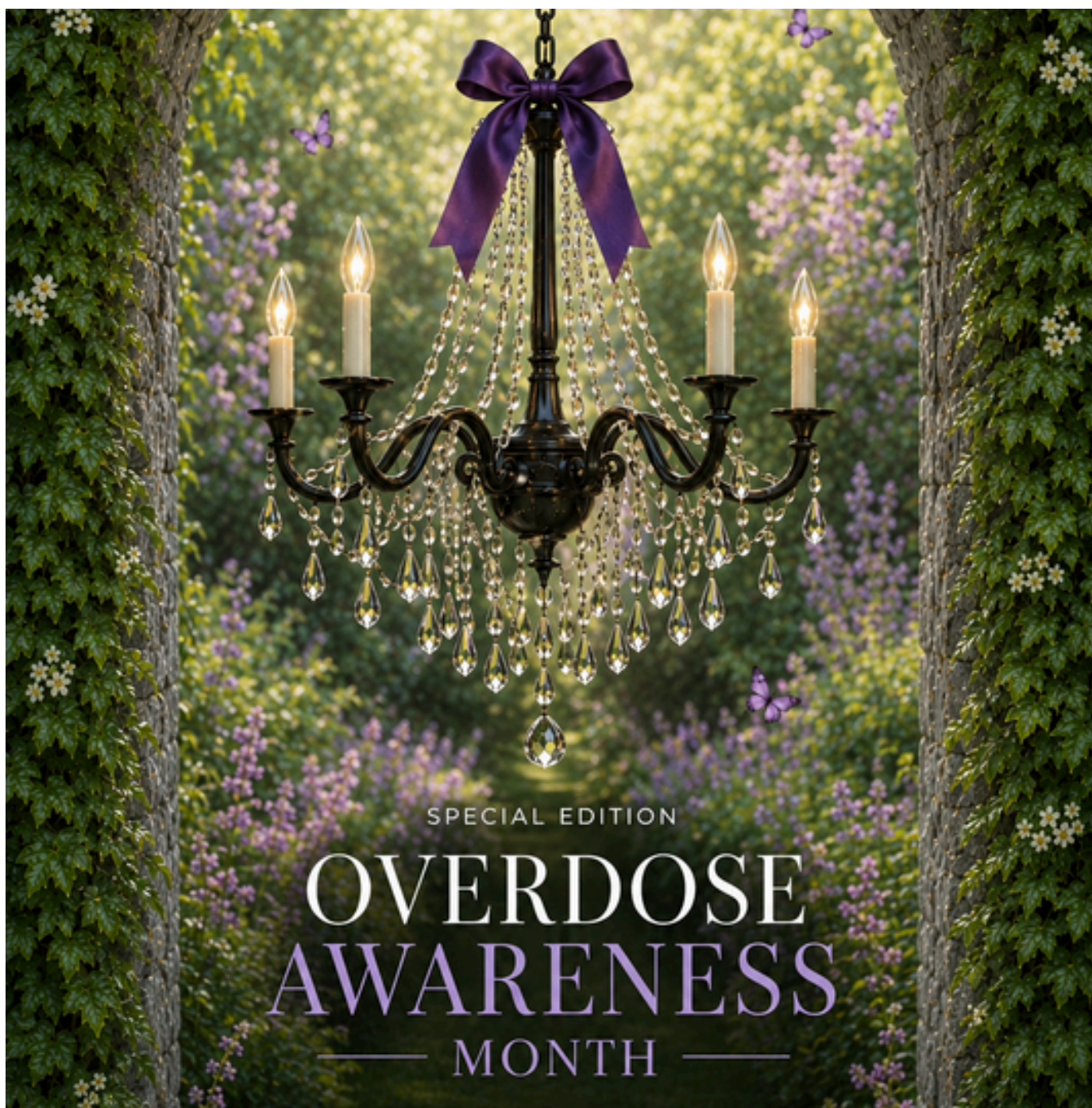


STONE & IVY

M A G A Z I N E

WELLNESS, REIMAGINED WITH INTENTION AND GRACE.



SPECIAL EDITION

OVERDOSE
AWARENESS
— MONTH —



EDITOR'S NOTE

Each August, communities around the world come together to recognize Overdose Awareness Month—a time to remember the lives that have been lost, stand beside those who continue to grieve, and remind every person still fighting that they are not alone. It is also a time to educate, advocate, and challenge the stigma that too often keeps people from reaching out for the support they deserve.

This special edition of Stone & Ivy was created with those intentions at its heart.

Over the years, I have learned that behind every diagnosis, every headline, every statistic, and every overdose is a person with a story. A story that often begins long before addiction ever entered the picture. Stories of resilience and heartbreak. Of trauma and triumph. Of setbacks, second chances, and extraordinary courage.

Addiction does not discriminate. It does not care about age, occupation, education, income, or circumstance. It reaches into every neighborhood, every community, and every family. Yet despite how common its impact has become, too many people continue to suffer in silence because of shame, misunderstanding, and stigma.

My hope is that these pages help replace judgment with curiosity, fear with understanding, and silence with conversation.

Within this issue, you will find stories shared by individuals in recovery, professionals who have dedicated their lives to walking alongside others, practical resources, moments of remembrance, and messages of hope. You will meet people—not labels. Human beings whose lives cannot be defined by their hardest days.

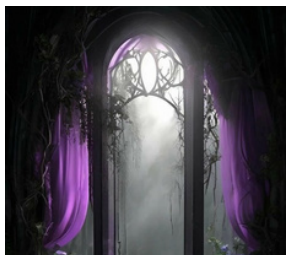
If there is one thing I hope you carry with you after turning the final page, it is this: never underestimate the power of simply showing up for another person.

Sometimes the greatest gift we can give another human being is the assurance that they do not have to walk through their darkest moments alone. Recovery is possible. Healing is possible. Connection saves lives.

Thank you for spending time with this special edition, for opening your heart to the stories within these pages, and for helping us create a world where compassion speaks louder than stigma, where advocacy leads to action, and where every person knows they are worthy of hope.

With gratitude,
Jen

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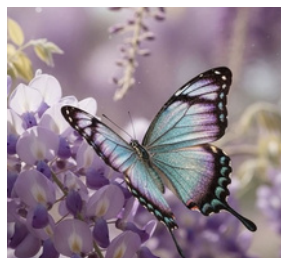
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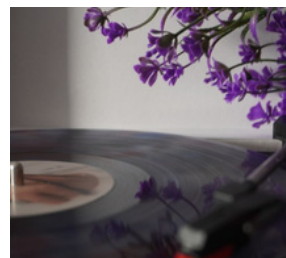
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A romantic garden scene featuring a large, ornate chandelier with lit candles hanging from a stone wall covered in ivy and purple flowers. In the foreground, a vintage-style chair with a light-colored cushion and a purple shawl draped over it sits on a stone path. To the right, a large, ornate urn holds a bouquet of purple roses. The ground is scattered with purple flower petals.

BEYOND THE STIGMA

Jen Timothy | Writer

There is a common misconception that addiction is simply the result of poor choices, weak character, or a lack of willpower. Yet anyone who has lived through addiction—or loved someone who has—knows the story is far more complicated than that.

Addiction does not discriminate. It touches people of every age, income level, profession, and background. It can affect the high school athlete, the successful executive, the devoted parent, the veteran, the college student, or the retiree next door. Despite this reality, stigma continues to surround substance use disorders, often preventing people from seeking the help they desperately need.

Stigma thrives in judgment. It appears when we label someone as an "addict" instead of seeing them as a person. It appears when we assume that recovery is simply a matter of trying harder. It appears when individuals are made to feel ashamed of their struggles rather than supported through them.

For many people, stigma becomes another barrier to healing. Fear of being judged can keep someone from reaching out for treatment, attending a support group, speaking honestly with a healthcare provider, or even confiding in a loved one. Too often, people suffer in silence because they worry about how others will view them.

The language we use matters. Words have the power to wound, but they also have the power to heal. Person-first language reminds us that a substance use disorder is something a person experiences—not who they are. Recovery begins when we see the individual before we see the diagnosis.

Stories can also help bridge the divide between judgment and understanding. When people share their experiences openly, they remind us that addiction is not a moral failure. More often than not, addiction exists alongside pain, trauma, loss, mental health challenges, loneliness, or circumstances that are invisible to the outside world. Every person's story deserves to be heard with compassion rather than criticism.

Perhaps one of the most important ways to reduce stigma is to talk about recovery itself. Recovery happens every day. People rebuild relationships. Families heal. Lives are restored. Individuals return to school, raise children, start businesses, pursue passions, and discover new purpose. Recovery is not rare—it is possible.

As we continue to navigate the ongoing impact of the addiction crisis, we have an opportunity to choose empathy over judgment. We can listen more closely, speak more thoughtfully, and create communities where people feel safe asking for help.

Because the opposite of addiction is not simply abstinence.

It is connection.



STORIES THAT MATTER

Some stories are difficult to tell. Some are difficult to hear. Yet it is often within these stories that we find our greatest opportunities for understanding, compassion, and change.

Here, individuals in recovery and professionals who walk alongside them share pieces of their journeys. Their experiences remind us that addiction does not define a person, that healing is possible, and that hope often begins when someone feels seen, heard, and understood.

May these stories & poetry open hearts, challenge assumptions, and serve as a gentle reminder that every life—and every story—matters.





THE DEVIL HASN'T SEEN THE BEST OF ME

Shared anonymously by an individual in recovery. Published with permission.

It's hard to have regular thoughts—
To sort them,
Assign them,
File them.
Everything is scattered.
Tattered.
Shattered.

I feel like I'm swimming in spaghetti,
While the devil chases me with a machete.

He's screaming,
"You're not ready."
You're not ready."

But he hasn't seen the best of me.
For years, he's whispered his deceit.
Taught me to cheat.

Turned my body and my mind into minced meat.
But he doesn't know I don't retreat.
So, I kept the receipt.

Now I'm in too deep for him to have another day of mine to
keep.

It's time for me to reap. I'm not just a sheep.
My soul won't come cheap.

I'm ready for war.
I'm screaming louder than a rattlesnake's rattle.

I'm taking over.
It's time to be sober.
I'm not naïve.

I know he'll put up a fight.
But it's title night.
I'm coming with bite.

I'm coming with the right to life.
So, bring more than that knife, brother.
Because even one more day,
You will not smother.

I'm putting one foot in front of the other.
We're divorcing each other.

You're no longer my father or my mother.
I don't know how to make it any more clear.
I may be full of fear.

My face may be full of tears.
I've already given you enough years.
This separation has filled my body with pain.
Sleepless nights have driven me insane.

But little by little,
My body...

I'm beginning to reclaim.
And I'm not doing it alone.
God just knocked you off your throne.
I'm finding my footing.

A path laid before me by others
Has been shown.

You've been outgrown.
This is war not a battle.

And this time—
I'm the one
Who climbed into the saddle.

LISTEN LONG ENOUGH



Jen Timothy | Writer

I spent thirteen years working for a mental health/substance use agency, specifically on their detox unit, their 28-day residential program, and managing their Medication Assisted Treatment outpatient program. And because I've always known that working in the field of addiction was my purpose, my mission, I went to work every single day with one goal in mind: to listen. Sounds simple. But it's not.

More times than I care to admit, I've been asked, "Why would you ever want to work there? Why spend your time helping people who made those choices?" I know this view is shared by many – which is heartbreaking. What's more heartbreaking are the thousands of stories I've collected over those 13 years – stories rooted in unthinkable trauma, loss, and neglect. Stories that leave you in utter disbelief, disgust, agony – stories that are almost too unimaginable to believe.

Too often, we form opinions based on what we can see, without understanding the story that brought someone to that moment. We simply observe an adult in active addiction and shame them for their choices. But do we ever care to know their "why"? Do we truly want to hear about their past, their childhood? The childhood abuse. The neglect. The foster care placements. The family histories of addiction. The devastating losses. The traumatic events that changed the course of a life.

I have been in the company of thousands of struggling, beautiful humans. And I have listened, with every inch of my being, to every single story trusted to me. It has been a badge of honor to not only be invited into their worlds, but to have the opportunity to assist each and every one on their recovery journey. It's amazing to witness the transformation. It's devastating to learn about a loss. I've been incredibly fortunate in my career to have witnessed hundreds and hundreds of success stories, and I've been incredibly unfortunate in my career to have witnessed loss. They hit differently.

Not all losses were overdoses. Some were medical (cirrhosis, heart attack, seizure), some were due to a MVA (motor vehicle accident). But the overdoses – they were brutal. I remember where I was and who I was with for every single loss. I remember feeling my heart drop down to my toes. I remember gasping for air. I remember the onset of tears streaming down my face. When you've had the privilege of walking alongside someone's recovery journey, these losses leave a lasting mark. You question everything – even if the person had been absent for months or years – you still questioned and you still felt your insides tie up in knots and you still wished them back for one more chance.

I do not expect the world to care as deeply as those of us who have devoted our lives to this work. But I do hope the world will pause before judging, shaming, or condemning. I hope we begin asking different questions. Instead of, "What's wrong with them?" perhaps we ask, "What happened to them?" Instead of assuming someone doesn't care about their life, perhaps we recognize the tremendous effort it takes to keep showing up when hope feels out of reach.

Many people living with addiction have tried. They continue to try. They fight battles most of us will never fully understand. Some ask for help directly. Others whisper it through their actions, their silence, their withdrawal, or their exhaustion. The invitation is the same: pay attention.

After thirteen years, I have learned that recovery is about far more than treatment plans, medications, or clinical interventions. Often, it begins with something much simpler: being heard. Before trust can be built, before hope can take root, someone must be willing to listen. Really listen. Not to respond, not to judge, not to fix—but to understand.

Every person I met wanted the same thing we all want: to feel seen, valued, and believed. Sometimes the most powerful thing we can offer another human being is our presence, our compassion, and our willingness to hear their story.

Take the call.
Answer the text.



Open the door.
Have the conversation.
Offer the ride.
Sit with them in the darkness until they can see the light again.
And when they are ready to talk, listen.

Listen without assumptions. Listen without judgment. Listen long enough to hear the story beneath the struggle.

Because people struggling with addiction are not statistics, diagnoses, or cautionary tales. They are sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, siblings, friends, coworkers, and neighbors. They are human beings deserving of dignity, compassion, and another chance.

And as long as there is breath, there is hope. As long as there is hope, recovery remains possible.

WHEN I FINALLY FACED MYSELF



Tasha Stanford, RMHC-I, CAP, EMDR-Trained Clinician | Writer

Author's Note

As clinicians, we spend countless hours documenting symptoms, developing treatment plans, assessing readiness for change, and measuring progress. Yet behind every diagnosis is a human being whose story can never be fully captured in clinical language.

The following narrative is shared with permission and is based on the lived experience of a client in long-term recovery from opioid use disorder (OUD). While identifying details have been changed to protect confidentiality, the emotions, reflections, and lessons remain authentic. This is not intended to define every person's experience with addiction or recovery. Instead, it offers one individual's honest reflection on what it felt like to live with opioid use disorder and what ultimately made lasting recovery possible.

My hope is that clinicians, families, and individuals living with addiction will hear the humanity behind these words. Sometimes the most meaningful lessons about recovery are not found in textbooks or treatment manuals—they are found in the voices of those who have survived.

People ask me what heroin was like. The easiest answer is this: It was like living in hell.

I knew, with everything inside me, that I didn't need it. I knew exactly where it would lead. I knew what I was risking every single time. None of that mattered. My body wanted it anyway.

I would stand in front of the mirror and tell myself, "*No. Not today.*" I believed it when I said it. For a moment, I truly believed I was done. Then it was as if someone else took over.

I would grab my keys, walk out the door, and drive straight to my dealer. That is the part people don't always understand. It didn't feel like I was making a thoughtful decision. It felt like my mind and my body had become strangers to each other. My brain knew the truth. My body only knew one thing: use. For fifteen years, that cycle repeated itself.

Treatment.
Relapse.
Jail.
Relapse.
Prison.
Relapse.
Another overdose.
Another promise.
Another relapse.



People often ask why I kept going back. The truth is that I wasn't ready. Not because I wanted heroin more than life. Because I didn't know life without heroin. When I entered treatment, I learned coping skills. I learned about triggers. I learned about addiction as a disease. I could repeat everything I was taught. But deep inside, I still believed heroin was the only thing that knew how to quiet my mind. Without it, I had to face years of shame, guilt, broken relationships, stolen opportunities, and people I had hurt. Those thoughts were louder than withdrawal. The drug wasn't only numbing physical pain anymore. It had become protection from myself. Ironically, I was often successful when I didn't have access to drugs. In jail. In prison. In residential treatment. When the walls were there, I survived. The real test always came when the walls disappeared. Freedom terrified me.

No one was stopping me anymore. The protection was gone. The craving would start long before I ever touched heroin again. It started with memories. Regret. Loneliness. Fear. Then came the phone call. The drive. The familiar streets. By the time I picked up, I had already relapsed emotionally. Overdose after overdose should have convinced me to stop. It didn't. Homelessness didn't stop me. Losing jobs didn't stop me. The things I swore I would never do didn't stop me. I couldn't imagine a future where heroin wasn't part of it.

For years, whenever someone said addiction involved choice, I became defensive. I would immediately say, "No. It's a disease." Today, I see it differently. I still believe opioid use disorder is a disease. It changes the brain. It changes the body. It changes how you think, feel, and respond. Anyone who has lived through it knows that. But my recovery also forced me to recognize something uncomfortable. Every time I left prison sober. Every time I completed treatment sober... Every time I walked out with a clear mind. I eventually made a decision. I called the wrong person. I drove to the wrong place. I convinced myself that one more time wouldn't matter. Those moments didn't erase the disease. They revealed something else. I wasn't ready to face what addiction had turned me into.

I wasn't ready to forgive myself. I wasn't ready to own the damage I had caused. Looking back, every relapse became another way to avoid that conversation. The hardest person I ever had to confront wasn't my dealer. It wasn't my probation officer. It wasn't my family. It was the person staring back at me in the mirror. Recovery didn't truly begin when I stopped using heroin. Recovery began when I stopped running from myself. That doesn't mean every day is easy. Even today, my body remembers. Sometimes the craving is still there, whispering from somewhere deep inside. But now I understand something I never understood before.

The craving isn't always asking for heroin. Sometimes it's asking me to escape fear. To escape the shame. To escape pain. Today, instead of escaping, I sit with those feelings. I ask for help. I stay connected. I keep choosing recovery. If someone reading this is still trapped in opioid use disorder, I want you to know this; you are not weak. You are not beyond hope. You are not the worst thing you've ever done. Recovery is possible. But for me, recovery didn't start when someone convinced me to stop using. It started when I became willing to face everything I had spent years trying to outrun. The heroin wasn't the only thing holding me captive.

I was. And facing that truth was the first real step toward freedom.

Closing Reflection

Working with individuals affected by opioid use disorder has continually reinforced one important truth: addiction is deeply complex. It affects the brain, the body, relationships, identity, and one's sense of self. While research has expanded our understanding of the neurobiology of addiction, there remains no substitute for listening to the lived experiences of those who have walked this path.

This narrative highlights something that is often difficult to quantify in clinical practice—the difference between achieving abstinence and becoming emotionally ready for recovery. For this individual, treatment was not ineffective because information was missing. Rather, recovery became possible only when they were prepared to confront the shame, grief, trauma, and consequences that had long been buried beneath substance use.

That experience may not reflect every recovery journey, nor should it. Recovery is not linear, and there is no single path that fits every individual. However, stories like this remind us that behind every relapse is a person, behind every diagnosis is a life, and behind every treatment episode is someone searching for hope.

As clinicians, we have the privilege and responsibility to create spaces where honesty can exist without judgment. When we combine evidence-based treatment with compassion, curiosity, and respect for each person's unique story, we move beyond treating a disorder—we begin helping people rebuild a life.

Stone & Ivy's contributing writer, **Tasha A. Stanford**, is a clinical mental health therapist and addiction specialist who works at the intersection of trauma, substance use, and recovery.



REDEFINING RECOVERY



John Poli, LMHC | Writer

For more than twenty years, I believed I knew exactly what recovery looked like. My career had taken me through residential treatment centers, detoxification units, and outpatient programs, where abstinence was the foundation of every conversation. I had been taught, and wholeheartedly believed, that addiction is a chronic disease, and that recovery meant lifelong abstinence from all mood-altering substances. It was the only model I knew, and because it had helped so many people, I rarely questioned it. Then, in 2018, I accepted a position as the Clinical Director of a Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) program.

Like many people, both inside and outside the recovery community, I struggled to reconcile medication-assisted treatment with the definition of recovery I had carried for more than two decades. I brought my own assumptions with me, believing that because clients were prescribed Suboxone, their recovery somehow looked different—or perhaps was even less than—what I had always known. When I first began working for the MAT program, I struggled with it because, unfortunately, I had brought this bias with me.

As Clinical Director, many of my responsibilities were administrative. One of those responsibilities was preparing a comprehensive monthly report for our funding agency. The report tracked admissions, discharges, drug screening results, and many other pieces of data, all without identifying clients by name. Oddly enough, it became one of my favorite responsibilities.

While I didn't always have the opportunity to know every client personally, these reports allowed me to witness recovery unfold in real time. I could see someone arrive with fentanyl, cocaine, benzodiazepines, alcohol, and other substances in their system. Week by week, the results often began to change. Eventually, many clients would test positive only for the medication they had been prescribed. Each report represented another life slowly being rebuilt. One client, in particular, caught my attention.

Like many others entering treatment, his first drug screen reflected years of substance use. Over time, one substance after another disappeared from his screenings until only his prescribed Suboxone remained. Month after month, his progress seemed remarkable. Then something changed.

His drug screens began showing alcohol alongside his prescribed medication. Week after week, the alcohol remained. I remember mentioning it to our MAT Program Director, Jen.

"It's really a shame," I said. "He was doing so well, and now he's drinking again."

She looked at me with genuine surprise.

"Excuse me??"

Thinking she hadn't heard me, I repeated myself. I said it was unfortunate that after so many months he was no longer in recovery because he had started drinking. Then she asked me a question that would forever change the way I viewed recovery.

"What do you really know about him?"

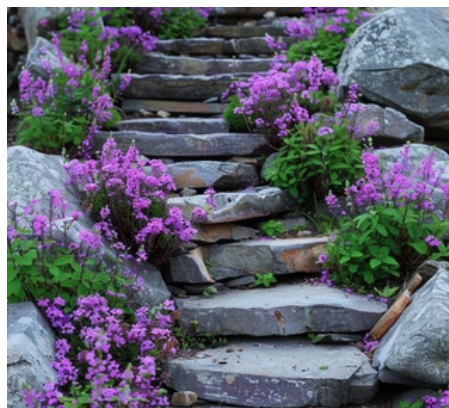
She went on to explain that at the time of his admission, he did not have a job, he no longer had any relationship with his wife and children, and he was homeless. However, now, he was working full-time and was back living with his family. He was reporting to his therapist who he was seeing weekly that his relationship with his wife and children was the best it had been in years. His therapist was aware that he was having wine at dinner with his wife on the weekends. Jen concluded her summary with (and I'm paraphrasing), "So yes, he is having a few drinks on the weekend but I'd say he's doing quite well for himself, don't you think??"

That moment stopped me in my tracks.

What I became aware of at that moment was that I was projecting onto this individual and all the other clients in the program my ideal for success without considering for one moment their actual quality of life. I realized that my way of thinking (which in retrospect was quite arrogant) was that it didn't matter how much their life had changed for the better, if they didn't meet my limited view of recovery, they were not a success at all. It was an incredibly sobering experience (pun intended) that forever changed my view of what harm reduction really was and that everyone's path of recovery is their own to walk.

Recovery is deeply personal. For one person, it may mean complete abstinence. For another, it may begin with simply surviving long enough to rebuild a relationship with a child, find stable housing, return to work, or rediscover hope. Harm reduction does not ask us to lower our expectations; it asks us to recognize progress, celebrate every step forward, and meet people where they are rather than where we believe they should be. That client changed far more than my understanding of medication-assisted treatment.

He changed my understanding of recovery itself.



*Stone & Ivy's contributing writer, **John Poli**, has 20+ years of experience working with adults of all ages experiencing minor or major concerns/changes in their lives. John also has extensive experience working with both individuals with a substance use disorder and individuals who have been impacted by a family member or loved one with a substance use disorder. www.helloalma.com/providers/john-poli | www.mahalowellness.org/our-team*

THE MIRROR

Written by a loved one of someone affected by addiction. Shared with permission.



Spiraling
into the bottomless depths
of your soul.
Crash.
Darkness filters through every corner of your world.
You cannot hide.
You cannot escape.
You are finally face to face
with your greatest opponent.
Boundless bruises
bring back the delusions
of a forgotten past.
Familiar, frightened faces
meet you in the present.
Tomorrow is too haunting to taste.
So you tuck it away.
Deal with the entity
standing directly before you.
Deal with the sadness.
Deal with the hurt.
Deal with the pain.
Deal with us.
Deal with her.
Deal with yourself.
Deal with Him.
Grab it.
Hold it.
Shake it.
Turn it upside down.
Turn it all around.
Place it above you.
Below you.
To your right.
To your left.
Look.
Look again.
Tell me...
What do you see?
The countenance staring back at you.
Staring at me.
Staring at all of us.
Who is he?
A hero?
A coward?
A leader?
A follower?
Lost?
Or finally found?
Is he yours?
Mine?
Ours?
Has addiction won?
Or is this where it begins to lose?
Has it taken enough?
You have wasted enough because of it.
You have taken enough because of it.
You have given enough because of it.
You have destroyed enough because of it.
You have suffered enough because of it.
Defeat it.
Or be defeated.
The choice stands before you.
Like an open door.
In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

TODAY I CHOOSE TO SEE

Shared anonymously by an individual in recovery. Published with permission.

Such a life we take for granted,
Every amenity practically implanted,
Everything at the touch of our fingertips.
The measure of a man judged
By how tightly he grips.

But when things begin to unravel,
When the seams unzip and start to slip,
We realize we missed the last chance
To climb aboard the ship.

The pieces begin to fall.
Life becomes a shattered glass ball.

Everything breaks.

My mind becomes
A thousand Mad Hatters.

The blood splatters
As the crowd gathers.

What matters now,
When the wolves circle,
Their hungry mouths already watering?

Nothing is as clear
As it once seemed.

Blurred vision.
Terminal demolition.

Boom.

Detonation.

Every violation
Laid bare for the world to see.

The only thing I trust
Is my own self-destruction—
Medical envenomation.
Self-assassination.
Degradation.

I've run out of explanations
For my self-mutilation.

Nothing works.

My enemies smirk.

I fell from my horse.

Somewhere in the battle,
I lost my course.

As for my problems...
I am the source.



So now,
I'm searching for a solution.

I must win
This internal revolution.

I long for the satisfaction
That comes with regaining traction.

I want to be open
To honest dissection.

I want God's protection.

And God willing,
The ability to show affection.

A new direction—
Away from self-obsession,
Internal aggression,
High tension,
And mental defection.

I seek relief.

But I know it requires
Work.

Faith.

Belief.

They tell me
That's how the grief begins to loosen its
grip.

How we reclaim
What addiction stole like a thief.

So whatever my sponsor asks of me,
I'll do.

Because I want
To be free.

At night,
And again each morning,
I take a knee.

He reminds me:
"It's not I.
It's we."

They once told me
I was blind.

But today...

Today,
I choose
to see.

BROKEN BUDDHA



Jen Timothy | Writer

Some people leave behind photographs. Others leave letters.

Mike left behind three bags of movies.

It was a quiet afternoon when his mother stopped by the treatment center. We sat together for a while, sharing stories about a son I had the privilege of knowing. We laughed. We cried. We remembered. A few months had passed since Mike's death, yet somehow he still felt very present.

As we talked, his mother smiled and said something I have never forgotten.

"He was my Broken Buddha."

There it was. The perfect description.

Mike had an incredible way of caring for everyone around him, even while he was struggling himself. He wanted people to laugh. He wanted people to feel welcome. He wanted peace—for himself, certainly—but perhaps even more for everyone else.

Whenever Mike came to treatment, he never arrived empty-handed. He was a devoted movie buff with a collection that seemed endless. Before admission, he'd often ask his mom to stop at Redbox or bring a stack of DVDs from home so there would be something everyone on the unit could enjoy together. In a place filled with uncertainty, difficult conversations, and hard days, Mike somehow found a way to create moments of normalcy. For a couple of hours, people weren't patients. They were simply people sharing a movie, laughing together, and forgetting, if only briefly, the battles they were fighting.

On the day his mother visited, she brought those movies with her—three large bags filled with hundreds of DVDs. She told us there was only one place they belonged: the treatment center. The place Mike often called his second home. A place where hope lived. A place where people came when they wanted to try again.

I remember looking at those bags and realizing they were far more than a movie collection. They were pieces of Mike. Little reminders that even during his own darkest seasons, he continued thinking about how he could brighten someone else's day. That was simply who he was.

Over the years, I've heard every opinion imaginable about addiction. "They chose this." "Why keep helping them?" "They should have known better." Those words become much harder to say when you've known someone like Mike.

Because addiction never tells the whole story.

Behind every diagnosis is a son or daughter. Someone who loves movies. Someone who makes people laugh. Someone who comforts others while quietly carrying burdens of their own. Someone whose absence leaves an ache in countless hearts.

Working in addiction treatment taught me many things, but perhaps the most important lesson was this: if we only see the addiction, we miss the person.

Mike was thoughtful. He was funny. He was compassionate and generous. He remembered birthdays. He encouraged complete strangers. He wanted everyone around him to find peace, even when he struggled to find it himself.

His mother didn't remember him by the disease that took him.

She remembered him as her Broken Buddha.

I think that's how we should remember everyone.

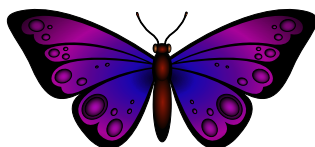
Not by how their story ended, but by how they lived, how they loved, and what they left behind in the hearts of others.

Every August, we wear purple to honor lives lost to overdose. But remembrance is more than a ribbon. It is choosing to tell their stories. It is refusing to let addiction become the only chapter people remember.

Mike's movies still make people smile. His kindness still echoes through the halls where he once searched for healing. His story continues to remind me that hope often looks like the person who, despite carrying the heaviest burdens, still finds a way to lift everyone else.

Maybe that's what Broken Buddhas do.

They quietly teach us that even a heart carrying unimaginable pain can become a source of light for someone else. And perhaps the greatest way we can honor them is to keep telling their stories—with compassion, with gratitude, and with the reminder that every life is so much more than the illness it fought.



THE WORDS THEY LEFT BEHIND

Notes, messages, art, and memories from lives that continue to matter.

I am so grateful for your kindness to me. You've always showed me you care! I've been so lucky to have you brought into my life. You've changed me in so many ways, you planted the seed for my sobriety and I finally watered it!

Thank you for being there for me, even when I wasn't there for myself! You made me a better person and now a better Mom! Always thinking of you! You have a space in my heart.

Hello love bug!! Miss you like crazy!



best things my way. lately we been reflecting on what a mess I've made of my life though coming to believe that's not who I am today. I make poor decisions when I let this ugly disease take charge. I don't have to live that way anymore. I can be true to me!! my only job today is to be spiritually connected, I believe my spirit is alive and wants to be good. I have seen the results of being a good person and I love the feelings it gives me!!

Recovery for me would mean being able to love myself, value myself, acknowledge my good qualities and know that I deserve happiness in my life without any anger or guilt about my past. It would allow me to find who I really am inside and be proud, it would also give me a second chance at the life I truly deserve by being honest with myself. Recovery would give me the chance to have a healthy relationship with myself, my family, especially my sons and fiance and possibly make some friends.

I would be able to let go of the events in my life that really shattered my self esteem and self worth without having anger in my heart and soul towards myself or others. I would finally be able to take full control of my life as well as responsibility that would lead me in a positive direction. I would be proud of who I am instead of carrying the weight of shame and regrets on my shoulders.

I would be able to smile again, dream again, love again, and be loved knowing I deserve it. I would finally be able to look in the mirror and love who I am. I would have found faith and spiritual peace within myself that I never had.

It is often said "you only live once" But for me Recovery means a second chance at life.

I just wanna be me! I can't wait to meet her ☺

I am talking to my family again, and learning more about them and about myself. I am also talking to the adoptive parents who I consider family now as well. Hearing the voices of my sons, their yells and screams, their laughs and coos, give me inspiration. The desire and will to be a better man, a better father, son, brother, nephew and uncle has become the top priority in my life. It is no longer the drugs or my street credentials that are of the utmost importance. Finding and releasing the powerful man inside me has become paramount. It all started with the efforts of you going above

Proverbs - chap. 10 verse 12
Luke - chap. 10 verse 18-20
God is...

were dark. I really didn't know if I was gonna make it but the Lord sure did! My heart has gotten lighter and softer in the past several weeks as a result of nothing that I did besides simply remain still. Now the healing can begin.

Thanks for being a friend!!

My kids don't deserve this
all great

Saturday
12-4
am

Family
drugs
kids

here
we
go
again

If I only think about HURT
I'll just keep
suffering



Im
fine!

god
help
me

I have to
find us a
HOME

bring it
on!!!
sleep

y did
it ditch
me

weak

Does
Jaylyn
like me
like I do
from

I did
I care
so much

drugie

y can
skip

I was
a little
girl

why do
I care
so much

Hypertension
Feeling
sadness w/o
cause

I was
so much
there

life is a
series of crushing
disappointments!!

does
anyone
love me?

y did
stephen
have 2
die

why can
I do any
thing right

My
heart cant
really be
this heavy

I took the
meds y do
I think like
this

weak

y am I
even crying

how much
worse can it get

I cant do
this alone

Im so
ungrateful

oxygen !!

am I
panicing

george
is going
to yell @
me



So guess
Im not sleeping
again tonight

how long
can I feel so
bad before
I use

am I
crazy

Its been
so long why
cant I forget

or as
broken as
I feel

whats
wrong
with me?

OFF
Switch
PLZ

nobody
understands
me

go ahead
waste ur life

why didnt
I die

stop
crying

If suffering is
a great teacher

am I so easy to forget, or just not worth remembering



Do whatever you need to do this morning...
then you can deal with the most DIFFICULT
task of them ALL... ME!!

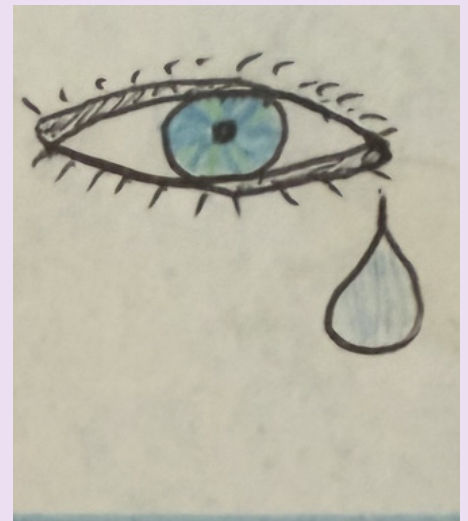
Wake me whenever... I'll most likely
be laying in bed awake anyways!??

Thanks!
your the BESTEST!
Winky

Thank you for everything
you have ever done
for me, thank you for
believing in me and
pushing me when
nobody else did...im
truly very grateful for
that and will forever
be indebted to you.
Take care~

I love you soooo you
have no idea how
much your kind
genuine beautiful
has been strength
when i lost sight of it.
When I give in to my
weakness I am so
disappointed in
myself I just want to
punish myself
because I know what
I capable of and it
hurts my soul bc it's
a chain reaction and
it's not juat me
involved when I slip.
But on the bright side
I am learning to love

I would like to thank you
for everything you and your
staff did for me. I say
good bye in writing, but
I'll keep you up to speed.



Love Hoped All things
Cor. 13.7

Whats Love To me?

Love is spending time
Love is understanding
Love is more than saying it
Love is shown through Action
Love is Lack of Dish
Love is Acceptance no matter what
Love is warm
Love is safety
Love is gentleness
Love is caring
Love is Joyful
Love is Dedication
Love is patience
Love is honesty
Love is Family
Love is never giving up
Love is putting yourself out there
Love is lack of fear
Love is protection
Love is being there when needed
Love is thoughtfulness
Love is Humbleness
Love is kindness
Love endures

Love gives All of itself

To experience All of these at once I think
would change the most polluted parts
of a Broken Soul, How could anyone carry
even an ounce of Darkness amidst the Full,
Awesome power of Love? Now that would
truly be an emotionally Broken person. Where
Do you come from?



IN THE KNOW

Awareness begins with understanding. Sometimes the smallest piece of information—a conversation, a resource, a phone call, or a simple act of kindness—can change the course of a life.

We've gathered a few important reminders, resources, and insights that educate, encourage, and inspire. Because when we know more, we love better, support more fully, and become part of the hope someone else may be searching for.



Support Saves Lives

A reminder that compassion, connection, and simply showing up for someone can make all the difference.



Community

Healing happens together—because no one was ever meant to carry life's heaviest burdens alone.



International Overdose Awareness Day

A global day of remembrance, education, and hope, honoring lives lost while standing beside those still finding their way.
August 31, 2026



Good Samaritan Law

Knowing your rights could save a life—learn how the Good Samaritan Law encourages people to call for help during an overdose emergency.



Finding Help

Recovery begins with a single step, and support, treatment, and hope are available for anyone ready to reach out.



The Purple Ribbon

The purple ribbon is a symbol of overdose awareness, remembrance, and our shared commitment to reducing stigma and supporting recovery.

IT STARTS RIGHT HERE

Building Communities Where Hope Lives



Jen Timothy | Writer

Communities are often measured by beautiful parks, thriving schools, safe neighborhoods, and welcoming streets. But perhaps the true measure of a community is something less visible. Perhaps it is how we care for people when they are struggling.

Every day, individuals and families are affected by substance use disorders. They are our neighbors, coworkers, classmates, friends, and loved ones. Addiction does not recognize ZIP codes, professions, or income levels. It exists in every kind of neighborhood, which means recovery should be welcomed there, too.

Yet when conversations arise about opening treatment centers, recovery residences, respite programs, or hosting educational events, we sometimes hear a familiar phrase: "Not in my backyard."

It is often spoken from a place of uncertainty or fear. Questions arise about safety, change, and what these resources might mean for a neighborhood. Those concerns deserve thoughtful conversation. But perhaps there is another question worth asking.

What if a community became known not only for beautiful homes and well-kept streets, but also for its willingness to care for its people?

Imagine neighborhoods where recovery meetings are viewed as gatherings of hope. Where educational events are opportunities to learn rather than something to avoid. Where treatment centers represent healing instead of hardship. Where families know they do not have to travel hours to find support, and where someone ready to ask for help can find it close to home.

Support is not something that happens only inside the walls of a treatment program. It happens when communities choose compassion over judgment. It happens when local organizations host awareness events, when businesses support recovery initiatives, when schools educate students, and when neighbors become willing to learn about addiction rather than fear it.

The strongest communities are not those without hardship—they are the ones that respond to hardship with empathy, understanding, and action. Recovery does not happen in isolation, it happens through connection. Because someone created a place where healing could begin.

Imagine if every neighborhood became known as a place where hope was welcome. Where conversations replaced assumptions. Where education replaced stigma. Where treatment was viewed not as something to hide, but as something to celebrate.

Because when one person finds recovery, families begin to heal. Friendships are restored. Children grow up with parents who are present. Workplaces gain healthy employees. Neighborhoods become stronger—not despite recovery, but because of it.

The question may not be whether treatment, support, or recovery belong in our communities. Perhaps the better question is this: **If healing doesn't belong here... where does it belong?**



OVERDOSE AWARENESS

What to Look For & What to Do

Symptoms and Indications of an Overdose:

- Respiratory depression: slow and shallow breathing or cessation of breathing
- Making snoring or gurgling sounds
- Blue or gray skin color
- Dark lips and fingernails
- Unable to talk
- Disorientation
- Pinpoint pupils
- Decreased level of consciousness, can't be woken up
- No response to stimuli
- Drug paraphernalia in the vicinity
- Note: If you can't get them to respond, don't assume they are asleep. Not all overdoses happen quickly and sometimes it can take hours for someone to die. Taking action in those hours means you could save a life.

What to Do:

- This is a medical emergency: Call 911 for a first responder immediately.
- Try to get the person to respond.
- Administer CPR if you are qualified.
- Rub knuckles on the breast bone.
- If they respond, keep them awake and breathing.
- If their skin is blue, perform mouth to mouth rescue breathing.
- Stay with the person. If you must leave, place the person in a recovery position (on their left side).
- Look around the victim to see if they are carrying NARCAN® (Naloxone), or have it in the vicinity, or if anyone in the area has it... and administer it! Keep in mind, it can take more than one dose of naloxone to revive a person who has overdosed. There is no harm in giving multiple doses to a person in an attempt to revive them.

What **Not** to Do:

- Do not put the person in a cold bath.
- Do not inject them with saltwater or stimulant drugs (methamphetamine).
- Do not try to have them walk it off or sleep it off.
- Do not induce vomiting.



What is Naloxone (Narcan)?

Naloxone is a non-scheduled (non-addictive), prescription medication used in opioid overdoses to counteract life-threatening depression of the central nervous system and respiratory system, allowing an individual experiencing an overdose to breathe normally. Naloxone can be administered by non-medical personnel, which makes it ideal for individuals to treat overdose in people who have been prescribed opioid pain medication and in people who use heroin and other opioids. Naloxone only works if a person has opioids in their system and the medication has no effect if opioids are absent (National Harm Reduction Coalition).

It may take multiple doses of naloxone to take effect. There is no harm in giving a person who is experiencing an overdose multiple doses of naloxone.



In the event of an overdose, complete the following steps:

STEP 1: Stimulate them awake by yelling their name and administering a hard sternum rub to the chest plate.

STEP 2: If you have naloxone/Narcan, use it. Administer one dose every two minutes.

- **Injectable:** Draw up the entire vial and inject it into the thigh muscle.
- **Nasal:** Stick the device all the way up one nostril and click the plunger, making sure the device is inserted fully (the medication will absorb through the sinuses).

STEP 3: Call 911; explain someone is not responsive and not breathing.

STEP 4: Provide rescue breathing. Get the person on their back, tip their head back to straighten the airway, pinch their nose, put your mouth over theirs and form a seal, one breath every five seconds.

STEP 5: When the person starts to breathe regularly on their own, roll them into a recovery position on their side.

STEP 6: Be gentle with them and yourself afterward!

GOOD SAMARITAN LAWS - WHAT ARE THEY AND CAN THEY SAVE LIVES?



Since 1992, more than 932,000 people have died from a drug overdose. We are losing generations of people, and the tragedy is that most if not all of these deaths could have been prevented.

The chance of surviving an overdose depends on many factors, but perhaps one of the most impactful is how fast one receives medical treatment and assistance. Oftentimes, people wait or hesitate to call for medical help or the police in fear of legal involvement. People who use drugs are still a very criminalized population, and even with police diversion programs where people are offered treatment instead of incarceration, people who use drugs are oftentimes not entirely comfortable with law enforcement or medical personnel.

To save lives and to encourage individuals to call the police in the event of a drug overdose, many states have enacted Good Samaritan laws that protect from prosecution for certain drug offenses for the person who called the police or ambulance, as well as the person who overdosed. People witnessing a possible overdose event should not fear reprisal for trying to save that person's life - and a legal intervention seems like the perfect way to guarantee that. But not all "Good Sam" laws are created equal.

According to the National Conference on State Legislatures, most states and the District of Columbia have enacted some form of a Good Sam law. The scope of what offenses and violations are covered by immunity protection varies widely by state. Some states have opted for more restricted immunity while others, like Vermont, have provided immunity from a more thorough list of controlled-substance offenses. Some states have sub-par Good Sam laws that impose requirements like police cooperation or treatment as a condition of immunity. Many states are constantly working on expanding the Good Sam laws to be more recovery-informed and effective.

While many states have ineffective or underutilized Good Sam laws, some states have none. According to The Network for Public Health Law, three states have no Good Sam law in effect - Kansas, Texas, and Wyoming.

Reducing barriers to calling 911 has the potential to save victims of overdose from severe injury and death; this is needed now more than ever. As recovery advocates, we must consistently maintain robust and effective Good Sam laws so we can stop those from needlessly dying.

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES



You can find lots of helpful information on our partnering site, Mahalowellness.org. For more, we recommend the following:

- Learn all about alcohol use disorder with the [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism \(NIAAA\)](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov), leaders in the nation's research efforts on the topic. (www.niaaa.nih.gov)
- Find out the [Real Deal on Fentanyl](http://www.realdealonfentanyl.com), a national campaign by the Ad Council, aimed at educating young Americans about its dangers. (www.realdealonfentanyl.com)
- Visit [The Opioid Response Network](http://www.opioidresponsenetwork.org) providing free educational resources to individuals in the prevention, treatment and recovery of opioid use disorders and stimulant use. (www.opioidresponsenetwork.org)
- [Sesame Street](http://www.sesamestreetincommunities.org) is leading efforts to support children's understanding of addiction and in navigating difficult family dynamics. (www.sesamestreetincommunities.org)
- [The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services \(SAMHSA\)](http://www.samhsa.gov) offers tools for families dealing with mental and substance use disorders. They also offer an [Opioid Treatment Program Directory](http://www.samhsa.gov). (www.samhsa.gov)
- [The Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation](http://www.hazeldenbettyford.org) provides a family toolkit to support families facing drug and alcohol addiction. (www.hazeldenbettyford.org)
- [Partnership to End Addiction](http://www.drugfree.org) gives parents direct support to prevent and cope with teen drug and alcohol use. (www.drugfree.org)
- [Matters Network](http://www.mattersnetwork.org) provides invaluable information around the efficacy of Harm Reduction strategies. (www.mattersnetwork.org)
- [Overdose Day](http://www.overdoseday.com) provides information, educational materials, and Overdose International Day community events for those who want to learn more and show support. (www.overdoseday.com)

IN MEMORY WE ADVOCATE

To remember is to love. To advocate is to carry that love forward.

Jen Timothy | Writer

There are names we will never forget. Faces that still come to mind without warning. Text messages we still cannot bring ourselves to delete. Birthday reminders that quietly appear each year. Empty chairs at family gatherings. Friends who should still be here. Sons and daughters whose stories ended far too soon.

This special edition is dedicated to them.

It is also dedicated to those who are still here—still fighting, still hoping, still searching for a way forward.

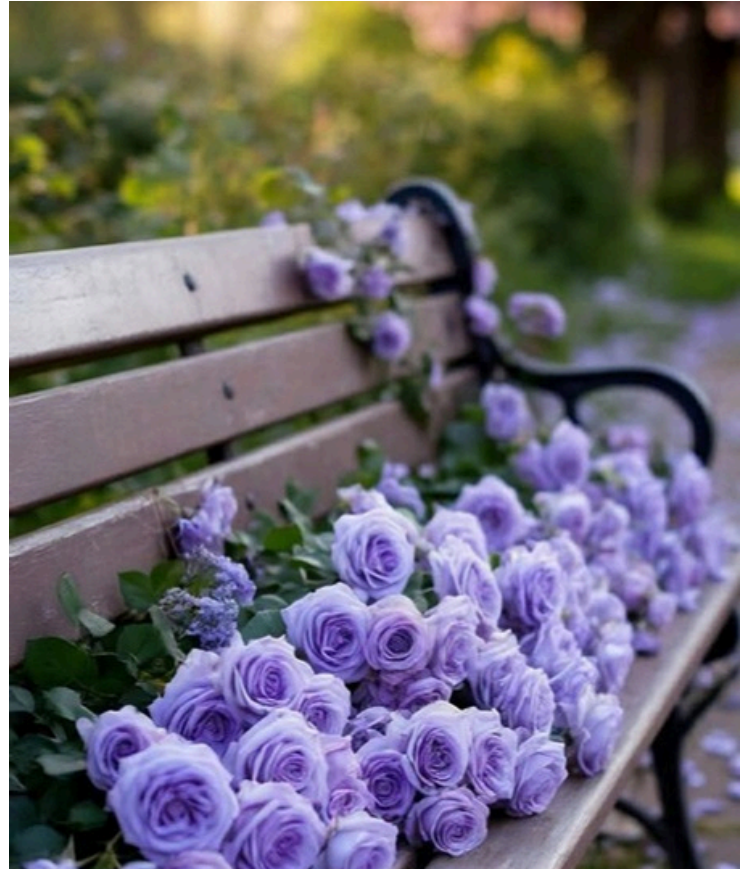
Throughout these pages, one message quietly rises above the rest: listen.

Listen to the stories that are difficult to tell. Listen before making assumptions. Listen long enough to understand that addiction is rarely the beginning of someone's story. More often, it is one chapter in a life shaped by experiences many of us will never fully understand. When we choose to listen instead of judge, stigma begins to lose its grip. Compassion grows. And compassion has the remarkable ability to change lives.

Perhaps that is where advocacy truly begins.

Not only in legislation, awareness campaigns, or organized events, but in our everyday lives. Advocacy begins when we are willing to learn. It grows when we speak with kindness instead of criticism, when we replace assumptions with curiosity, and when we create communities where asking for help is met with dignity rather than shame.

The strongest communities are not those untouched by hardship—they are the ones that respond to hardship with compassion. They support treatment instead of resisting it. They welcome educational events, encourage honest conversations, and recognize that recovery is not



someone else's issue; it belongs to all of us. Every time we make space for healing, we strengthen the very fabric of our neighborhoods, our schools, our workplaces, and our families.

Each year on August 31, communities around the world observe International Overdose Awareness Day. It is a day to honor the lives that have been lost, support those who continue to grieve, and stand beside every individual who is still courageously finding their way through recovery. It is also an opportunity for each of us to become part of something larger than ourselves.

Wear purple. Attend a remembrance walk. Light a candle. Share a story. Learn about addiction and recovery. Reach out to someone who may need encouragement. Every one of these acts, no matter how small they may seem, helps replace silence with conversation, stigma with understanding, and isolation with connection.

The people we remember are far more than the circumstances of their deaths. They were parents and children, siblings and spouses, neighbors and friends. They laughed, dreamed, loved deeply, and hoped for brighter days. Their stories deserve to be remembered with tenderness, and their lives call us to build a future where fewer families experience this kind of loss.

As you close this special edition, my hope is that you carry one simple idea with you: every act of compassion matters. Every conversation matters. Every effort to educate, advocate, and support another person matters. We may never fully know the impact a listening ear, an open door, or a few words of encouragement will have on someone's life.

And for all of us, may we continue building communities where compassion speaks louder than stigma, where healing is welcomed, and where every person knows they are worthy of another chance.





PURPLE SKIES PLAYLIST

Music has a way of reaching places that words sometimes cannot. This collection of songs was chosen with hope in mind—for the people who are healing, the families who continue to love, the lives we remember, and the futures still being written.

Whether you listen while taking a quiet walk, sharing time with someone you care about, or simply sitting with your thoughts, may these songs serve as a reminder that even after the darkest nights, light returns. There is hope. There is healing. And there is always another chance to begin again.

1. Rose Cousins - *Never Surrender*
2. U2 - *Running to Stand Still*
3. P!nk - *Who Knew*
4. Rent Cast - *Seasons of Love*
5. Lauren Daigle - *Rescue*
6. Rob Thomas - *Ever the Same*
7. Train - *Calling All Angels*
8. Javier Colon - *Fix You*
9. Papa Roach/Carrie Underwood - *Leave a Light On*
10. Casting Crowns - *Scars in Heaven*
11. Daughtry - *Gone Too Soon*
12. Brooke Fraser - *Shadowfeet*
13. Ed Sheeran - *The A Team*
14. Beyonce - *Halo*
15. Five For Fighting - *100 Years*
16. John Mayer - *Say*
17. Christina Perri - *Human*
18. The Fray - *How to Save a Life*
19. Sarah McLachlan - *Angel*
20. The Greatest Showman Cast - *This Is Me*
21. Sia - *Unstoppable*
22. The Black Crowes - *She Talks to Angels*
23. Demi Lovato - *Anyone*
24. Neil Young - *The Needle and the Damage Done*
25. Amos Lee - *Hang On, Hang On*
26. Evanescence - *Bring Me to Life*
27. Pretenders - *I'll Stand by You*
28. Bill Withers - *Lean on Me*
29. Brandi Carlile - *The Eye*
30. Danny Gokey - *Tell Your Heart to Beat Again*
31. Plumb - *Beautifully Broken*
32. Art Of Dying - *Best I Can*
33. Billie Eilish, Khalid - *Lovely*
34. Chris Stapleton - *Broken Halos*
35. Dermot Kennedy - *Better Days*
36. Kacey Musgraves - *Rainbow*
37. Simon & Garfunkel - *Bridge Over Troubled Water*
38. Gregory Alan Isakov - *The Stable Song*
39. Maggie Rogers - *Light On*
40. The Teskey Brothers - *Carry You*
41. Noah Kahan - *Orange Juice*
42. Xavier Rudd - *Follow the Sun*
43. Andra Day - *Rise Up*

This mix can be found & saved on Spotify: Purple Skies by JTimothy



From All of Us at Stone & Ivy

Thank you for spending time with us and for opening your heart to the stories shared throughout these pages. We hope this special edition has offered not only awareness, but also understanding; not only education, but also compassion; and above all, hope.

May we continue to choose kindness over judgment, curiosity over assumption, and connection over silence. May we become the neighbors who listen, the friends who stay, the families who support, and the communities that remind every person they are worthy of love, dignity, and another chance.

As you leave this issue behind, we invite you to carry its message with you. Wear the purple ribbon. Share what you've learned. Attend the walk. Have the conversation. Reach out to someone who may need to know they are not alone. Small acts of compassion have a remarkable way of becoming something much greater.

Thank you for believing that every story matters, every life has value, and every act of advocacy helps build a more compassionate world.

Until next time, may you continue to lead with grace, listen with intention, and never underestimate the quiet power of hope.

