

## *DISCARDED DARKNESS: LIFE LESSONS OF A BROKEN CHILD*

Twisted real life story of my life of substance abuse and recovery. I wish I had known these life lessons before all of this.



# DISCARDED DARKNESS: LIFE LESSONS OF A BROKEN CHILD

## Part I: "Discarded Darkness" Part II: "Life Lessons of a Broken Child"

- The publication is broken down into two parts:
  1. The first part, "Discarded Darkness," is a unique abridged amalgamation of the dark, twisted, and entertaining real life tale that is my life.
  2. The second part, "Life Lessons of a Broken Child," is keenly insightful and incredibly helpful life lessons. I wish I had known these life lessons before all of this.



## ***PART 1: DISCARDED DARKNESS***

### **(1) LAKE OF THE SEVEN FINGERS**

When I was a little kid, we moved to a small southern town. The small town was typical in that there were bars, churches, and hawthorn on nearly every street corner. Frequent drinking parties were the norm, and getting wasted was totally in vogue. My hard partying started around the 5th grade.

My friends and I helped ourselves to the family intoxicants, and we developed a network of nasty dogs, who would purchase us booze for a small fee. In short order, my network of drinking associates expanded to people outside my contemporaries, with each drunken savant beguiling me with upgraded levels of debauchery. Getting toasted became a completely normal part of my life, and looking for the next buzz was just part of the deal.

My parents divorced and went their separate ways, and me being the minor son, I was given to my mother. My mother met a slick talking traveling salesman, who suddenly stopped traveling. Soon thereafter, I found myself in an ugly quagmire, like the 3rd wheel of a rusted tricycle. The rusted tricycle squeakily wheeled itself into what was left of a bankrupted resort. At one point, the resort was a beautiful oasis, but that all changed. By the time we arrived, the only thing really left standing was a rustic fourteen room lodge. After the owner supposedly burned it down about a week earlier, the once fine dining restaurant was still smoldering toxic blue smoke.

The slick talking traveling salesman's job was to run the lodge, and to perform routine maintenance. In exchange, we were provided free lodging, in which I was provided my very own room. It was far away from the slick talking traveling salesman, and my mother. My room was located at the extreme edge of the rustic lodge, entirely separated from the other spokes, and I was free to do my own thing all the time.

On most weekends, some of my other town friends would be carted in to stay for the weekend. I had my own fancy room, so, naturally, my pad at the lodge was a hot ticket item, and my friends competed to be the chosen ones. Of course, we partied, got wasted, and smoked some weed too.

Our booze of choice was Mad Dog 20/20, and lots of it, and that stuff plays rough. On top of that, huge lake parties, replete with kegs of beer, pig roasts, and half naked campers, were omnipresent in the fields and streams, and the parties were frequent, and enormous in both size, and scale.



At one point, the lodge was reported for not having any running water. The lodge was supplied with water from the enormous lake. The lake water was pumped from the belly of the beast into a giant 20,000 gallon cauldron that was filled with sand to sort of filter it, and then a second pump sent the sand filtered water to the lodge.

For several months, the slick talking traveling salesman chose not to pay the electric bill, so the electricity got shut off, and the water pumps could not pump. For over 4 months, we were bathing in the lakes, and hauling five gallon buckets of water, with one bucket on each arm to balance the load, to fill the holding tanks of the toilets. Ultimately, the slick talking traveling salesman was fired, and we were forcibly evicted from the lodge.

## (2) GOVERNMENT CHEESE

After being forcibly evicted from the lodge, my mother, and the slick talking traveling salesman, went to live with a country family, and I was returned to live with my father and siblings in the other town. From the outside of the house, the family home seemed like a nice Tudor. On the inside, however, the inhabitants did their own thing, and lived their own separate lives, which was fortuitous for me.

Throughout the school year, my drunken friends, and I continued riding the thunder river of debauchery. Our little town had many dealers who primarily sold weed. Some other dealers were more full service, and sold weed, and other exploratory accouterments, including acid. During that school year, some of my friends and I took some walks on the wild side, and visited the land of LSD a few times.

Finally, after a year or so, the slick talking traveling salesman found us a place to live, so subsequently, I was returned to the rotted tricycle. The slick talking traveling salesman found us a house, a rental home. The rental house the slick talking traveling salesman discovered was grossly bespectacled, both visually and structurally.

In better economic times, the rental house would have been condemned, or torn down. Fortunately, the walk to school was a breeze, and I usually ran into some friends along the way. In high school, I became much more proficient as the town's drunken stalwart, and I really stepped up my game to feed my addictions.

At the start of my senior year of high school, I got connected with a shady person who I will call Tom. Tom lived with his sister, and brother-in-law, and was sleeping on their couch for several months at that point.



Tom loved to drink, and get stoned, and usually had booze, and weed in stock. Down in his sister's basement, Tom had access to a ping pong table, and a pool table, and I loved to play both, and get drunk, and get high too. Every morning, instead of walking to school from our rental home, I walked to Tom's sisters' house, and Tom and I hung out, drank, and smoked weed, and just spent the days getting roasted.



When it was all said and done, I had skipped out over half my senior year getting wasted with Tom. Finally, the high-school principal contacted my mother to report me missing. Of course, my mother was not exactly in the running for mother of the decade either. Ultimately, I returned myself to high school, completed my senior year, graduated without too much drama, and then shortly thereafter, I was moved out of state.

### (3) TRAVELING CIRCUS

Under the pretense of a fleeting visit to my grandparents, my mother made the sneaky gambit to ship me to the great Midwest. At one point later in my life, I thought my mother was doing me a solid, but then, I discovered, it was strictly financial, as child support stopped paying their rent. The clandestine action was already in place for me to live with my grandparents, and the plan was betrayed shortly after arriving and announced at dinner.

More or less, I settled in living with my grandparents, and after living with them for a while, I secured a full time job at a fruit juice factory. There, I met a colorful bunch of tulips and roses, and just like that, I had joined a new group of troubled hard chargers. As a group, we would bar hop, and the fact I was underage was no matter, as I spent a whole lot of money drinking like a wild buffalo, and my foolishness continued unabated.

The mastery of the drunken chicken dance was the zenith of my life at that stage. My drunken chicken dance was legendary and farm raised.

My suave and salty southern charm helped me make friends easily, and the dance gelled into a vortex of pirouettes, intensified by performances in unique occupational arenas. After work, flopping to the bars, closing them, and going to after bar parties, was the right thing to do for a party monkey.

My weekend friends and I had similar adventures, just the venues were different. The cast of characters were divergent in theaters of operation, and personalities. Nevertheless, the final mission of getting wasted was entirely the same.

The circus of traveling friends jumped from one tent to the next, distinguishing themselves with their flamboyant florets, caress of steel, and overstuffed couches, replete with invisible dried pee, and shattered chips and dreams.

#### (4) DETOX SECTOR IV

As the years flowed by, the circus, and the clowns advanced in oblong patterns, subsequently, evaporating any pretense of allegiance, or genuine friendship. As the ship of fools sank to the bottom, it was every jester for himself. My boat needed little to submerge it, as it was already thrashed from years of alcohol abuse, and the destruction manifested in several intense voyages to the emergency room.

In my insanity defense, summoning a party lion to a drinking challenge, any drinking challenge, is a battle worth fighting. For me, the road to inpatient treatment began with an activated charcoal cocktail made to order in the emergency room.

Depending on the smog level of alcohol pollution, a person will detoxify in the nurturing hand of the medical center Shepard. Alcohol withdrawal is categorically no joke, and can render a person our dearly departed, like rest in peace. Conventionally, the purification process concludes at the end of day three, and then, the purified person is escorted to the locked zone of inpatient treatment.

After detoxification was complete, I was wheel chaired by an affable security officer to the locked ward of inpatient treatment. My sinewy legs worked great, and the wheelchair is used as an effective security measure, as it makes running away more challenging.

My wheelchair enters the first level of defensive doors, into a rudimentary barren waste land. It is an area with mini-lockers, coat racks, defibrillators, more wheelchairs, oversized first aid kits, and an intercom system that is used to coordinate the buzzing of doors. Only after the first doors safely seal shut, a second set of doors open widely. Alas, I entered the inpatient zone.



## (5) INPATIENT ZONE

Walking on my own power into the frigid passageway of the locked ward, I am unwell. After detox, my insides feel like a wet washcloth twisted into a contorted pretzel, with every sense elevated to high alert. The nurse escorts me into a windowless room that is painted with colorful creatures from the pond. The nurse is noticeably frenzied, and hastens me through the intake process, and admonishes that visitors need prior authorization.

Then, an expedited tour is arranged, revealing my stoic and secure surroundings. Finally, I am escorted to my stale and motionless room.

The room is a generic hospital room, devoid of any lifesaving equipment, televisions, or creature comforts. The room has a windowless bathroom, without a door, and a stand-up shower, with an unfettered view of the helpless aquanaut. Like most newcomers, I hide in my room for a couple of days, and, from time to time, the staff comes to check in on me, encouraging me to venture out of the stuffy room. On the locked ward, vacant beds don't stay empty for very long, and I was given a roommate, a cheerless man, who fancied gloominess. To escape the pessimism of my roommate, I advance out into the opaque unknown.

The nurse's station is located front and center, and is enclosed by thin security glass, with retracting sliding panels. Next to the nurse's station, is a barren common area that has tables, chairs, board games, simple puzzles, playing cards, stuffed animals, educational pamphlets, sanitizer, and coloring books. The chief occupants of this sector are the emotionally exhausted newcomers. The newcomers feel more safe with the nurse's station nearby. All newcomers quickly learn the chow schedule, but the programming regimen takes some learning. Participation in programming is voluntary, but not engaging in the program, however, protracts your stay in the locked inpatient facility.

Programming can best be described as going back to high school. Every morning, programming starts around nine, and you go from one class to another, every hour or so. Every class has a different teacher, and, in this case, different so-called professionals, in a wide variety of disciplines, like art therapy, substance abuse, psychology, counseling and life skills. Our handlers keep close tabs on us, and determine if and when we can

leave locked-up mode, and upgrade to, come and go, outpatient mode. After a period of time, I was offered outpatient mode, finished my assigned time, and completed the program.

## (6) AUTUMN LEAVES

After completing the program, I experienced a stretch of soberness, and then, after a couple months or so, I started drinking heavily again. For many years thereafter, my drinking escalated frightfully, and I ended up in some hell holes, and other nasty dog centers for drunkards. Many of these centers are just warehouses for substance abusers.

My existence teetered on moments of functionality, followed by a cascade of pandemonium, which continued ad nauseam. I was a death star, slowly imploding. My jovial personality marginally masked my darkness and despair. Fortunately, the cosmos smiled upon me, offering me another chance at living. I didn't have an epiphany, or a religious experience, or a crucible moment of some sort. I was simply sick of myself, and I had enough, and wanted to change. For years, I have safeguarded my soberness, and have accomplished some things, with many things yet to complete. As a kid, I was discarded, forgotten, and neglected. Then later in life, I generated tons more garbage on my own, so the journey back will be a lifetime deal.

My problems did not disappear just because I stopped drinking. The reality for me is that the emotional wounds accrued interest all the years they were left untouched, and the time to repair it may be a long time. So far, the journey has had its share of bumps and bruises. Who knows what may come next.

Peace be with you.



## ***PART II: LIFE LESSONS OF A BROKEN CHILD***

### **I: REVIEW YOUR FAMILY PLAYBOOK**

#### *What is a Family Playbook?*

Try to picture the Family Playbook as an enormous instruction manual in many languages. It is so big, in fact, that it may symbolically break your back, if not handled properly. The Family Playbook is tacitly handed down to each, and every new generation. This instruction manual goes back many generations, probably to the genesis of your family. The Family Playbook may be viewed as rules of learned behavior that continuously gets recycled until someone decides they want to change, and break the cycle of generational complexities, like trauma, addictions, relationships, etc.

The Family Playbook effectively communicates without spoken language, or even words. The Family Playbook has a wide range of preaching's, including information about attitudes, beliefs, standard operations, applications, techniques, biases, a how to guide, relationships, health, wellness, coping, drinking, eating, smoking, religion, marriage, job, career, prejudices, emotions, and just about everything else. The Family Playbook is titanic in scope. The information contained in the Family Playbook may or may not be relevant to you, or may fall somewhere in the continuum of relevance to you.

Take time to review the Family Playbook. It's completely in your control to make changes to it. With the Family Playbook, you have the power to update it, amend it, delete it entirely, and keep it as is, or start anew. You may create your very own version of the Family Playbook. If no review of the Family Playbook takes place, we will probably follow the established Family Playbook, as is, for better, or for worse. In the spirit of all sports fans, not just the cheese head wearing Green Bay Packers fans: Picture your favorite team using the same playbook, season after season, year after year, with no changes made ever. Do you think your team would be successful?

## II: THE FRIENDS AND FAMILY WE HAVE TODAY, WILL PROBABLY NOT BE THE FRIENDS AND FAMILY WE HAVE TOMORROW

For me personally, this is by far, the most emotionally painful of all the life lessons in this first volume. I feel pain, not for the loss of flavorless friends, who have long come and gone, but the genuine friends still with me, in heart and spirit, and in person. The genuine people in my life have accepted me, and they are people I know I can trust. In years past, I occasionally dumped on these genuine friends, sometimes deliberately, and other times, I was just being a knucklehead, and lacking much insight and clarity.

I spent years hanging out with flavorless friends drinking, smoking, bar-hopping, attending parties and just random nothingness. Looking back, what a waste of flipping time. True story: one flavorless friend didn't even know my first name, and this was after hanging out for years and years. I didn't discover this until after I attended his milestone birthday party, and in our drunken conversation, he asked me my name. This was after 5 years! I felt like an idiot. In all those years, he just called me "hangover."

We may think that our friends will always be our friends. I totally get it. Of course, for some people, this may be the case. That wasn't the case for me at all. Not even close. I am fortunate that a couple of genuine friends are still with me after the years of incremental neglect. Some of the time, I was not a very good friend. I prioritized flavorless friends over my real friends for the sake of foolishness, and hedonism. I paid the fool's price, and have the pointy dunce hat to prove it.

So, take time, and do an inventory of your friends, and prioritize your genuine friends, over the social media type friends. As we move down life's bumpy road, our most important friend, and confidant, will be our life partner, you know, the one we will share our home with. Give this person an exclusive stage pass to you. This is this person who is, and will be, your very best friend. Treat them like royalty, with Grey Poupon, of course.

The family part is a bit more tricky. I suggest breaking down the "family" into individual parts; more specifically, to each individual person within the family. Individuals in the family can be a source of sparks, including good and bad jolts, and everything else in between.

The spark may be ignited by one or more individuals in the family, or every individual in the family. What we really have is a family of individuals, and individuals make mistakes. Sometimes, the mistakes may be repeated over and over, accidentally, or otherwise.

As the years flow like a raging river, individuals in the family change. Of course, we all change one way or another, whether we want to change, or not. Change can be viewed as positive, or negative, but more likely, change will fall somewhere in the continuum of good and bad. At many points in our life, individuals within our family will ignite some emotional event, and it's likely the emotional event, or spark, will fall somewhere between pleasure and pain, good and bad.

Just like reviewing our friends list and Family Playbook, take time to review our own family to determine our direction in the family, or the level of participation in functions, events, and life stages. The direction and participation part is entirely our choice, and subject to change without notice. Remember: the only person in the family, and in life, we can control is us.

### III: WE CAN INFLUENCE HOW WE FEEL

*"YOU CAN'T CONTROL THE WORLD AROUND YOU BUT YOU CAN CONTROL HOW YOU INTERPRET AND TAKE CARE OF SITUATIONS IN YOUR OWN LIFE." MIKE HUPFER*

#### Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is a tool I have found to be extremely helpful. Aaron Beck, MD., facilitated its movement over half a century ago. CBT may sound complicated, and esoteric, but it's really straightforward. In essence, we can help shape, and influence how we feel, and subsequently, how we act too. The behavior chain, given as an example on the next page, may help illuminate it a bit. The behavior chain is a very effective tool in CBT therapy that helps one to identify how thoughts influence one's behaviors. Every life's action, like a movie script, can be broken down into four basic components: (1) situation (2) thoughts (3) feelings (4) behavior



*CBT basic components: (1) situation (2) thoughts (3) feelings (4) behavior*

The behavior chain starts with a **(1)** situation. It can be any situation. The next part of the behavior chain is the **(2)** thoughts section. Our initial thoughts tend to be negative.

When we are able to identify the initial negative thoughts, and replace them with more positive thoughts, our **(3)** feelings, and subsequent **(4)** behavior, are more likely to be grounded and centered. The key is to identify, and challenge the initial negative thoughts.

We can use behavior chains to review past situations, and to plan for upcoming situations (weddings, reunions, birthdays, etc.). To illustrate, we will use the example of driving in traffic, to get to work, when "somebody cuts us off and flips us the bird."

*CBT basic components: (1) situation (2) thoughts (3) feelings (4) behavior*

**(1) Situation:** Somebody cuts us off and flips us the bird.

- Situation: "Somebody cuts us off and flips us the bird."

**(2) Thoughts:** Initial negative: “Why that SOB” OR more positive: “Who cares.”

(2) Thoughts: (Initial negative: “Why that SOB”)  
Or  
(more positive: “ Who cares.”)

**(3) Feelings:** Thoughts create feelings      pissed off/agitated (initial negative) OR  
less anxious (thinking something more positive)

(3) Feelings  
(pissed off, agitated) from negative thoughts  
Or  
(less anxious) from thinking something more positive or neutral

**(4) Behavior:** Can Lead To snapping at co-workers (negative flow) OR be nicer to them (positive thought flow)

(4) Behavior:  
Negative thoughts may cause negative outcomes such as  
snapping at coworkers  
or  
Positive or more neutral thoughts  
Nicer to coworkers and others in general

***Situation example used: "somebody cuts us off and flips us the bird."***

You can see how outside actions beyond our control can influence both our thinking and behavioral patterns. By understanding these concepts through CBT one can make better decisions that can have a better, more positive impact on both ourselves and others as well.

### CBT Core Components:

Sometimes, our thoughts are misshapen, and weighted toward the negative end of the teeter totter. By challenging the negative thoughts, we may be better able to feel, and act differently.

### CBT Core Beliefs:

People believe core beliefs very strongly, even “feel” it to be true. Yet, it might be mostly, or entirely untrue. A person can use a variety of strategies to challenge the idea, so a person can view themselves in a more realistic way.

### CBT Coping Skills:

Another component of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is developing useful coping skills. Ideally through therapy, the professional will help an individual by teaching coping strategies. These coping strategies may be used to help deal with high-risk situations.

- **Encouraged reading:** *“Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy” by David D. Burns.*

The book is about using Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). More specifically, the book is about using Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to help with depression. The book describes the practical use of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and is applicable to most life events.

## IV: WE ALL HAVE AN INNER CHILD AND THAT CHILD MAY BE SCREAMING FOR HELP

### Transactional Analysis (TA)

The utterance of the words Transactional Analysis conjures images of a pale scientist in some dark lab. The concept is user friendly though. Just think PAC without the MAN. PAC is an acronym that stands for parent, adult, and child. The PAC acronym is a very important concept to know for understanding what Transactional Analysis is all about. Eric Berne, M.D., is the founder of Transactional Analysis, and he likely integrated other resources from others, including Sigmund Freud.

Eric Berne's groundbreaking work helped shape how people's social interactions could be understood better. Transactional Analysis postulates that each one of us has a parent, adult, and child inside of us that largely influences our thoughts and choices in life. In 1964, Eric Berne wrote a great book about Transactional Analysis titled, "Games People Play." The book talks about, you guessed it, games people play. These games are not fun games, like hide and seek, but are harmful games that hinder people from getting close.

From my understanding, the term "warm fuzzies" was derived from a kid's book version of Transactional Analysis. There were a whole series of Transactional Analysis books that included versions for tots, for teens, and for couples.

Transactional Analysis was hugely popular in the 1970's. When thinking of Transactional Analysis (TA), try to visualize PAC. Transactional Analysis refers to PAC as three distinct ego states.

Parent ~ Adult ~ Child (PAC)

P

The "Parent" is a sum total of what we have learned from others when we were kids, especially caretakers, teachers, etc. This has a big impact on how we view others and the world around us since most of this has been integrated within us through learned behavior that has been taught to us in some regard.

A

The "Adult" in the Transactional Analysis is important, because the "Adult" is the kind, and objective coach, who plays mediator for two forces between the parent and child within us, who most of the time, are at opposite ends of the teeter totter. The purpose of the Adult state is to examine and question thoughts and feelings from both the child and the parent part of us and to form an educated conclusion. In essence, it is to be a critical thinker.

C

Our personality lives in the "Child," and deals with emotions, so this piece is important. If you find a joke funny and you start to laugh uncontrollably, most likely this is the child part of us letting go and having fun.



### Parent ~ Adult ~ Child (PAC) II

Picture the parent, adult and child, as big stores inside your brain's mega mall.

Malls are on the endangered species list, but that's another story. The cheese in the Wisconsin water has bolstered my creativity, so I will use the terms parent store, adult store, and child store, when referring to the individual components of the PAC.

The parent store has two departments: the nurturing parent and the critical parent. The nurturing parent and the critical feedback come from many sources: our mother/fathers, educators, relatives, etc. As children, we generally want to please these folks, and will conform to gain approval. In essence, children adapt, to not be cast out.

The child store has two departments: the free child and the adapted child. The free child is the mountain spring source of our creativity, spontaneity, and personality. To obtain conditional approval from others, kids learn to adapt. Problems may surface later in life, when the free child is buried deep, and screaming to be set free.

### Parent ~ Adult ~ Child (PAC) III

*Picture the parent, adult, and child, as residing within yourself. Each has a separate part and function of what makes up your personality.*

- **(P)** The parent part has two components: the nurturing parent and the critical parent. The nurturing and the critical feedback is influenced by many people during our childhood such as parents, educators, relatives, etc. As children, we generally want to please these folks, and will conform to gain approval. In essence, children adapt, to not be cast out and to feel accepted.

- **(A)** The adult component is a function all on its own, and is vital to the overall operations of both the Child ego state and the Parent ego state. It makes decisions based on facts and is influenced by both the Parent and Child ego state. The purpose of the Adult state is to examine and question thoughts and feelings from both the Child and Parent ego states and form an educated conclusion. In essence, it is to be a critical thinker.
- **(C)** The child part of the PAC model has two main components: the free child and the adapted child. The free child is the mountain spring source of our creativity, spontaneity, and personality. To obtain conditional approval from others, kids learn to adapt.

Parent ~ Adult ~ Child (PAC) IV

Problems may surface later in life, when the free child is buried deep, and screaming to be set free. The free child does not like the perpetually critical parent, but will comply, albeit grudgingly. As we grow older, the experience is a series of internal, cerebral conflicts, between the screaming, free child, and the always critical parent. A great example of this conflict is a person who is passive aggressive. On the surface, the adapted child is complying, but the screaming, free child, exacts revenge in the end. This could be in the form of something like giving someone the silent treatment or continually putting off responsibilities.

The adult intervenes by taking inventory of both the Child and Parent ego states so that the Parent component can make a more conscious, balanced decision, independently. At all times, the Adult ego state has the child's best interest. The Adult balances discipline and direction, with freedom for our kid to be a free child. As we grow older, and move through life's trials and tribulations, many of our contemporaries may lose some pizzazz, like they are missing pieces of their personality. It is likely their free child is buried, screaming for rescue.

- "HOME COMING: RECLAIMING AND HEALING YOUR INNER CHILD" BY JOHN BRADSHAW
- "I'M OK - YOU'RE OK" BY THOMAS A. HARRIS M.D.
- "BORN TO WIN" BY MURIEL JAMES AND DOROTHY JONGEWARD
- "GETTING SOBER: A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO MAKING IT THROUGH THE FIRST 30 DAYS" BY KELLY MADIGAN ERLANDSON

## V: HAIR OF THE DOG

At a very young age, I started drinking to numb my emotions. I became heavily involved in abusing alcohol for many years thereafter. With some help and hard work, I have been sober for 11 years. For me, it's frightening and painful to look back, and critique the person I was then. I don't like some parts of that person then, and I see many chapters of my past as flat insanity. My problems have not gone away just because I quit drinking.

To this day, the emotional pain can become overwhelming. Back in the day, alcohol was my turn to, my main man, and my coping mechanism, to numb the emotional pain. Now, I am learning how to deal with emotional pain without booze. From time to time, I still think about grabbing a bottle of booze to make the pain go away. So easy right.

Addictions come in all shapes, sizes, and flavors. For me, my drug of choice was booze, and a whole lot of it. I think most people with addiction issues know they have an issue. I did anyway. For the most part, people suffering from addictions are, more or less, the functional variety. For people suffering from addictions, there may be periodic episodes of "something isn't right" to the outside world, like shirked responsibilities, unusual demeanor, and just being way off one's game.

Mainly though, from outside appearance anyway, many people suffering from addictions look relatively stable, and are able to live their lives fruitfully, however one defines fruit. Here's the thing: the people near, and dear to the addicted person, are also impacted by the addicted person. These folks are innocent bystanders of the unresolved emotional issues, and unpredictable behavior of the addicted person, and it's nearly impossible to feel safe, let alone flourish, in that environment.

After years of practically destroying myself, I decided enough was enough. At first, it was a terrifying experience. Along with other people close to me, I didn't really know who I was 100%. Drinking was such a big part of my identity. Despite the years I spent drinking trying to forget them, all my emotional issues accrued compound interest, and they patiently waited for me in the emotional bank vault. There's a whole lot saved there, so the road back will be a long one.

Sometimes, I think that some people would rather have me back the way I used to be as a drunkard, as the silly and unpredictable clown, and the life of the party. In situations like these, I try to take a step back, and evaluate what relationships are important, and to avoid, or minimize situations that may not be in my best interest, and to practice better self-care.

I'm sure this sober Mike is a bit foreign to some people and a bit unnerving. When it comes down to it, the only person we can control is us. Trying to change people, who don't want to change, regardless of what the change is.....is a practice in futility!

In the Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) realm, it is prudent of me, and whoever desires change, to develop different coping mechanisms, besides drinking or drugging of course. Whatever coping strategy works for an individual is all that matters. It can be anything really. Sometimes, I morph into technology, including the website, the tube, and the troubled little blue bird.

Other times, I just zone out, and enter the streaming world, to watch whatever I find interesting at that moment. Sometimes, I just have to ride out the emotional roller coaster. With the massive peaks, the ride can be terrifying. Fortunately, the emotional roller coaster does eventually return to the relative calmness of the station.

Some other coping strategies that I personally use include developing strategies for handling peer, work and family pressures, and developing strategies for managing emotions/self-control strategies (paced breathing, counting backwards, pleasant imagery, relaxation, positive self-talk, and taking a break).

More often than not, we make better choices and decisions, when we are calm, so managing emotions is quite beneficial. As described in a previous chapter, the behavior chain of CBT can help us prepare for potentially challenging situations, like weddings, parties, reunions, funerals, work functions, family, appointments, etc.

As far as the getting help part, I found all counseling, regardless of content, beneficial. Also, I discovered some self-help books especially helpful too, and have listed some of those books in the previous chapter.

If for no other reason, other than to be around people who don't drink, or drug, twelve step groups can be helpful. Additionally, people in twelve step groups will have some good information about staying sober, and know of some solid resources too.

For the most part, I liked my experience with all the twelve step groups, including AA & NA. In my early recovery days, I attended many meetings and they were really helpful. I don't push them on anybody. If you're interested, check out a meeting, and make up your own mind! Attending a meeting is super easy. You don't even have to talk or participate.

## VI: LIFE'S PIGGY BANK

From time to time, memories of my high-school days come trickling back into my conscious mind. Truth be told, I learned more about getting high at lunch than much of anything else really. Of course, that is on me. For the life of me though, I can't think of a single time, just once, where I used anything I learned in Geometry, or Algebra. I wish I would have learned more about social skills, and some basic finances information to apply to life after high-school.

My thoughts transition into a raging river, however, when I think about my college days. To follow in the footsteps of my Family Playbook, I went to school for business, and it was years of learning random things. Truth be told, I can't remember much of what I learned to this day. I wish I would have learned more about conflict resolution, and mechanisms of saving while working our whole dang life.

As far as attending college is concerned, I wish I could turn back the clock. I would have been far more selective in choosing my learning path, and better equipped to consider the cost versus the benefits. Like many people my age, I am saddled with education debt. Of course, that is on me, and a whole another story.

Today, it is far more likely that people in the workforce will change jobs, or occupations, much more frequently than the generations that came before. That is the case for me anyway. Most have heard about, or are participating in, a work sponsored 401k. For us



job changers, explore the IRA option too. A person can have both a 401k and an IRA. The IRA is your own thing; it follows you around, and not tied to any employer.

An IRA is like a savings account that invests in stuff you decide. An example is an IRA through Fidelity: you pick a medium risk option bundle (or whatever risk) and Fidelity does the rest. A person can deposit money in their IRA by having an attached checking account, savings account, etc. Simple. Deposits made into the IRA can be small, like a few bucks really, and deposits can be made pretty much anytime. Check it out.

Fast forward a few years: the churning in my cerebellum continues to do the disco of the “what if’s” and that dance can be relentless at times. It can be an ugly game of “shoulda woulda coulda.” For me, it's hard to turn off my brain sometimes. In those moments, I try to ride it out the best I can. I used to drink it out, or under. By using CBT described in the previous chapter, I try to counter punch the negative thoughts with more positive thoughts.

*The Relationships That We Have with Ourselves, Parallels the Relationships We Have with Another*

Think about this for a moment: the relationship that we have with ourselves parallels the relationship we have with another. Let me explain what I mean. When I was drinking to numb my pain, I had no idea what I was really feeling inside. I shut everyone out, even those who genuinely cared about me. I didn’t care, and I just wanted to continue doing what I wanted to, without thinking how my actions were hurting my loved ones.

After I sobered up, and received treatment, I learned that most of my problems were mine alone, and I needed to own it, and I needed to take responsibility for the choices I made later in life. After evaluating my Family Playbook, I wanted to make amends for the damage I was responsible for, and for how my addiction harmed others.

When I no longer relied on alcohol as a coping tool, I realized that I liked myself sober, well, most of the time anyway. I am becoming a better person, and this is the start of my journey to heal the wounds for myself and others, and I have mostly made amends to those I hurt.

For the most part, when we like who we are as a person, we are kinder to those around us, especially to those really close to us. I learned that by better understanding my own Family Playbook, and how those rules influenced me, I realized that I am in control, and can decide how to live my life.

Finally, to conclude this chapter, please don't let regret rule you. This has been challenging to me. I have a lot of regrets in my life, and I wish I could go back in time, and make a tweak. Well, maybe more than a tweak.

Try to keep in mind that every experience we go through in life will make us who we are today, and the not so pleasant experiences will strengthen us, and make us more resilient. Without the "hard knocks," would we be who we are now?

*"Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win, by fearing to attempt." – William Shakespeare*

Change can be terrifying. At least, it was for me. Looking at ourselves can be an extremely difficult experience. When I was heavy into my addiction, I didn't care much about myself, and didn't give much thought to how I was treating others. Pretty much all I cared about was feeding my addiction, and getting wasted.

When I did manage to pull through, I recognized that fear had been holding me back. Fear had been causing me to doubt myself, and in my own abilities to help myself. When I faced this fear of change, it unfettered me of the chains of addiction, allowing me entry into a new phase of my life. For now, the shackles are undone.

## VII: TAP THE AVOCATION WELL

"What is an avocation well?" "Is this some sort of Artesian Spring from the cascading mountains of beautiful Wisconsin?"

An avocation is a hobby that we really like to do, and think about doing frequently. An avocation can also mean a person's true passion, like a calling. Compare that with a vocation: a vocation is what we do to pay the bills, our regular 9-5 job. Now, if our vocation is also our avocation, we have struck gold. We are making money, and loving what we do. All along, shouldn't we be doing something we like to do? I know, it sounds great in theory.

I think many people, however, just casually fall into their career field. I know I did anyway. For most of us, we will work much of our adult lives, and then, many years later, we retire. When we retire, we will likely do something else besides what we did all those decades while we were working. I always thought that part was a bit crazy, and probably the norm though.

Remember those people in high school, or college, who seemed to know exactly what they wanted to do, or be, when they grow-up? That would have made life so much easier right. I have spent an enormous amount of time looking for the unicorn flying up to the rainbow type job, occupation, and career. I have dipped my toes in many career ponds, and was fortunate enough to have sampled many different types of flavorful fish.

If you can narrow down your career focus, then go for it. As far as a career is concerned, there is so much power in knowing what you want, or what you think you want. If work is just a means to pay the bills, so be it. Money is money, and bills are bills.

Our identities can extend outside what we do to pay the bills. Outside your regular job, try to channel your creative spark in whatever dimension that may give you voltage. Consider exploring such things as writing, media, music, gaming, sports, singing, reading, website design, travel, gardening, voice over, crafts, animals, instruments, gadgets, yard work, tinkering, selling, and so many other things too. Give it a go!



## VIII: FAREWELL AND IN BETWEEN

As we move forward in life, we have a tendency to reflect back on our past. Naturally, with a few years of life experience under our belt, it's easier to critique our own life decisions. Our critiques of ourselves can turn quite negative, and may roll into a boil occasionally.

Nit-picking our past actions, or decisions will likely turn sour, really fast, so try to stop yourself before going off the rails too much. As described in a previous chapter, use CBT to help challenge whatever negative thoughts, or thought patterns that may surface, and try to ride it out as much as possible.

When I look back on my life so far, many parts seem like a twisted late night soap opera. I still have much intensity lingering from my childhood. The intensity is both a blessing and a curse. As an adult, I added to my childhood trauma by descending into the chasm of substance abuse. For now, I have pulled myself out of that, and that is a gift within itself.

*“Life affirming dedication and thank you to K. O.  
Without you, I’ d be gone long ago” .*

# *Discarded Darkness: Life Lessons of a Broken Child*

2022

Thank you for taking the time to read my book. I welcome you to check out my Memoir of a Broken Child, "A gripping first hand account of one's person's addiction. All told from their own self destructive cycle of chaos. Brace yourself as you delve into the unknown. Addiction wasteland few have witnessed until now."



*Discarded Darkness: Life Lessons of a Broken Child.*

*"By sharing my story and recovery process, it is my hope that the skills I have learned may benefit others on their own individual journey. After eleven years of being sober, I am grateful to have learned so much and this will continue to be a lifelong expedition."*

*Mike Huffer holds degrees in the realm of business and has had training in the treatment of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA). He has experience working in both business and human services professions.*

## Memoir of a Broken Child

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## CHAPTER 1: TOXIC FOUNDATION

Through the eyes of a quiet seven year old kid, it all started when my father's orange sports car with black mag wheels broke down near a steel mill less than a mile away from our new southern town. For the last time, father got out of his much loved now broken down little sports car and scrunched into the tank that was the family station wagon. Then, we all

prickly bushes dominate the landscape. On the west side of the house, there is a small slab of a mismatched basketball court that has a mangled pole with a crooked rim. About two hundred yards past the basketball court is a crude clumpy garden whose only real success was bringing to life several tiny marijuana plants one homecoming season. The garden is near a section of dilapidated weathered white fencing that separates heavy field brush from the creek that runs parallel to the back of the house.

The same creek becomes a raging river when storms pass through. Towards the back of the house, there is a large concrete sundeck that has a gas grill attached to it. The sundeck is rarely used for anything family

made our way to the little town and to the new home and to a new start. The sun was still heavy in the sky and the afternoon baked with humidity as we arrived at our new house.

The old house doesn't have a garage and we parked the station wagon in the cedar planked parking area that has rough hewn gravel as its foundation. The parking area is ideally suited for a couple of small cars and the station wagon is a battle tank. The large two story house is an old Tudor style and it's surrounded by red clay bricks and broken cobblestone. The rolling meadows of the lawn looked uneven with some clever mole trail networks interspersed throughout the vast yard. Walnut trees and thick

related. The sundeck's principal function is for the mass overflow of drunken high schoolers partying at my brother's parties. Rounding out the east side of the house is an unkempt small storage shed located underneath the sundeck's northern slope. The remainder of the lawn is smattered with rough patches and undulating terrain and small bushy prickly shrubbery that circles back around to the front of the house.

At the front of the house, pay close attention to the wide concrete steps leading past the vaulted porch to the sturdy front door. The sturdy front door even has an old fashioned knocker attached to it. After entering the front door, we are greeted by a steep

staircase to the left. As we climbed up the staircase, we noticed some pictures were already hung as the movers had finished much of the detailed work along with completing all the heavy lifting. On the top of the stairs, we are greeted by a mostly functional half bathroom. The bathroom always smelled a little bit and was smelly regardless of use. The second floor has three large bedrooms with my parent's room closest to the bathroom. In the time to come, the bedroom is vacant with the cracks of a troubled marriage deepening to a wide chasm of empty darkness. My sister occupies the middle room and my brother and I share the other room. Soon thereafter, my brother moved to the basement and

dining room. In the dining room, the eloquent maple table is disrespectfully relegated to warehouse duty and to store large piles of posts and parcels and bills and other random junk. Right across the hall from the dining room is a small den. The den is supposed to be a place to cozy up as a family and watch movies and hang out. Ultimately, the small den becomes my father's sleeping tomb. Step out of the den and into the hallway and then proceed to a dark alcove at the end of the narrow hallway. At the end of the hallway is an eerie green bathroom. During my brother's parties, the green bathroom is used by the high school girls to powder their noses and for other things.

commandeered it like a conquering soldier taking the trophies of war.

As we head back down the stairs to the main floor, we make our way to the living room. Back in the day, the living room was designed as an inviting parlor and a cozy sitting room. Little thought was given to modern annoyances like televisions and entertainment centers. In its current state, the once classy room looks downtrodden and hopelessly barren with few amenities to help brighten its melancholy.

There is a majestic old sooty fireplace pleading for someone to come spark it to life. In an adjacent room, there is a room designed for use as the family

Being socially minded, the high school boys use nature for relief. After exiting the bathroom, compose yourself as you enter the kitchen. The kitchen is tight and compact with a little nook and a round table crammed into a corner. During the parties, the kitchen table is used by mother as she is the honored guest. Mother is often surrounded by star struck high school kids and other attendees including an older friend of my sister who I will call Ginocchio. Ginocchio and my mother like to share stories and schnapps and talk about bands from back in the day and that was real music by golly.

## CHAPTER 2: MANGLED TALE

Near the kitchen table is the door that leads down to the basement. Go ahead and open the door and then carefully walk past the scary looking fuse box to start the descent down the decrepit creaky narrow stairs until you reach the bottom. At the bottom of the stairs is a dimly lit room that our cat uses as his litter box closet. Unfortunately, the feline's tail was

so I used the room to escape from her when necessary.

The rest of the basement was open and ran the entire length of the foundation. My brother and I initially shared a bedroom on the second floor. Not long after that, he moved to the large partitioned part of the basement that landed east to west. It was a huge room that ran the entire length of the basement and was a considerable upgrade from bunking with me.

mangled in an accident leaving him with about half of it and we never sought medical attention to fix it.

Pepper's tail healed as a sickening stump resembling a disjointed appendage and I was hesitant on petting him for fear of raising the stump. The family ship was sinking and it was everyone for himself including Pepper.

About one hundred yards from the litter box room is a much larger room which houses a giant hissing boiler that produces blinding hot water for the old fashioned radiators scattered throughout the house. Mother was absolutely terrified of the boiler room,



So, just like that, my brother, this high school kid, had his own basement apartment with its own private entrance. My brother furnished his basement apartment with all the traditional things like couches

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A gripping first hand account of one person's addiction. All told from their own self destructive cycle of chaos. Brace yourself as you delve into the unknown. Addiction wasteland few have witnessed until now. <https://detoxsector.com>

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02: Mangled Tale

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