving relationship with all four of my children, and I am building relationships with my family that was damaged by my addiction. After 20 years of being lost, I have finally found my way and Oxford House is our home. Ailani and I are happy here and are very close with all our roommates. Ailani took her first steps in this house.

I had never known loving, trusting relationships with women and I came to find my best friends in the Oxford House. My roommates and I are very close, and we live and breathe Recovery. We support each other; attend meetings together on a regular basis, and share holidays and special events together. I am very proactive in my recovery because I believe in the Oxford House principles with my whole heart. Oxford House has saved my life and given me a chance to be a mother. I am now blessed with 15 and a half-month's clean and I jump at any opportunity to educate anyone who is curious about Oxford House Inc. Since October, I have been responsible for the Oxford House Re-Entry Program for those completing treatment. I am also a part of the Oxford House Panel at the same treatment facility that helped me. I am grateful to be a part of Oxford House Inc., and Ailani and I are grateful that Oxford House is a part of our story. Kandy Lepe, Oxford House Member

#### **LESLIE R.**

Four and a half years ago, my addiction to alcohol had reached the point it does with a lot of people. I had put together ten years of sobriety previously but it took six years of further research to find my way back into AA. I began drinking because I couldn't stop thinking, thinking that I could stop drinking and killing myself in the process. By the time I landed in rehab there was nothing left. No friends, no family, no job and little if any hope of turning that around, again! Two weeks into treatment, I attended a presentation for the Oxford House because my counselor made me. She firmly reminded me that I had no other options left. I was homeless at this point and this was the last avenue I had available based on my history. At 50 years old I knew what I had to do. I was ready to pursue my recovery with a vengeance and, while I had my misgivings about moving into a sober living environment (I had done the halfway house and transitional living thing before), what appealed to me about the Oxford House concept was the simplicity. All I had to do was not drink or drug, pay my equal share, do a weekly chore, attend the regular house meeting and hold whatever position the house assigned. It was pretty much a no brainer.

What I received was way more than I can describe. I became not only a part of the Del Mar Oxford House in Aurora but I also became part of a support system that models what REAL recovery looks like. During the three years I lived in the Del Mar house, I held every position in the house, participated in the monthly Housing and Chapter meetings and am now the Chair of South Chapter of Oxford House Colorado. I have a sponsor who is all about service and the AA traditions and here I have experienced an actual working model of what that represents! I consider being a part of the Oxford Houses an honor and a privilege. I have since moved out on my own and my continued affiliation as an Oxford Houses alumna is a necessary part of my on-going journey in recovery. The greatest take-away in all this is that Oxford House allowed me to participate in my own recovery process as an adult. Holding myself accountable and responsible for all that that encompasses, I can attribute to my being part of an Oxford House. Leslie Reis

#### **MATT H.**

My name is Matt H, and I suffer from the disease of addiction when I choose to. I'm grateful to a loving and caring higher power for that choice today. In exactly one month (my higher power willing), I will have lived in the Morehead Oxford House in Greensboro, NC for a whole year. What a year it has been! A year ago today I was

sitting in a treatment facility wondering where on earth I was going to go next- "lost" is the only word I know to explain how I felt at the time. I was homeless and penniless, with no direction and no hope. I can remember thinking, "How on earth did I end up here?"

I was born into an upper middle class suburban family, raised in the country clubs of Charlotte, North Carolina; and never really wanted for much of anything material. From the outside looking in, we were the perfect family. From the inside looking out, we were dysfunctional and jaded at best. I can remember feeling very different from my peers almost every waking moment at a very young age. Until a few years ago, I thought I was so different, I'd never find anyone that would understand – much less befriend me. After a somewhat unhappy childhood that included sexual abuse, psychological trauma, and enough Ritalin to kill a race horse, I finally graduated from high school by the skin of my teeth and went to college with every intention of never looking back. I had already been finding ways to change the way I felt from a young age, but in college I found hard drugs and alcohol and fell in love with how they made me feel.

My addiction progressed quickly. By the end of the second semester of my freshman year, I had a 0.0 GPA and was drinking and drugging daily. Weekends were spent in and out of blackouts. It's a miracle I never caught any legal charges, save for a handful of speeding tickets – Lord knows I deserved them. The next six years involved two more attempts at school, countless jobs that I lost either directly or indirectly related to my addiction, a lot of money made either legitimately or illegitimately, a lot of money lost, a lot of property and money stolen (mine or other people's), physical sickness, traumatic amounts of emotional pain, loss of self worth, estranged relationships with most of my friends and family, the list goes on and on. I lost or gave away almost every part of myself.

On June 2, 2012, I hit rock bottom. I had been stealing my parent's credit cards to continue my habit(s), and they were cutting me off for good. There were warrants being filed for my arrest by my own parents, who wouldn't even claim me as their son anymore. At the exact moment I got off of the phone with my mother telling me what was about to happen, I distinctly remember thinking to myself, "I can't go on living- with or without the drugs." I attempted to kill myself, failed, and passed out on the floor of my apartment. The next day I called my parents and asked if they would send me to treatment, and they reluctantly agreed.

I was nearing the end of treatment, just grateful to still be alive, but terrified of what was going to happen after I left. I had zero confidence as it related to my outlook on life, much less my sobriety. It was suggested to me that I interview at an Oxford House. I had no idea what an Oxford House was, and by nature I'm not a fan of taking suggestions, so needless to say I had low expectations. I needed somewhere to go though, and Oxford House was my only viable option. I interviewed and was accepted into what is often referred to as "THE" Oxford House in Greensboro (Morehead Oxford House), and will forever be grateful that my higher power placed me exactly where I needed to be.

When I moved into the Morehead House, I was scared, alone, and had nothing but the clothes on my back. I was welcomed by open arms by complete strangers. After I was accepted, I felt something I hadn't felt in years – hope. It still gives me chills to this day thinking about it. Within a few weeks of moving in, I was elected to be the House Treasurer. Me! The same one who just a few months before had stolen money from my own family, managing thousands of dollars for a group of people who barely knew me. They showed me in a loving and caring way that we all have a past but it doesn't have to define us. When they told me "Welcome home, Matt", it touched my heart in a way words cannot express. I needed that hope and still do today.

Since then, I've held every house officer position, grown as a person, been gainfully employed, but, most importantly, I've stayed sober. I've also had the opportunity to serve the Oxford House organization in many different capacities, most recently as the Treasurer of Chapter 14. While I've lived here, the dynamics of the house have changed quite a bit but the loving and caring spirit that was here when I moved in has prevailed. My housemates are my brothers. I would do anything for any one of them. They are my family, and I love each and every one of them with my entire heart. It's an honor to be able to be a part of their journey in recovery, and to be able to watch them trudge this road of happy destiny with me. Every day I learn something new from each of them, and even though I have more clean time than them, and have been in the house longer, they continue to show me how to live. Every day when I come home, no matter what is going on with me, I know that I can come home to exactly what I need. I recently celebrated a year of recovery, and at midnight on my anniversary we held a 12-step meeting here at the house with just the housemates. I'm so blessed to have so much love around me all the time.



Living in this house has been the cornerstone of my recovery and the most rewarding experience of my life. I no longer am lost. I no longer am alone. I no longer feel helpless. I have hope. I am no longer different. I have a family again. I am loved. My needs have been met. None of this would be possible without Oxford House. I just wish this wonderful opportunity of self-help recovery was available to everyone struggling with the disease of addiction.

### MIKE

I'm an addict named Mike. I have been clean now for over 8 years. I owe this in a large part to the Oxford House I found early in my recovery. I am eternally grateful and hope that more people are able to get the opportunity I had.

After spending half my life getting loaded I had reached a point of no return. Waking up in the ICU after another overdose left me facing the reality that I could not keep using and live. My life was such a mess that I was surprised to find that I actually did want to live. I had no choice but to seek help and try to find a new way of life. I was fortunate that I had the assistance of a treatment program to help get me stabilized and started in recovery. While in that program I was directed to two programs that became the foundation of my new life. I needed to learn how to not use drugs. Narcotics Anonymous would be the recovery program that showed me I didn't ever have to use again, just for today. I also needed to learn how to live the life of recovery. I am not sure if the little bits of wisdom I could get in an hour meeting each day and reading some literature would have been enough. What I needed was people to show me how to live recovery and hold me accountable. I found that kind of guidance and support in Oxford House.

There were only 3 men's Oxford Houses and one women's' Oxford House in our state at the time that I left rehab. I was lucky to be able to move into one on the day I left rehab. I had seen people leave rehab with nowhere safe to go and relapse the same day. I saw them wind up dead or in prison or lost back to the bleak existence of a using addict. I learned that the odds are stacked against us in early recovery and the consequences terrible. In that Oxford House, though, I saw guys who were staying clean and sober and working successful programs of recovery. Their example and support made it much easier for me to find and develop my own path in recovery. In the rooms of NA, I see many new people trying to get clean come and go. While it is true that not everyone who moves into an Oxford House stays clean and sober, I am quite clear that that the success rate is far, far higher than the general population of addicts and alcoholics trying to find help.

Living in an Oxford House was an opportunity for me to learn from people who were successfully making a new life for themselves. I faced the same kinds of challenges they did and they were able to show me what worked. I learned to pay rent and bills on time, how to balance a checkbook, how to keep my home clean and orderly. These may seem like simple things but, for me and many others early in recovery, they were skills that had been lost or never existed. I learned firsthand the importance of taking responsibility for my life and my recovery. I saw that my housemates who worked recovery programs had lives worth living and I wanted that. I followed their example in attending meetings, doing stepwork, and being of service to others. Being responsible for running our house ourselves meant that I had to do my fair share and work well with others. These skills continue to help me improve my life and stay clean.

After living in that house for a little while, some of the guys from my house and the other two men's houses were working on a project to open a new house. I had learned that each of the houses that we had here were the result of the slow, steady efforts of the members of the existing houses. Some of them had found the time and motivation to seek out new houses to rent and organize the existing houses to save money until they could start a new house. This was a slow process with much trial and error. Knowing that there was always a list of dozens of men and women hoping to get a spot in an Oxford House, I began to help with these efforts. Over the next few years I was able, with the help of other Oxford House members, to open a number of houses and contribute to other new houses in our area. I do believe that every new bed we can offer in a new Oxford House helps to save the lives of many, many addicts and alcoholics for many years to come. I am grateful for Oxford House and hope I can continue to be a part of it, even years after living with all those great recovering addicts and alcoholics.

## NEEV

I never used to do the dishes. They would pile up in the sink, covered with half-eaten food and sugary goo. Every couple of weeks I would have a day of sobriety and furiously attempt to restore order to my apartment. Several times when the dishes, trash, and empty bottles would pile up, there would be flies everywhere. They were a mild nuisance but I never thought that perhaps it's because of the amount of filth that was accumulating around me. I would begin to load the dishes into the dishwasher and when I got to the bottom of the sink, sitting there in a dark puddle of food sludge, there were maggots. I found this disgusting. Yet somehow, after cleaning up my apartment, I would slowly allow the crap to pile up around me again. The only way I managed to ignore it was because I was either high or drunk.

Today there are no maggots in my sink. I don't have a family of insects buzzing around my head as I sit half-conscious in front of the TV. Today I sit with a group of five roommates enjoying movies together. These roommates are also my friends. The dishes are neatly piled up in the dish rack or put away in the cabinets. The trash is taken out when the trash can is full, voluntarily. We all do our part to make sure our house is a pleasant place to maintain our sobriety.

I commonly say that today I owe my sobriety half to AA and the other half to Oxford House. I have been living in an Oxford House for a little over a year and a half now. I plan on moving out this coming December and feel that now is a time for more growth. The only reason I feel confident to do so is because my sobriety and living skills have been well established due to the structure of living in this house. I take pride in our house. I don't consider my chores to be a task to get through but a responsibility that I owe to my roommates and myself. It's amazing how life seems to be so much easier when you have an orderly place to lay your head at night and don't have to worry about waking up to unknown chaos in the morning. In my time in this house I have lived with over nineteen different people. Seven of them have since relapsed – two of them are in jail, and one has died of a drug overdose. It just goes to show what we are up against in our fight against this disease. However, ten of them are still sober today and many have moved on from Oxford House to happy lives in sober homes of their own.

It hasn't always been easy living here but I hope to look back on this period of my life as one of the most important to my well-being. I honestly think that when I move out I will miss our weekly meetings and service to the house but I hope to remain active in Oxford as a house alumna and continue to contribute to the growth of the organization. I won't wake up to coffee brewing for me that has been made by my early rising roommates upstairs or enjoy gardening in the house yard with my friend downstairs. However, I hope to swing by and enjoy some fellowship with the house members, sitting on the porch. But, when I move on from Oxford, I'm pretty sure that I'll do the dishes and won't have to worry about maggots in the sink.

## NICK I.

My name is Nick I. and I am an addict. I was born in Charlotte, NC but I was raised in a small town called Shelby. I was part of a wonderful family with an older brother and both parents who raised me. I was the child that lived off of wants, not needs, and had many manipulation tactics to always pursue what I wanted. The early years of my life I loved sports from soccer to football and I used that as an escape from everyday life. As I grew up in what I thought was a shadow of an over-achieving brother, what I really lacked was my own sense of confidence in what I was accomplishing. For the most part, I did really well in school, got good grades, and behaved in an appropriate manner until school let out. In my middle school years, as I entered the seventh grade, my father encountered a brain tumor the size of a softball; through surgery, they removed it all but during his recovery he had a stroke that paralyzed his left side, keeping him out of the house for a year in a rehabilitation hospital. During this time, my older brother was the role model who raised me. Not to say that it was all bad but I added to my manipulation tactics and I saw my addiction taking off at this point. I continued playing sports but throughout my whole day it was all about how was I going to be able to use and that's all I focused on.

My brother went off to school and that left me to fend by myself with no respect for authority, no sense of work ethic, dedication, or commitment. I changed many groups of friends depending on my needs at the time, using and abusing anything in my path. Throughout my years I saw many patterns of trouble and, as soon as I turned 16, I remember starting the legal trouble. By the time I turned 18, I had three criminal convictions; I had been to three different programs for drugs, and found myself on the brink of ruining anything I had going for me. I had some

glimpses of recovery but never caught on and remembered thinking that I wasn't like anyone I had met. As my addiction progressed, I continued down the degrading path until I finally hit a bottom and asked for some help.

After watching my brother get clean, I realized that I could live a different way. I went to treatment and after completing it, I heard all this talk about Oxford House so I decided to give it a try. After interviewing and getting accepted, I had my mind set on attending court in a different area. The house told me that I did not need to stay in the old environment but I failed to listen and I used as a result. Catching some more pain I decided to listen and I moved into Oxford House Walker where I started to connect with others, build a network, and gain some hope. I started to believe in myself through the positive attitudes I got from my roommates in the house and others in my network. I moved houses to where my brother lived in Oxford House Morehead. As we grew closer as brothers, we showed inspiration to the other members in the Oxford House as we learned to stay clean and develop some healthy relationships. I took some positions in the house and I learned some very valuable tools that I still use today.

The responsibilities I learned through Oxford House have translated to a very strong work ethic that has carried over to those around me. Realizing the need for service, I decided to take some service commitments and become more involved by becoming Chapter Chairperson but mainly helping out wherever needed. I stayed in Oxford House Morehead for 18 months and transitioned out on my own where I still run a household based on Oxford House principles, holding true to everything I learned. Today I have been clean for over 27 months based on the strong foundation that I learned through Oxford House. I am currently a State Housing Service Representative for the Central-West region of North Carolina and help out in expanding the Oxford House name wherever I can. I am grateful for what Oxford House has taught me and I tell people that Oxford House was one of the best decisions I have made in my life and the single, most valuable thing I have done for my recovery.

#### **PATRICK G.**

A few years ago (as I was emerging from the dark side of a major depressive episode), it was pointed out to me that I was still in isolation mode. There was an AA Meeting less than a five minute walk away. I would not / could not / did not attend with any frequency. A friend suggested Oxford House. Then my Sponsor strongly encouraged me to make the move. He reminded me that 'If nothing changes...then nothing changes'. I believe there is a 'rawness' that comes from Ego deflation in depth – A 'Re-Freshing' of Spirit. Not comfortable...but vital and valuable.

Upon moving in, I was oftentimes elated to feel that I was re-learning many lessons from my infant days in recovery. And lots of new stuff too! What Oxford has provided me was time (as Paul Molloy so eloquently stated in our now legendary 60 Minute interview). And Community! I think the characters I've met in Recovery are some of the most interesting, talented and loving people on the face of the Earth! And to be able to interact closely with the Ladies and Gents of Oxford is quite a special gift indeed!

So...thank you Paul for all you did. Thank you all - for being ~\*~. Namaste.

#### **RALPH MARTINEZ**

Hi. I would like to introduce myself and tell you my life story. I was born into a normal family; my dad worked full time and supported his family. He did not drink, smoke or cuss. My mom took care of the house and I had a pretty good childhood. I was a bit of a rebel, and found at an early age that I enjoyed drinking and that alcohol allowed me to be a party animal. I joined the Army in the mid-seventies and had a great career but I continued to drink and enjoyed my after-work high. I got out of the service in 1982 with an honorable discharge and many citations to my credit. I got a great job right after I got out of the Army. I worked in the telecommunications field for 30 some years, all this time enjoying my after work drinking and partying. In 1985, I married a beautiful woman; we had three kids and had a good life. I was still enjoying my drinking after hours,,,,,Are you seeing a pattern yet?

Well, as time went on, I found myself under stress at work, trouble with my home life and I started to rely more on the bottle to relieve my worries. This is after 30 years of me controlling the bottle and, guess what, it started to control me. I found myself not being able to get through even a half a day without getting numb with alcohol. It got worse and worse. I tried to cold turkey it many times, and I give my wife credit for putting up with me during these times. But after getting over the withdrawals, I would pick it back up. My life was going to hell; everything was falling apart on me. On September 21 2011, I finally lost it. I was going to lose my job; I was fighting with the wife

and I said, “fuck it,” I was going to end the pain. I went into my bedroom, opened my gun safe loaded my 9 mm handgun, and was going to commit suicide. While I was in the bedroom, my wife and son came in; at that point I blacked out. The next thing I remember was my son saying, “Dad you do not want to do this.” Well I put the gun down and walked out of the house still intent on killing myself. I picked up a bottle of vodka and drove north intent on jumping off the Rio Grande Gorge Bridge. Well, I got as far as Espanola and decided the trip was going to take too long so I stopped and picked up a bottle of sleeping pills and that was going to be the end. I drove back to Albuquerque; drove to my home. The house was full of people so I parked outside and downed the bottle of pills with the last of a fifth of vodka, crawled in the back of my truck and waited to meet my maker.

Well, a bit later I heard a knock on the window, and two policemen asked me what was going on. I told them I wanted to be dead but I guess sleeping pills from Walgreens did not do the trick. I was transported to the hospital; I do not remember much, but the doctor came in at 6 am and said I could leave. During that time a police officer came in and gave me a restraining letter so now I could not go home. I had no place to go so I turned to a long-time friend and he picked me up and allowed me to stay at his house. We talked and decided that I needed to go to MATS to sober up. I sobered up at MATS for a week or so then was admitted to Turquoise Lodge. I was there for a week when I was told that the police were there to pick me up. Well, to make a long story short, during the time that I had blacked out on Sept 21, I had pointed the gun at my wife and son. I spent 9 weeks in jail, and then was readmitted to Turquoise Lodge.

I learned a lot in rehab and realized how alcohol is a disease. It finally hit me that alcohol was killing me and I needed to stop drinking totally. During the time in rehab, I realized I needed three things to get on with my life: (1) a place to stay after rehab; (2) a vehicle, and finally (3) a job to support myself and family. During my stay at Turquoise, we had three guys who lived in an Oxford House come and give a presentation. And, wow, this is something that I needed after I got out – reasonable rent, an alcohol-free place and all the extras that I would not have to worry about paying extra for. I talked with the guys and they made me feel very comfortable. I set up an appointment and interviewed before I got out of Turquoise. I was accepted and moved into Kirtland house the day I left Turquoise.

I was at this house for 4 months. I spent a month on the couch because the house was full but eventually I got a room with a roommate. After another couple of months, I found out that Oxford was opening another house so I applied for that house. I helped set up the house and eventually became the president of the house. I enjoyed being in the house and I think that I was a good president and kept it running good, but that demon was still there and I did relapse. I realized my problem and left Oxford and admitted myself back into MATS. I sobered up and reapplied to Oxford and was accepted again into the brotherhood.

Today is July 15 2013. I am president of Oxford House Indian School. This place has been a lifesaver. I am enrolled in school and am well on my way to a new career to be a commercial truck driver. My family has accepted me back. My lady sees me every day and, after I complete my schooling and get my career started, we will be getting back together. I really do not think that I would be where I would be today without the support of my family and Oxford House. I have a safe clean sober place to live without the worries of living by myself.

I have seen many people come and go in Oxford. Some make it; some do not. I think that it is up to the individual. If you want to make a change in your life, this is a good place to start, but it is up to you. The last thing I have to say about everything – sobriety, Oxford House and life in general. You have to want it. No one is going to do it for you. It is not easy and that devil will always be there. Be stronger than the evil. Good luck to you and I hope you choose the right path in life. Ralph Martinez, Husband, Father, Grandfather, Recovering alcoholic and DAMNED PROUD OF IT!

#### **SARAH H.**

My name is Sarah H. I grew up in a very dysfunctional family full of addicts. I had started drinking by the age of 6 and started using drugs by the age of 11. Because of all the abuse I endured as a kid, I started prostituting by the age of 13. As a teenager, I had no hope and no place to go. I tried going to high school, but really, “what was high school?” At the age of 15, I began my love affair with needles and my life continued to get worse and worse. I had two kids taken away from me by age 16 and continued to use more and more heavily. When I turned 18, I started going to jail and by the age 21, I had been to jail 18 times. Also, when I turned 21, I had a baby that died because of

my drug use. Because of this I was in jail looking at doing a couple more months and they rolled me up to go to treatment.

For the first time I realized what it was like to be truly cared for and I stayed clean for 6 years after that. I had a beautiful baby boy during this time. And I told myself that I was going to give him the life I never had. I then, after 6 years decided, I could be a 'normy' and I started to drink. I continued to do this for 3 years and was a revolving door in the rooms. I then entered a domestic violent relationship and drank harder and became homeless. I dealt with this for a few months and then entered a DV shelter.

From there I went to a RAP house and from there interviewed at the Ramona Oxford House in Portland Oregon. I got voted in. Needless to say, after living at my house for a little while, some people moved out and my house became dysfunctional. I called my Chapter Chair and told her about all the things that were going on, like people moving their significant others in, selling drugs etc. And the Chapter came in and took over my house. I was the last one standing. I was so grateful the day the Chapter came in and took over my house.

Shortly after that I was offered my own apartment and turned it down because I knew being alone would cause me to relapse. Then I went to a leadership summit for Oxford and learned amazing things on how to be a good leader. While I was at the summit I found out my grandma died and right then I knew my higher power was working for me. Because not only was I with a bunch of people in recovery to help me get through it, but I also wasn't alone. Since then I have helped remold my house into a awesome Oxford House with wonderful women. I am so grateful for Oxford. If it wasn't for Oxford I think I would have relapsed again.

#### **SHELIA L.**

My name is Shelia J. Lloyd. I am a woman in long-term recovery. I started this process on April 15, 2003. I could no longer survive in the belly of the beast. I was broken. I had to find another way to live. They say God helps those who help themselves; I was going to die and I had to do something to save myself. Turning Point was the answer, a 28 day program. Now I had to change people, places and things. I knew that if I did not chose wisely, I would end up back in the belly of the beast; I had to do something different. I knew I must move to North Carolina where I was born to start my life over. So I left everything I knew and I came home to where I was born. Now I had to find a place to live and it had to be a recovery house. Thank God for family. My cousin was in the substance abuse field and she said that Oxford House would be a good place to start. I interviewed at Oxford House North Hills. I was scared but the members of the house made me feel comfortable. I said to myself, this is where I need to be. "Welcome home", they said to me. They said they would love me until I learned to love myself. They said, "Get with the winners." I needed to know everything; I wanted this so badly. Kathleen Gibson, Debi Holt – I went everywhere they went; I learned from those ladies; they were God-sent. I followed them like they were honey and I, the bee.

Since coming to Oxford House, I have held every position in the house and have learned a great deal from those positions. I have learned so much: respect for myself and others; responsibility, holding myself accountable as well as others. I look for the greater things in life that have meaning. I also have a job that has meaning. I work for North Carolina Recovery Support Services helping other recovering addicts; giving back what was so gratefully given to me. I have Lynn Williams to thank for helping. I am in the progress of going back to school. There is so much that Oxford House can help you with; you just have to be willing. At the chapter level, I have been Treasurer and I am Co-chair for Chapter 11 as well as Housing Service Chair.

Without Oxford House, I know I would not be here today; Oxford house saved my life. I have been with and living in Oxford House for ten years. I have lost loved ones and jobs, etc. but I have not found it necessary to take anything that would take me where I do not need to revisit. I am grateful to the God of my understanding and Oxford House for my process. I am grateful that relapse is not part of my story. I have come a long way. Today I can look in the mirror and love what I see, and I treat others as I want to be treated: I love others until they can love themselves. There are no 'big I's' or 'little you's'; we are all equal. Karen McKinnon, thanks for being part of my recovery as well as all the other women in my story. God love you and so do I. A grateful recovering addict named Shelia.

### **SIONE L. KENI III**

I became involved with Oxford House Hawaii in July of 2012. It was the best choice that I have ever made. After being released from prison after three years, the only choices I had open to me, were to go and pick up where I had left off when I was incarcerated, or to enter into a clean and sober environment at an Oxford House. While serving time, I met an individual who had been involved with the publishing business and, before he was released, he showed me the particulars of getting a book sent to press. I started writing two fiction/adventure novels two years before I was set free, and at the present time, I am completing the final drafts, so they can be reviewed by an editor. After receiving an ISBN number from the Library of Congress to protect my interest, it should go to press by 2014. I am also working on my second Master's Degree in Hawaiian Studies and Creative Writing at the University.

I would not be able to accomplish any of these goals, without being in a clean and sober living situation. Oxford House has truly become a safe haven, as well as a shelter from the storm in my life. Thanks, Oxford House! Aloha, SIONE L. KENI III, Comptroller, Ku'oko'a House

### **STEPHANIE H.**

My name is Stephanie and I am an addict. I was raised in a divorced home and primarily by my father. That was rare during the 70's and I often felt like I didn't fit in. I didn't have the 'right' clothes or hair style. And not having a woman in my home caused some of my friends' parents to feel scared about them coming to my house. My dad was a former Marine and demanded perfection. I tried very hard to be perfect and every time I made a mistake I felt like a big loser. I was terrified of him and so I never tried drugs or alcohol. Then, when I was nineteen, I was diagnosed with a rare cancer. My mom had taken a medication when she was pregnant with me that caused me to have reproductive cancer. Initially I was told I wouldn't live to see twenty-one; I started having surgeries and treatment. My boyfriend of 1 year proposed and we planned a wedding for the next year.

I believe that long before I ever took my first pill, I was an addict. I was insecure, depressed, seeking outside validation, and thought everyone had an instruction book for life that I somehow missed. Now I was scared and thinking my life was over at a very young age. After having multiple surgeries, I found that opiates filled that void and took away that fear. For several years I got away with 'taking my medication' and my family was just glad I was alive. Then they began to get concerned about the many doctor visits and how often I was tired and irritable and wanted to isolate. I ignored them and continued to take pills all the time. I worked in medicine and had access to opiates at work. I stole pills from patients and my family. When my father was dying of cancer, I stole pills from him. When he died, I couldn't imagine surviving it. My drug use intensified and I began using IV drugs. I tried to get sober multiple times, but never had longer than 5 months of sobriety. My husband ended our marriage and my daughter was broken-hearted.

In July, 2011, my Mom convinced me to go to treatment. I went to treatment and told the staff that I was beyond hope and I was too broken to stay sober. I had been stealing pills at work and calling in fake scripts to the pharmacy. I hated myself and had thought I was one of the people beyond help. While I was in treatment it was recommended that I move into sober living after treatment. It was a concern that the additional stress of having a terminally ill mother was too much for me. It would be healthier to go to sober living. I had tried an Oxford House once before and stayed a few months, so I interviewed and went back to the Lulatory House in Houston in August, 2011. I began to do service work in Oxford and looked for a job outside of medicine. I had a sponsor and worked the steps. I was thriving in my house.

But, on October 5, 2011, the warrant squad showed up with a warrant for my arrest for prescription fraud. I was arrested in the Oxford House and taken to jail. In the beginning, we thought I would be coming home in a few weeks. But God saw fit for me to go to SAFPF (Substance Abuse Felony Punishment Facility) in Dayton, Texas. I spent two months in county jail and then nine months at SAFPF. During that time, I worked incredibly hard to stay sober, work a program, and I even led meetings in jail. My sponsor wrote to me and sent me Step work. When I completed SAFPF I was required to go to a halfway house for three months. I began looking for an Oxford House to go to when I was finished. I found the Shalva House and moved in November, 2012. I then began to truly live a sober life. Three days before I left SAFPF my mother died. It was now time to stand on my own two feet! Even though I felt alone in some way, I had support with my sponsor, AA fellowship, and my Oxford House.

Since getting out of prison I have gone through a lot. I have grieved for my mother, found a new career path, and almost completed an intense probation. SAFPF probation is a graduated probation. In the beginning, I saw my probation officer four times a month. I was required to attend six months of weekly aftercare for four hours a night and complete community service. I graduated from aftercare with perfect attendance. I now see probation only once a month. The responsibility and structure it has taken for me to complete tasks is something I have learned in Oxford. Oxford helped me to learn responsibility and accountability. Oxford helped me learn to hold people accountable and set healthy boundaries. I have seen women in my house relapse and had to watch them leave. I pray for them and wish them well. I have done service work in Oxford. I have been a check-signer and the Vice-Chair of our Chapter. We recently had to convert a men's house to a women's house and I was made a check signer at that house as well. It's amazing to me that my chapter trusts this convicted felon and thief with their money. The BEST part is that I have never considered taking any of it. I have such immense gratitude for Oxford that I don't want to hurt them. I have almost two years sober and I have little doubt that I would have been using if not for the support and accountability of Oxford. I have seen growth in myself and respect the woman I am growing up to be.

In two weeks I will have two years sober. That is such a miracle to me. For the last year I have paid all of my own bills, worked when I was scheduled, attended every house meeting, attended every chapter meeting, shown up for my commitments and given back where I can. God truly gave me a gift when that counselor told me about Oxford House.

### TARA S.

I am an addict by the name of Tara. I spent the first eighteen years of my life in a little town called Beltsville – just a few miles outside the D.C. border. My mother was 28 years old, and my father, 30, when I arrived into the world on June 25, 1989. They had been high school sweethearts, and had eloped a few years after graduating, later settling in a quaint, one-story home. I was their first-born child, and today I know that they did the best they could. I can recall many early experiences, which, I believe, instilled the value of “family-togetherness” deep within me. I can also recall many early experiences which, although seemingly insignificant at the time, now serve as anchors – anchors to a truth which my disease tries often to defenestrate: that I am, have always been, and will always be, an addict.

I can say one thing for certain about who I was as a child: I felt in constant need of companionship. I never, ever wanted to be alone. Friendship, or my distorted concept of it, was a secondary drug-of-choice, with the primary being fantasy. For the first few years of my life, I spent a great deal of time each day distracting myself with either the TV or with my imaginary friend, Sara, impatiently awaiting my father's return from work, completely abhorrent to the mere thought of being alone. Having taken a thorough 4<sup>th</sup> step, I can now see that this theme ran, amok, throughout my life.

My parents' separation when I was 11, a watershed-moment, so-to-speak, meant that one of my most deeply ingrained values, (the ‘family-togetherness’ piece), would seemingly now be out-of-reach; and I went on, having never truly accepted this. Rather than make the best of my new reality, I thought it a much better idea to pull out of the grieving process entirely, and flee to higher ground, no-pun-intended. I began seeking ways to break in to some of the various social circles in school, but never felt like I had done a good enough job at doing so; I never felt “a part of.” Then, one day, my fear of staying exiled in this limbo-like state far-outweighed my fear of trying drugs. And so, having already lost touch with some of my values, here I was, severing ties with some of my morals, as well. Being the extremist that I am, it did not take long before active addiction had me “living” in constant opposition to every single moral I had ever had. Even in active addiction, I would make futile attempts at reproducing that sense of “family” that I felt I had lost, still wanting never to be alone. Most days and nights I spent selling myself on the internet, smoking crack and shooting heroin, not necessarily in that order, and never alone if I could help it. I epitomized the saying “misery loves company.” If I stayed up for days, without taking a break from “the hustle,” so-to-speak, then I did so to ensure my means to support my “friends” habits, as well. Similar to my ‘customers,’ I, too, was now paying for companionship.

After doing a few stints in some various institutions, staying 7 weeks behind-bars, having a MRSA infection that required wrist/hand surgery, and losing my hearing permanently in one ear, I finally managed to get 81 days clean, and a sponsor, before ultimately deciding to take my will back. I then got my very first introduction to Oxford House. I mentioned needing to move out of my grandparents' house in a meeting one night, and was approached



afterward by a girl living at Broadwood Oxford House in Rockville, MD. She encouraged me to call and set up an interview for their one vacancy. Long story short: I interviewed high; moved in, high; and wound up becoming known as “the girl who ran out the back door, barefoot in the snow.” I did not need to do any more research – I knew on the surface, as well as deep-down, that I was an addict, through and through. The thing was, though, that I just plain did not care enough to surrender for myself, yet.

The next four months, I spent working out of crack houses in NW D.C., but would always return, much like a homing pigeon, to my friend Jennifer’s crawlspace of an apartment. To touch on the “family” piece a little more: I even went so far as to become a sort-of junkie-midwife to my newly-pregnant, using-buddy, never leaving Jen’s side, except to get us more money for drugs. A low point for me was when I witnessed her shooting drugs into her belly veins, at about 7 months-along. Unfortunately though, I used this only as another opportunity to minimize my own unmanageability. At that point, having just suffered a minor stroke, I had full right-radial nerve paralysis, (i.e. no use of my dominant arm), as well as a severe case of pneumonia; both of which I had gone on ignoring for two months. I did, however, make a promise to myself and to anyone who would listen that I would get help on my birthday. On June 22, 2011, two fellow junkies and I took a rental car up to New York City with the intention of buying large quantities of heroin and crack with the “tons more money” that I was going to make working in the “Big Apple.”

Not even a day and a half later, on the eve of my birthday, I was pan-handling for lunch money at La Guardia airport when I collapsed, face-first into the slice of pizza that a pilot had bought for me out of pity. After coming to, the E.M.S. paramedics made an offer to me; one which I had been made many times before, but had never obliged. One of them asked me, simply, “Would you like to go to the hospital?” I cannot tell you who or what spoke the word “yes,” for me, although I can tell you that it certainly was *not* me. My own best thinking had not yet brought me anything in the way of self-care and self-preservation; though, in that moment, I had surrendered. And I thank my higher power for that, constantly, because, as I found out later, I was roughly 24 hours away from death’s door. There had been a grapefruit-sized MRSA-filled empyema growing in the cavity between my lung and ribcage, something that resulted from allowing pneumonia, coupled with MRSA, to go unchecked long enough. Overdosing had never been enough for me because, once awakened, I would have no clear recollection of being near-death. Only when I was *faced* with my own mortality did I care enough to do something different; only then did I become willing. “*When we were beaten, we became willing.*” –NA Basic Text, (pg. 20), and quoted in the reading from Just for Today for June 23. As it happens, June 23 is my clean date.

I spent 7 weeks in a Queens, NY hospital, recuperating from major lung surgery, before being admitted to an inpatient/detox facility, then from there, moved into a halfway house in Baltimore City, MD. I was very eager to try living in an Oxford House again, as I could remember the sense-of-family that I had experienced during my first attempt, even while in active addiction, and brief as it was. However, my sponsor, who I had reconnected with, advised I ought to “sit on my hands” for a bit. After waiting-out the summer, I interviewed at Oxford House Weller in Silver Spring, MD, and was accepted. I moved in the next day, September 6, 2011, and have been there ever since. Honestly, I have never felt more at-home, more “a part of,” than I do with my housemates. Wendy, Twanya, Andrea & Patty have been my sisters for nearly two years, and, through this experience, my long-lost value of “family-togetherness” has been reawakened within me. The ladies even accompanied me to my mother’s first year celebration in AA a few months ago! Today, I am employed by Oxford House, Inc., which has easily been one of the most rewarding parts of my recovery thus far. I also am currently writing on my 6<sup>th</sup> step, am very active in NA service, and am working toward further-deepening my relationships with friends and family. One thing I have not yet done in recovery is go on a date, but I am okay with that. This addict needs a bit more time to get to know “self,” first.

### **TRACEY C.**

My name is Tracey Curtis. I attempted to get sober approximately 9 years ago. After attending a 30- day treatment program for my addiction, I was released on my own devices, picked back up the same day I was released from treatment, and continued to run the streets. Within a few months I had been admitted to the mental institute for being mentally out of control. I was a terror to my family, friends, and society. The hospital had mentioned Oxford Houses. I was given two choices by Dr. K, I was either moving on to the regional center, which meant I would definitely lose my son, or I could attempt to transition back into society with the help of an Oxford House. During

my stay at the mental institute I was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic and the doctor expressed his concern of a possible relapse and talked about there being a possibility that I might not return from the relapse mentally.

I chose to attend a screening at the Women and Children's Mutual Oxford house in Omaha, NE with my mother. My mother asked me to step out and she explained to the girls a bit of my story, her experience, and concern. My mother's main focus was my son, her grandson, and trying to get her daughter back from this horrible disease. My first week in the house, I was pushed to get a job, go to meetings, attend the day program at the mental health institute, and interact with the women in the house. Being in the house with other sober women, watching them with their children, and seeing them living life on life's terms gave me hope. But eventually I became complacent. I went through the motions while in the house for 2 years, but I was lacking a program of real recovery. I became a "know it all" and eventually I relapsed on crack cocaine.

I continued to live in the house without anyone ever discovering my "secret." I moved out, and continued to use crack. However, my actual drug of choice was meth, and I soon became terrified of going back to that. I didn't want to lose everything I had worked for, so I started going to meetings again and got sober. One of my first calls for help was to the Oxford House outreach worker. I got honest for the first time in my life. She was nonjudgmental and said the way I was going to make it up to the house for using while I was there, was to get involved in service work. My life has not been the same since. I went back to the Mutual House, got honest with the ladies who were living there, and eventually got involved as a house sponsor. I helped plan chapter fundraising activities such as dances, swim parties and dodge ball games. I went to the World Convention in D.C. I became willing to be of maximum service. Along with the service work in the Oxford Houses, I got a sponsor, worked the 12 steps, started to sponsor other women, and carried a message of hope to others.

I now work as a paralegal for a Disability Attorney, and help organize our team every year for the NAMI Walk. On July 16, 2006, I decided to get honest, trust in GOD, clean house, and help others. I just celebrated 7 years of sobriety and believe that none of this would be possible had it not been for Oxford House Outreach pushing me to get involved and stay involved with Oxford Houses. I have developed friendships and an unshakeable foundation for my recovery. I am forever in debt to Oxford Houses of Nebraska and the program of Alcoholics Anonymous and have recovered from a hopeless state of mind.

### **TRACY G.**

My name is Tracy G. and I am a thirty-seven year old alcoholic addict. I was born and raised in a small town outside of New Orleans, Louisiana, named Bogalusa, by my mother and my alcoholic father, who is sober today. In my twenties, I enjoyed drinking and using drugs recreationally, never experiencing the severe consequences that other people who drank and used drugs go through. I wanted desperately to "fit in" so, whatever someone else's habits were, I made them mine. I became addicted to everything and these choices led to my own suffering and personal consequences.

When I hit my thirties, I changed from recreational use to conscious full-blown addiction. When I decided to live with my then-boyfriend, I was on my way. Even though I had my own apartment, I functioned at work and lived my own life, I couldn't pull myself out of what was starting to spiral out of control. I felt a transition into something that would permanently impact my health, my life and future decision making. I contracted Hepatitis C and dealt with an emotionally and physically abusive boyfriend, which led to our break-up and I moved back in with my mother. Then, over a six month period, I stole her debit card and forged checks to fuel my addictions. My mother caught me and threatened to have me arrested for theft or committed to rehab for my behavior. After making the rounds in a few outpatient treatment centers and going to meetings, nothing worked; somehow I always managed to fall off.....

During the week of June 20, 2011, my life changed in a way I could never have imagined. I decided to call Lori H., my best friend from high school, who had gotten sober previously and was living in Tulsa Oklahoma as an Outreach Coordinator for a place called Oxford House. Lori asked me if I was really interested, willing and ready to get sober. I honestly did not comprehend what that meant but I agreed to make that trip. I told my mother of my plans and she was very supportive of my decision and helped me pack all of my belonging into two suitcases, bought my plane ticket and waved goodbye as I boarded that flight for Oklahoma. The whole time I was on the plane, it didn't

seem real but the car ride to Oxford House Green Country when Lori picked me up from the airport seemed to take forever. It was the longest car ride I have ever been on and it was only a fifteen minute trip.....

I was a small town country girl moving to the big state of Oklahoma and I had no clue about sober living, recovery or group living. Upon arriving at the my new house, broken, no morals, feeling so far away from home, I said to myself "what have I gotten myself into?" Fines? Chores? Democratic order? After only being there for one day, an emergency house meeting was called because a woman was drunk; it was then that I realized just what was in order. Oxford House Green Country was chartered for nine women. It was a beautiful house in the suburbs, with eight women with eight different personalities, behaviors, and varying lengths of sobriety. Living within the structure of an Oxford House gave me the tools I needed to rebuild my life. I never knew what kind of inner strength I had until I moved into a strange house in a strange town, living with sober women and becoming more involved with my house and chapter meetings. I picked up several women from rehabs and motels and introduced them to the life I was living and I tried to carry a message of experience strength and hope. Later I became Vice Chairperson for Chapter Seven in Oklahoma.

In August, 2012, I realized I could be a productive citizen. I adapted to a structured setting even though I was a mess on the inside from years of others taking care of and enabling me and not seeing my family for many months. I became an alumna of Oxford House and I moved out of the Green Country house into my own apartment with another Oxford House alumna. Even though I continued to attend A.A. meetings and connect with other Oxford House residents and was self-supporting through a good job, I was starting to experience relapse mode in my actions, thoughts and behaviors. I started isolating and gambling and giving in to other addictive behaviors that were leading up to a relapse, in my opinion. By then, Lori had moved back to Louisiana to be an Outreach Coordinator for that area and I only had my Oxford House family support system to fall back on and I began missing my family back home.

That October, Lori must have known because she called me and told me about the Oxford House Vieux Carré in New Orleans, Louisiana, and asked if I wanted to move in and help out the house because it was struggling after losing residents after Hurricane Isaac. I didn't have to give it much thought. I gave my two weeks' notice at my job and packed all of my belongings into the car (Geo Metro, with no A/C, *lol*) my mother had bought me that spring with her income tax refund and made the ten hour road trip from Tulsa, Oklahoma to New Orleans, Louisiana all by myself. I was excited and felt a renewing of my spirit and an awakening of a recovery that I had lost somewhere in Oklahoma. I cried. I was mentally exhausted and filled with mixed emotions about leaving my new-found network of friends that I had built and who thought I had lost my mind moving to an Oxford House by the French Quarter. When I finally I arrived, I threw myself into my new house, became chore coordinator *a.k.a.* "chore Nazi" and continued to picking up women from rehabs to move in. Just like before, I started to get involved with my new Chapter 12, which suffered losses of several houses from another hurricane called Hurricane Katrina. On July 15, 2013 I signed my first lease to open the second women's house in New Orleans called Oxford House De La Majorite, meaning "majority of" in French that will open August 1. I just want to say that being part of opening an Oxford House is an achievement that I never thought was possible. But by living within the Oxford House organization, the possibilities are endless. Also, I have come to realize I am part of making an impact on other women's lives, including women whom I have yet to meet.

Today, as I look over the past 2 years, Oxford House has given me a sense of freedom from the bondage I had imposed on myself through my drug and alcohol addiction; structure in my life that I had never I had before; friendships with other strong women who embraced the same freedom that Oxford House offers; and I have come to realize that I can pick up the phone and call any one of the over 1,600 houses worldwide where my fellow family members reside. Oxford House has given me a sense of freedom that I had never known before. At one time in my life I looked at the woman in the mirror and wondered who was that person staring back. Today I can look myself in the eye and know who I am and where I am going. I realize that, as long as I stay clean and sober, I can live anywhere I choose in an Oxford House that continues to support my growth, my recovery, my self-identity and self-worth. I thank my higher power, which I call God, for allowing me to live the life I did and for making the decisions I make today.

## VINCENT S.

My name is Vincent Stewart and I have been in more treatment facilities than I care to admit. I am an alcoholic, but my problem is Vincent. You see, I didn't have any structure, I was unemployable and my life was unmanageable. I needed to make some life changing decisions. I decided to try an Oxford House (provided they saw fit, that there was hope for me). Working the steps with a sponsor made me realize that I couldn't do this thing alone. Thank God I was accepted.

Oxford House gave me that one thing I was missing....Motivation and Structure! I was humble enough to find whatever work I could. I washed dishes and bussed tables (After all it paid my weekly EES). I didn't have a driver's license for over 10 years but was able to work on it and get it back. I began to get used to a daily regimen of working, going to meetings, and doing my chores. I had to learn not only to live well with others but also to be honest and reliable. These were some of the traits that I learned at the Oxford House. Eventually I was entrusted with holding an officer's position within the house; not only did this improve my confidence in myself but I thrived in it. I began working with other Oxford Houses -- training other people at other House's in every position. I began to give back what was so freely given to me. In October 2013, I will celebrate 3 years in sobriety in Oxford House. I haven't found anything more powerful than Oxford House. Vincent Stewart – North Raleigh Oxford House

## WALLIS S.

Most people think that those who suffer from the disease of addiction came from broken homes and/or a dysfunctional family. This is not always the case. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth when it comes to my story. I was raised in the suburbs with two parents and was the last of six siblings. I had a very traditional family full of love and compassion. I was a child who was shielded from the outside world. It was school, homework, sitting down at the dinner table together every night and going to church on Sunday. My parents were very old school. My father was born in 1928; my mother was born in 1935. Needless to say, growing up in the mid-seventies, my parents were very strict disciplinarians. Being the one who always made A's in school, very high expectations were placed on me from a very young age. This, along with expectations to follow a set of siblings who were known for being popular in sports, with the ladies and all the other things that came along with being the typical "All American" male, there was very little room for error or weakness. I always felt different in a lot of ways but was not permitted to express myself. Some things in the mid-seventies were very taboo, but I digress.

As years passed by, I continued to conform to an image that I myself sometimes didn't feel that I could live up to. Because of these feelings, I was constantly looking for some person, place, or thing that could make me feel whole. I wasn't allowed to hang out in the streets like other kids of the same age in my neighborhood. The only "hanging out" that I could do was when my father decided to go for his Sunday afternoon visit to his hangout which consisted of grown people doing what they do. There was alcohol, oldies but goodies on the jukebox, and lots of card playing and storytelling. My job was to fetch cold beverages and empty ashtrays. My reward for this was a quarter to play a song of my choice on the jukebox. While cleaning up, I took this job to another level. While throwing away beer cans I would make sure the ones that weren't empty were empty before they made it to the trash can. I liked the way I was feeling after I swallowed the corners of the cans that weren't quite empty. Little did I know that this was the beginning of a long, troublesome road called addiction that I would be traveling.

As years went by, my addiction progressed because I had found what I needed to escape the pressures of my reality. It's as if I was two people; living a double life. As years continued to pass by and as life continued to show up, I required more and more of "something" to separate myself from reality. After high school, I joined the military, which gave me the freedom to be who I was. The lifestyle that I led continued to progress and involved more drug use. After some time, I had gotten to a point where I depended on drugs to get me through those feelings of loneliness, sadness, betrayal, self-disappointment and a whole array of other feelings that I did not know how to deal with. I continued on in active addiction for many years, progressing on to harder drugs which continued to spin my life out of control. Finally, I had reached a point that if I did not do something different with my life I was sure to end up in jail, institutionalized, or dead. As fate, I believe, would have it I found a program called Narcotics Anonymous. I became a member with the hope that this would be the answer to my problems. I struggled in the beginning with staying clean. After going to meetings for a while, I found myself back out using drugs again. This cycle of in and out of the program continued on for six years. Even though I wanted to stay clean, there was

something that still wasn't quite right to ensure my continued recovery. I was once again fed up with using drugs and needed something more than just going to NA meetings that would help me to stay clean.

In July of 2009, I was introduced to an organization by the name of Oxford House. I wasn't sure that this would work but I was desperate and willing to try anything. Little did I know that this organization would be the extra piece of the puzzle that would ensure my continued recovery. I was surrounded by people that were striving to stay clean or sober just like me. This was new for me. When had I tried to stay clean before, I was always still in an environment where people were still using. This organization gave me relief and comfort knowing that when I came home I would not have to face using people. Not only did it offer me a nice clean and/or sober environment, it gave me a sense of belonging and responsibility. I felt a part of it. This was a feeling that I hadn't felt in a long time. Truth be told, I had never felt such a sense of belonging in my life.

Since the first day I moved into the Oxford House and continued to practice the program of Narcotics Anonymous, I haven't found it necessary to go back to a life of drug use. I know in my heart that this is a direct result of the Oxford House organization and its guidelines and traditions coupled with the Narcotics Anonymous program. I have since been an active member of the organization that has assisted in giving me back my life. I have rebuilt relationships with family and friends; I went back to college, and above all other things, I have a peace of mind that is rivaled by nothing that I have ever experienced before. Thank God for the Oxford House organization and the program of Narcotics Anonymous. They have truly saved my life!!

#### **WILL S.**

My name is Will S. and I am an addict. My clean date is January 7, 2012. I grew up in Durham, NC in an upper-middle class family where I was provided everything I needed and most of what I wanted. I had a very normal childhood, nothing traumatic at all. I went to boarding school in Northern Virginia. During high school, I made good grades and played sports. Looking back, I was a huge prick. I thought that because I was on the honor roll and played football, I could be a jerk to everyone. Unfortunately, the culture of my high school allowed that to happen. I also started using in high school but because I was focused on playing sports in college, my using was kept moderately in check. The first major consequence from using came during my junior year. One of my classmates had asked me to get her a particular drug and I did. A couple hours later she had overdosed in the bathroom. She lived but I still had an incredible amount of guilt and shame from the incident.

It was not until I got to college that my using progressed to unmanageability. I had given up on trying to play sports in college; using was far more important. I went to UNC about 15 minutes away from where my dope man lived. I started using every day; I stole from my parents, friends, and anyone else who had anything worth stealing. I couldn't stop. I remember watching the show Intervention and thinking to myself I'm not as bad as those people because I never stuck a needle in my arm. Then about two months before I went to treatment, I did start sticking a needle into my arm and my life went downhill fast. I went to treatment in May of 2011 when I was 19 years old. I was about 50 percent willing to listen to what my counselor had to say. She suggested I move into an Oxford House which I respectfully declined. Instead, I moved into a halfway house in Cape Cod, MA where I wasted two weeks of my life living under a house manager who thought he was God. I called my parents and told them I wanted to come home. They laughed and said "Hell no, you're not moving in with us", so I moved into an Oxford House. When I had about 6 months clean, I relapsed and was kicked out of the Oxford House. I thought that I could get recovery from just living in a clean environment and going to meetings. When I was faced with dealing with life on life's terms, I used. When I was kicked out of the Oxford House they told me if I stayed clean for 14 days, they would give me another interview. When that interview came, they admitted me into the house but I was put on an extensive newcomer contract and I had to get a meeting sheet signed every day for 90 days, curfew of 10 pm, and I had to be out of the house during the day on the weekends. I was willing to do whatever it took.

I was lucky enough to live in an Oxford House where we all loved one another enough to call each other out on our own "bullshit". I started working steps to the best of my ability, praying, and taking responsibility for my life. I have gotten unbelievable gifts from recovery. I have lost the desire to use which is still unreal to me, a drug addict. This is directly proportional to how plugged in I am to my recovery. Another gift of recovery is our understanding that feelings are just feelings. It's perfectly fine if I feel like crap; it will pass as long as I continue to do the right thing for the right reason. I firmly believe that the Oxford House saved my life and I think it can save anyone's life if they put the effort in.

## *Notes*

## **OXFORD HOUSE TRADITIONS**

1. Oxford House has as its primary goal the provision of housing for the alcoholic and drug addict who wants to stay clean and sober.
2. All Oxford Houses are run on a democratic basis. Our officers serve continuous periods of no longer than six months.
3. No Member of an Oxford House is ever asked to leave without cause -- drinking, drug use, or disruptive behavior.
4. Oxford House members realize that active participation in AA and/or NA offers assurance of continued sobriety.
5. Each Oxford House should be autonomous except in matters affecting other houses or Oxford House, Inc. - as a whole.
6. Each Oxford House should be financially self-supporting.
7. Oxford House should remain forever non-professional.
8. Propagation of the Oxford House, Inc. concept should always be conceived as public education.
9. Members who leave an Oxford House in good standing should become associate members

# Oxford House™

1975-2013

*38 Years of Organized Self-Help To Enable Alcoholics and Drug Addicts to Recover Without Relapse*

- Providing Sole Authority for Oxford House Charters
- Providing Technical Assistance to Establish New Oxford Houses
- Providing Technical Assistance to Keep Existing Oxford Houses on Track
- Providing Organization of Chapters to Help Houses Help Themselves
- Providing the Time, Living Environment and Support to Enable Alcoholics and Drug Addicts to Achieve Recovery Without Relapse
- Providing the Legal, Philosophical, and Scientific Framework for a Cost-effective, Worldwide Network of Supportive Recovery Housing.

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