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Moving Towards the Light

by Heather Bolen Johnson

College Scholars Project

Spring 1997

"It's always darkest before the dawn."

(author unknown)

Question: How many psychologists does it take to change a lightbulb?

Answer: Only one, but the lightbulb has to <u>want</u> to change.

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Preface

"You're not going to find anybody who will talk to you about their personal lives," the therapist told me on the phone. "You can't do this project." More than anything, those statements spurned me to actively pursue people who would talk to me so I could answer my research question, "What causes positive, long-term dramatic change in individuals?" Fear that I could not find anyone was a motivating factor for me, as well as indignation at his telling me what I could not do.

Reassuringly, however, I did indeed find people who were willing to tell me their life stories, sometimes for hours on end. They told me how they personally achieved positive, long-term dramatic change, in spite of sometimes severe difficulties. In reading their stories, you might think these individuals are one in a million. They are. However these people were not hard to find, and they did not stand out like flashy gold either. I believe that I could, without much difficulty, find several more people with similar stories, however individual and unique.

While being interviewed, these people were very open with me and were all, in fact, willing to let me use their names in my paper (although I did not). I think people enjoy telling others about their successes, as well as their failures if the other person can empathically and nonjudgmentally listen. I was a captive audience for them. I showed interest by asking questions, and I was genuinely enchanted by their personal views and recollections. After having been told the story of an individual's

transformation, I always left the interview filled with feelings of excitement and optimism. With some individuals, I felt like a child who had just watched a caterpillar metamorphisize into a butterfly with unexpected beauty. With another, I felt like I had followed him into a deep dark cave where we were lost for days, stuck with no apparent way out; in fact, every step we took seemed to go deeper and deeper into the darkness. And then, unexpectedly, we stumbled across a light. I was overjoyed to walk with him into the sun again. These interviews undoubtedly affected my emotions; I hope they do yours. I feel like I met some truly wonderful people.

In conclusion, to the original therapist I talked with on the phone, as well as the people I interviewed, I hereby dedicate this paper.

Introduction

"What causes positive, long-term dramatic change in individuals?"

I have worked at a psychiatric adolescent treatment center for almost five years, two and a half years of which I was full time. The center in which I worked uses a behavioral level system; the levels advance from one to four, with clients with outstanding behavior being on level four. The lowest level, really a non-level or a sub-level, is called Restriction.

I have always been intrigued by hard-core cases, kids who typically came from horrific backgrounds, were very set in their ways, and refused to make any kind of progress in treatment. These are the kids that would remain on Restriction (ideally given for anywhere from one to four days at a time) for <u>months on end</u>. I, personally, would give up hope on these individuals, although, of course, I tried not to let it show. However, the kids would remain in the program and staff would continue working with them. Eventually, many of these kids <u>would</u> indeed dramatically change for the better. I always found that somewhat awe-inspiring, and I always wondered, Why? What was it that "clicked"? What was it that finally got through their heads? Where was the key (that was so hard to find) that finally unlocked the door? What was it that made the difference?

I talked to the program director at the facility in which I worked and discussed with him the topic I wanted to use for my research project, "What causes change?" Several times he objected

to this topic saying, "Change is nebulous." The term was too broad for his tastes; the question was too vague. He said that I had to make change concrete and quantify it. Some of his advice I took; some I did not. Regarding the term "change," I added three adjectives to describe what kind of change I wanted to research: positive (i.e. undeniably for the better), long-term (i.e. lasting, preferrably displayed for more than a year), and dramatic (involving a major or radical shift in one's life). However, regarding quantifying change, I leave that to other researchers. I chose to do a qualitative study.

When I talked with my program director, I quickly found out that I probably could not interview the clients with which I worked. However, that was okay. It would be hard to determine if their changes actually were long-lasting (unless I did a very long-term study), and it seems that often, for adolescents, change is simply a part of the natural process of maturation.

Therefore, I set out to interview other individuals who had made major changes in their lives. I wanted to get their opinions about what causes change, based on their personal experiences. I wanted to focus on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the individuals who actually made the changes. I looked for people from all walks of life, individuals who had all sorts of problems that they had overcome. I talked to chain smokers who gave up smoking, alcoholics who gave up drinking, individuals who experienced a religious conversion, overcame an eating disorder, got out of an abusive relationship, avoided committing suicide, left a life of crime, gave up drugs, rose out of poverty, escaped

homelessness, and grew up into a responsible adult after being a juvenile delinquent. Many of the individuals I talked with fit into more than one of those categories.

I also interviewed people in the "helping fields," therapists, social workers, teachers, ministers, program directors and line staff of an eclectic variety of facilities. I asked for their opinions as to what causes positive, long-term dramatic changes in individuals. I wanted to see how what they said compared to what the individuals who had made the changes had said. In the end, I was surprised at how similar some of the responses were between individuals who made changes and workers whose goal it was to help them. In fact, many of the people who made major changes are now in professions helping others.

All in all, I interviewed fifteen people; each interview lasted from twenty minutes to over three hours (probably one to one and a half hours on average). I took notes at these interviews and taped them as well.

In this paper, I will focus on five case studies, the stories of five individuals who made major changes in their lives. From there, I will proceed into a discussion about these changes and what caused them. I will include not only examples from their stories but also information I have gathered from the library, as well as my own personal opinion. In conclusion, I will summarize my findings.

Case Study #1: Jim's Story

It was a beautiful spring day, and Jim was walking around the lower yard of Morgan County prison. "I'd love to be free, " he thought. "If I was only free..." Jim had been sentenced to twenty-six years in prison for his second conviction of selling cocaine. His thought was a typical inmate dream. "But if I was free," he continued, "I'd have to be getting high... I'd definitely have to be getting high." All of a sudden, he was struck by what he had just thought. "Jim, that's sick... Being free is gonna have to be enough." This represented a major turning point in Jim's life.

Jim's story begins with him getting married early, at the age of seventeen, in 1966. As he described himself, he was a "workaholic." He didn't use drugs but busied himself working full time and going to college. He pushed himself very hard, only sleeping two to three hours a night and, after just three years of college, graduated with a bachelor's degree in English Education. It was 1969.

Jim was the sixth of seven children and not the first to graduate within his family. He described the achievement of his undergraduate degree as "ho-hum," an occasion which he "failed to celebrate." "Nobody even took off from work." Jim then began his first year of teaching. He also signed up for a full load of graduate courses, began working nights at a psychiatric institution, and started going to marriage counselling with his wife. It was at this point that Jim began experimenting socially

with marijuana. As he explained it, he realized he had "forgotten about play."

John began using drugs with "weekend smokers" and shortly thereafter thought, "Wow, this is so good, why not do it every day?" He started selling drugs just to afford his marijuana habit. In dealing drugs, he met a person doing speed, and then Jim began experimenting with other drugs, LSD and occasional downers. Jim, who had, by now, grown a beard, was not rehired for his second year as a teacher. He felt that this was an unfair political move; someone went back and changed his evaluation. This event only made him want to get into drugs more. He said, "I was ready to experience every drug." He found drugs very "fascinating" and "interesting." He thought that his using drugs and selling drugs was "expanding" his "social consciousness" and was therefore a "social good." It was 1970.

Jim stayed in graduate school until "1973 or 1974" when he dropped out. He chose to quit school because he had gotten to the point where he felt his schoolwork was meaningless. "I was working on a paper entitled 'The Etymology of Hey Diddle Diddle' when I left."

Jim continued to work full time after he was not hired back into the public schools. He worked at an alternative nursery school (called a "free school") at a Unitarian Church from 1972-1975. He left because he wasn't making enough money. He then worked at Riverbend, a strict behavioral program for juvenile offenders. He felt "like a round peg in a square hole" and didn't get a position that he wanted, so he quit this job also. (Looking

back, he feels his drug use was probably involved with his not getting promoted.) After a brief stint at Peer One, a local business, Jim got hired running daycare centers for KCDC. Jim said he deliberately smoked hash before the employment interview so they'd know him in the stoned state. He was "always high" now, including when he worked. He said that a "virtue of the job" (at the nursery school) was that he could be high and still do his job well. "I would really get into story-telling and singing songs with the kids," he laughed.

Meanwhile, Jim's marriage was steadily going downhill, and Jim felt that his wife was the cause of it. Jim left his spouse in 1977 (at this point, they had a nine year old daughter). He started dealing cocaine in 1978 and was divorced in 1979. Looking back, Jim said, "I felt like she [my wife] was a drag... Really she was an anchor." John's father died in 1979 as well; he had a heart attack while doing yardwork. Jim felt partly to blame for this because he used to do the yardwork with his father and "should have been helping him." He also felt guilty because he promised his father earlier that he'd stop selling cocaine, and he did not keep his pledge.

Jim moved in with a younger black woman. He described her as "hot" and his "drug buddy" (they did cocaine together). Jim and this woman had an "open marriage" that was "sometimes open, sometimes closed." Jim said that this type of arrangement (the open marriage) was hard on his partner, and ultimately the relationship ended when he left her after she had an affair (she wasn't honest with him about it).

In the early 1980's, Jim was laid off from his KCDC position. Due to Reagonomics, all degreed personnel in the daycare centers were terminated from employment. This was the first time Jim was without a job since the age of seventeen. By now he was heavily immersed in drugs, and he decided to depend full time on his income from dealing. He told himself, "I'm going to take it easy." Whereas originally Jim had been a small part-time marijuana dealer, he now sold marijuana, cocaine, acid, pills, quaaludes, and other drugs. After his layoff, he created his own company, but that was only a front for his drug dealing.

In 1981, Jim was arrested for selling cocaine. He spent one and a half days in jail and then was released on bond. Jim got a lawyer and, in 1983, the case was finally tried. Jim was placed on probation, although it was a nonprobationary offense. At this point, Jim was heavily in debt ($75,000 at one point) due to the trial. He borrowed a lot of money to pay off the lawyers, judges, and other court costs. "It might have all been a scam," he says. In order to get out of debt, Jim said he started dealing "more than ever." Jim, out of desperation, was working "on the front." This means he was getting drugs on credit, and giving customers drugs on credit, hoping they'd pay him back. Basically, he was shuffling a lot of money around, trying to make as much as he could to pay off his debt. He admits he was "not the best business person." He once figured out that people owed him a total of $30,000 (which they never paid back), and he was robbed numerous times. Nonetheless, Jim "never threatened anyone" when they owed him money and was, himself, "honest." He was almost out of debt when he was

arrested in 1985, again for selling cocaine.

Jim was allowed out on bond for a year before the trial. He still sold marijuana while he was out on bond, but he was determined to get off cocaine (and not deal it) since that was what got him in trouble. Looking back, he feels that he should not have been out on bond. However, he was afraid to go around some of the same people he used to associate with for fear that they might think that he was cooperating with the law; that kept him from getting into even more trouble. As Jim explained it, since he wouldn't "snitch" on other drug dealers, he was locked up after going to trial. He received a twenty-six year sentence (a combined sentence of six years for the original offense and twenty years for the second). Jim, however, was proud of the fact that by the time he went to jail he was off cocaine. He had gotten back into acid (that was the way he got off cocaine), but he indicated that, in his mind, that was a better alternative. "Only a person who had been into drugs before could appreciate me coming off cocaine." Apparently, it took a lot of will power. Nonetheless, Jim was still getting high all the time (especially with marijuana). Jim says that "tripping" was tied into his image of himself; he was still "very invested in getting high."

In 1986, Jim began serving his time. While in the county jail, which he said was "a really horrible place," he got high "probably ten times" on marijuana. He was determined not to sell while he was in prison, but he saved up his prison pay (which was only $10 - $11 a month) and bought his drugs with that. Since he couldn't afford much in jail, his time smoking pot was "special

time." "Drugs made my life meaningful," he said. But the counter effect of that was that it made more time (the time he spent not high) "unspecial."

Jim got himself a job as a counselor's aid. This got him out of the main prison and gave him special priveleges like picnics which he enjoyed. His sister and mother came to see him, and his daughter visited weekly. Jim began to get more worried about smoking pot because he "now had something to preserve." He had never gotten written up, and he knew that if he got just one write-up, he could "kiss early release goodbye."

One fine spring day while walking in the yard at prison, Jim thought dreamily, "If I was only out..." Then he thought, "But if I was out, I'd definitely have to be getting high." Suddenly a new thought dawned on him. "Jim, that's sick." Jim admits that he did not give up drugs from that day forward, but the moment was like a "door opening psychically." He continued, "Like most people, I didn't like being forced to change... But now it was like, Oh, I really want to change." Jim says he realized that he had a problem and now he didn't have to change just for others. When asked to elaborate on that moment, Jim says that he felt that the change actually was a gradual one and that the moment was not really that significant, in and of itself, but was what his mind "zeroed in on." He felt that that moment was representative of a larger experience, the way he "filed" his thoughts (about wanting to change) in his brain.

Jim did get high after that day, but only a few times. The experiences incited a lot of fear in him and therefore were

"unrewarding." He worried about the consequences and asked himself, "Why am I doing this?" The last joint he had was in 1987. It was a "street joint" (a big joint), and he said smoking it made him "so paranoid." "Marijuana was the hardest [drug] to quit," he commented. "It seems so mild... You can work, go to school... It doesn't seem so strong until you try to give it up." Jim could not bring himself to say "never again" to drugs, but he did say no "for now." Apparently, taking one day at a time helped him become drug-free.

Prison gave Jim a lot of time to think about his drug problem and how to go about changing who he was. He describes this change as a process in which he went from no longer dealing cocaine to no longer getting high. He said that the center of his world was drugs and that being a dealer served a social function for him. It made him feel "important and needed." He conceded that sometimes he missed that social prestige when he saw inmates flock to the prisoners who dealt drugs. Jim now had to redefine himself. He explained he had to decide, "Who am I gonna be? What am I going to do with myself when I'm no longer a person who gets high all the time?"

While in prison, Jim read How Can I Help? This book was written by Ram Dass after he gave up drugs and wrote Be Here Now (about Eastern religions' advantage over drugs). How Can I Help? is about counselling, therapy, and serving others. Jim really identified with Ram Dass; he too had been immersed in drugs and was now ready to change. He was looking for new direction.

Jim was released from prison on July 23, 1990; he served a

little over four years (out of twenty-six). He said that it was good that he didn't know that would be all he'd serve when he first went to prison; the punishment (and fear of getting into more trouble) was his "original motivation for change." Jim is on parole until 2010.

After his release, Jim went to Dismas House, a halfway house that helped him get on his feet financially. (He was able to save money for a car). He did not smoke pot while he was there although he says it was available. He also did not drink at all for the first nine months, although his parole only required he did not drink for the first six months.

Jim has not been totally drug-free, however, since his release. He admitted that, before being locked up, he had saved some marijuana cookies that he planned on eating once he got back out. He ate some of them while on an excursion to the mountains and, as a result, "felt guilty." John says he does drink alcohol "on occasion" but has been drunk only once since getting out.

When Jim was first released, he started working a modest job at Manpower, for minimum wage. He saved enough for a car and got car insurance for the first time ever. ("I wanted to do things right this time.")

John later applied to get into the masters program for social work and was turned "flat down." Determined, he took a couple of educational psychology courses (in the counselling program) and reapplied for graduate school. He was turned down again. He was told he had to take the GRE test again which he did and then reapplied. This time he got in. John says there are still some

unresolved issues regarding his future career, like what kind of certifications he can get, but his "faith helps." He believes that if he does what he needs to do and "hangs in there," things will work out. Jim says at first he felt "out of place" at school, but now he is "really comfortable." "I wouldn't mind being a professional student." Recently, Jim got elected to be a student representative for a campus professional organization.

Jim also busies himself by working part-time for ADCET (Alcohol and Drug Consultants for East Tennessee). While he was an inmate, he was in the ADCET alcohol and drug counselling program and was the only inmate to graduate. He now works at the prisons and with various parole groups. Jim did his practicum with DRI (Detoxification Rehabilitation Institute). He seems to feel his substance abuse couselling reaffirms in his mind the importance of staying off drugs. It also, he says, constantly makes him think about what causes people to change and give up drugs.

In Jim's case, he says the primary motivation for giving up drugs was the "legal ramifications" and fear of losing "future possibilities." Beyond that, he cites his own "cognitive abilities" as important in the change process. He <u>realized</u> he had a problem, and he wanted to change. He was determined to get off drugs and had the "discipline" to do so. He believes his life is now better without drugs, and he has "reimaged" himself (as a drug-free person). He also says that, to his advantage, he had experienced a past without drugs (before he was twenty years old) and has a supportive family.

Jim now lives in a house with his mother who he plans on

taking care of "until death." The house was bought with his mother's money, but he considers it basically his own. The house seems to be a symbol of stability and responsibility to Jim, and his relationship with his mother is very important to him. He says that, if anything was to happen to him, it would be like "killing" his mother; he doesn't want to "jeopardize" his relationship with her, and he refuses to let anything illegal into the house.

Is Jim ever tempted now to go back to a life of drugs? He admits that he still has drug dreams and small temptations, but not "core temptations." "It still seems like it [drugs] might be nice sometimes... but I am enjoying being clear headed and liking where I am." He mentions effects on his health and less erratic behavior. He also says that he wishes that the users he still knows and cares about would stop using. "Every once in a while," Jim says, "marijuana might be okay if it were legal." But that's a big if, and Jim is well aware of that. He knows the consequences of breaking the law.

At present, Jim defines himself as a "good workaholic"; he is busy "being happy." He attends school full time and plans to graduate this year with a masters degree in Community Counselling. He is currently doing his internship and still working part-time for ADCET. He takes care of his mother and also has a steady relationship with a woman he has known for several years. In comparison to his previous lifestyles, Jim says that he's now "living the slow-lane life... and liking it. This is the way to live." At the close of the interview with Jim, he told me rather contentedly, "I am now getting high off of living."

Case Study #2: Linda's Story

"Both my parents have been married three times [each]," Linda begins. "I think their official divorce was when I was like four or five, but they separated when I was three. When they were separated, my dad went away to Europe to 'find himself.' When he came back, my mom was already living with somebody else."

Linda begins her "own little timeline" with her early childhood. As she proceeds, her affect is earnest, sincere, and frank. She's quite open about her life and feelings, a bit gritty even. But she laughs quite easily, often at ironic situations or her own sarcasm. Despite this slightly caustic quality, Linda is quite comfortable to be with. Talking with her is like slipping on a pair of worn jeans. She seems accepting of the in's and out's of life and the strengths and weaknesses of people.

"My mom's live-in boyfriend and my dad started physically fighting over my mom," Linda continues. "I guess that was my first exposure to a lot of violence... I don't remember a whole lot of it; I guess I blocked it out... They were going to do an old fashioned duel over it (you know, ten paces, turn, and shoot), but they ended up just arguing it out in the end."

Linda says the divorce was very hard on her. She was "really close" to her dad, "more so than my mom... We played a lot together." Her mother, on the other hand, was "Ms. Classy Lady." "She'd go to work, come home, and go to bed. I was an ornament to her."

Linda was strongly affected by the way her dad left her when

she was five years old. She recalls this event vividly. She was in the middle of the schoolyard. "My dad sent a friend of his onto the playground... and she had this big red flower. I didn't know who this woman was, and she said, 'This is from your dad. He is leaving. He's hurting too bad to come and say goodbye.' And I was just in shock sitting in the middle of the playground, and I looked over and saw him walk away. He was like watching the whole thing. I didn't see him again for six years."

There's a long pause. "That really marked me," she said.

Another memory: "I used to go to the babysitters. I liked going to the babysitters... At one point, I started calling my babysitter 'Mom,' and I used to tell my mom, 'No, you're Pat.' She wasn't there [a lot], and I probably blamed her for my dad leaving."

Linda continues her story with a series of vignettes, connecting them all with several comments about her feelings. She told her life's story so clearly and concisely that I feel the best way for me to report on her is to basically let her speak for herself.

"Anyway, my mother remarried that guy. From the age of five to the age of twelve, he was my father... I was pretty good... until around the age of eleven. That's when I first tried pot... I was already kinda drinking a little bit here and there, just kinda rebelling. My mom was always out of town. And my stepdad was a little crazy... I was just hanging out with my friends."

"I was doing poorly in school, and my parents made me take the sixth grade over, even though I didn't fail it. I couldn't believe

they made me take it over even though I didn't have to." That explained some of the rebellion, she said. Her parents sent her to First Lutheran for her second year of sixth grade. "That was my year of depression," Linda states. "I hated it."

"My parents got divorced, and my mother and I moved in together... I went to Tyson Middle School in the seventh grade... That's when all the fun started," she smiles wryly. "I immediately got with the bad crowd there, and I started hanging out and smoking pot... I would get grounded for a bad grade... [My mother] used the grounding method of discipline." Linda did not find this method of child rearing to be very effective.

"My mom had this new boyfriend, Ralph, who eventually became my third father. I would come home from school... and my mom would come in and... say, 'Linda, don't you have some homework? Go upstairs and do your homework.' My mother was not an active mother... I was neglected."

It was while she was in the seventh grade that Linda got caught for bringing alcohol to school ("little bottles of premixed screwdrivers"). A classmate had asked her, along with some other girls, to bring the drinks to school. They were planning on having a "bathroom party" between classes. Linda was the only one who brought the alcohol; she got caught, was kicked out, and sent to the Alternative Center for Learning. "I was the youngest person ever to be accepted there, at the age of thirteen."

"So, my mom made me wear this little stupid skirt there to make... a good impression. It was one of those little kilt things with the pin... Oh, I hated it, and I couldn't believe she made me

wear it... I went in, and the first person I saw walking down the hallway was this white guy with this blond afro, and he had a boom box he was carrying, and on the back of the shirt he was wearing he had the letters CAPTAIN QUAALUDE," Linda laughs. "So this was my new school... Yeah, this was going to be helpful. This was like a storage place for little hellions... where they can all learn... It's like juvenile except it's better. I was like, 'thanks.' You get out earlier, you get smoke breaks, and usually people went out in the woods to smoke pot. And if you were caught... where were they going to send you then? You know they'd just slap you on the hand if you were caught doing anything... unless you were violent or destructive... So I met a lot of new friends there," she laughed.

"I went back to Tyson after all this [in the eighth grade], and I was a BAD ASS. I... just... knew it all. I'd been hangin' with the big kids. But I was on probation. I was still... partyin' some... but I was... going to school every day... I don't know what could have helped me at that point, if anything could have... But I got in this fight, and it wasn't even me. It was a planned fight, and it was a girl that was twice my size, and I even tried to talk to her... It was over some stupid rumor that I walked home holding hands with this guy, which I didn't. I walked in the same direction with my friend Dianne who was walking in the same direction as he was walking." To make a long story short, Linda got kicked out of school. "I got kicked out of all Knox City and County Schools... They [the school officials] were trying to say I was the leader of the gangs."

"I went to Harrison Baptist Academy... It's a day school/ boarding school. It has the reputation of a reformatory... I totally didn't want to go. I felt like I was being totally shipped off by my mother... Before I went, I made a lame attempt at suicide... by taking aspirin... I took, I don't know, I guess thirty..." Her mother never found out. "I was just kinda out of it. I had a ringing in my ear the next day when I left... I never told anybody."

"It was downhill from there. I felt totally isolated like I'd been abandoned again... I never heard from my stepfather.... I would just go to classes, and I wouldn't do anything... Nothing. I was just completely rebelling. My mom was still going out of town all the time. I would have friends pick me up on the weekends. I would say my mom's coming to pick me up because we could go away for the weekend. Our parents could come pick us up; we just had to fill out a form... Here I was in the eighth grade having older high school kids pick me up, and I would go hang with them all weekend... And I was very sexually active."

When asked what she means, she responds, "There were three guys in a year's time. Two were from high school, and one was my age."

"Also, I didn't tell you something, and this is something that's touchy. In elementary school, at about the age of seven, I went home with one of my classmates, and her older sister sexually abused me. I didn't tell anybody. I didn't tell my psychologist [in middle school]. I didn't tell anyone until I was way into my twenties. Even through the treatment [Peninsula twice], I never

mentioned that. I was so embarassed."

"I think the sexual abuse had a lot to do with me being sexually active at an early age besides just looking for my father in everything else. It all kind of went together. Also because my mom got divorced again when I was at the age of twelve. There's something textbook about that, about around the age of thirteen if the girl doesn't have a father figure of some sort, they go looking and act out, you know? And I also think that because it was sexual abuse by a woman, I think I was trying to prove to myself I wasn't a lesbian."

"She made me perform oral sex on her... I tried to leave. I lived a mile away, but I got scared when... her mother had this crazy look on her face when I tried to go out the door... I ran back upstairs. I felt trapped. The girl and her sister were both in on it... I was freaked out afterwards. I really would like to go back in time and see how I acted after that... I've never talked to a therapist about that.. I was even asked blatantly by therapists, and I was like, 'Nope, nope...' I talked about everything else... Anyway, I don't want to talk about this anymore. I can handle it, I just don't want to start thinking about it. I don't want to get in that mindset."

"Anyway, back to the eighth grade," she laughs nervously as she changes the subject. "In the eighth grade, I totally, just completely, gave up hope. I just thought I was the biggest failure. I had been kicked out of school twice. And I totally let down my whole family... my grandparents... And I just felt like... I was a hellion. It was just me. And I would smoke cigarettes. I

would constantly get into trouble at Harrison Chilhowee Baptist Academy. They had me room alone because the parents would get word of me, and they would request that their kids be removed from the room with me...

"So anyway I was still seeing... the psychologist at this point, and he highly recommended Peninsula, and so I went to Peninsula... I think it was beneficial because I was pretty far gone. I think I was prime candidate for some sort of inpatient treatment.

"You know, you get all these trainings [there], and it was helpful... like the assertiveness training, and you get art therapy. I was turned onto a lot of things I had never been into which is good. And then the group therapy was good... small groups with the therapist, one big group once a week, individual therapy, relaxation therapy, family groups...

"And then I was out in six months. I got through that program, man. I felt very good there. I was very productive there just because you're rewarded a lot more. And I did very well in that program, and I got out, and I went back to high school [Bearden].

"And I got into trouble, but it wasn't anything a little outpatient therapy couldn't handle. I went to school. I made decent grades. Every now and then I got a D, but I mostly made B's and C's. I was doing alright, but towards the end of my freshman year my mom got onto this grounding kick... You know, for the D I'd get every once in a while. My mom was remarried to my third father. She got remarried when I was fifteen. So then, when she

got on the grounding trip again, and it was never ending, even though I was still being compliant for the most part. But, once I got into my room at night, I would sneak out and go see my friend Susie from middle school. She lived on her own at this point--Don't ask. Somehow she talked her mom into letting her live with her boyfriend. The grounding business almost drove me nuts. I was sneaking out drinking. And I was almost leaving evidence for them to find... I was partying quite a bit. I was doing it as a result of needing [missing] something. It wasn't like I needed alcohol... I went through a phase in which I was, you know, smoking pot and drinking beer."

When questioned further, she says that she did "other things here and there, but never anything regular." She experimented with quaaludes, coke, and speed. She reported she never bought any drug from a dealer; she'd just chip in money with her friends.

"I had been grounded, grounded, grounded into the floor just over little tiddly shit. Everything would just add up. It would just be [*she snaps*] week more [*she snaps*] week more. I had a stepbrother at this point, and he was perfect, mind you.

"My friend Susie's boyfriend was about to get a big settlement... and they were about to move to Florida, and I was invited along. So I ran away, and they found me somehow, the next day, before we even left. I don't know how she [my mom] found out where I was to this day. I had been forbidden to even have contact with Susie.

"So my mom is talking on the phone to one of the family therapists, Allison, and she highly recommends I go back to

Peninsula because I'm 'out of control.'

"So I'm in therapy there... I can't believe I'm back. I know I don't need it this time. And they thought I was being a bad ass there [displaying a negative attitude]... But man, it's not me... It's my mom. So I was there, and I went through the little therapy," I can hear the bitterness in Linda's voice. "And I did deal with some problems while I was there this time, better, more in depth, some other problems that weren't completely resolved. Because I got through my dad leaving... While I was in treatment this time, by mother went through her third divorce [this marriage lasted only six months], and she went through a severe depression. I don't know, she was getting migraines and getting Demerol shots quite often... I have my suspicions [about her overuse of the drug]... So she was thinking about going into therapy herself... inpatient. So I'm in Peninsula, and they're thinking I can't go back to my mom, and they're looking for the proper placement, and I'm waiting around for another place for me to go... ten months in Peninsula... It pisses me off just thinking about it.

"Then I go to Holston Homes in Greenville, Tennessee... It's mostly for foster kids. I hated it. I felt so out of place. All those girls didn't have families, and I had my mom, and slowly but surely she started coming around, getting her head back screwed on. And I was like, 'Mom, get me out, get me out,' and we were getting along at this point."

Linda's mother restabilized (and has never remarried since then). Linda was allowed to return home after six months and returned to Bearden for her junior year. "I made good grades in

school. I had calmed down... I've been through my partying phases. I've rebelled. What can I say? Since then I've not had any therapy. My senior year, the second semester, I made second honors which was good for me considering everything I had been through... It was a struggle [keeping up with her schoolwork through so many placements]." She graduated on time with her class.

So, has everything been "peachy keen" since then?

Not quite. "I met my sister that I never knew... I found out I had a half sister that I never knew I had... My mom had a child before me, and she put her up for adoption..." Linda explains that her mother wasn't married. She was young (nineteen or twenty) and engaged to a soldier. "He was at Paris Island... They [my mom and grandparents] went to visit [him] and they had this big wedding planned, and I guess they [my mom and him] screwed around before the wedding, and he calls off the wedding. And then when they got back from Paris Island, Mom's all depressed and then she finds out she's pregnant..." Linda continues, "My grandparents pretty much forced her to adopt because she wasn't married and was 'going to be disowned.'" Linda's mother had not had contact with her adopted daughter since she was born. "She found my mom," stated Linda.

"My sister moved in with me, and I had to share a room with her after being an only child for all those years," Linda laughs. "That caused some turmoil..."

"I've had some struggles in my life... I could tell you a lot more screw stories, but I haven't had any more treatment..."

When asked further about her life, she continues, "I went to a

graduation party, and when I came home I was going to go to another party the next day, and my mom said I couldn't. And I said no, and then I didn't come home for two weeks. I stayed at a friend's.

"I was eighteen now. I had already decided it was time for me to move out. I didn't want to live with my mom and my sister anyway. You know, it was too close for comfort... The best thing to do would be for me to move out." Linda told her mother in a mature fashion of her decision. Her mother didn't want her to leave and started crying. Linda's half sister decided to get in the middle of it, and Linda and her got into a "huge fight." "She told me I couldn't go upstairs and get my things... Mom was drugged up on Demerol, 'Girls, girls, stop, girls.' And we were like [having a violent brawl]. She [Mom] would conveniently get migraines when she got really upset... put it that way." After Linda "whipped her [sister's] ass," she got her things and moved out.

"I got a job at Subway. I'd always been a hard worker. I worked my way up to manager at the age of nineteen. Some of my employees were older than I was. But I had a hard time. Like there was an in-store theft at the Subway I was managing that caused a lot of problems for me. It was Subway policy that whoever was working the shift while the money was stolen had to get polygraphed. I had all these high schoolers' mothers calling me up, 'Do you think my daughter's a thief? Na, na, na.'

"And also I had an old friend from high school-- I didn't know how far gone he had gotten on drugs-- and he freaked out because I wouldn't give him a ride somewhere, so he busted up the windshield

of my car.

"And I totally freaked out; I had all this shit happening at once. I kind of lost it. So I quit Subways, took some acid. (I was doing acid at this point in my life, trying it here and there. I had a summer of doing quite a bit of acid.) I had another friend who was having similar problems. The job was sucking; she was ready to move out of Knoxville. So we both took some acid and moved to New Orleans. I was missing in action for three weeks."

What happened? "I got in a fight with my [real] dad down there the first day I was down there. The next day I was gone from there [my dad's] because of our fight.... I felt like I was alone again, so I tried to get a job that would make quick money. So I got a job at Big Daddy's Strip Club," she laughs ruefully. "I was a cocktail waitress and a stripper for three weeks, and I lived with the owner and his wife... I would never do that in the town that I lived, but I did this in New Orleans." She says she didn't like the stripping and tried to wait tables as much as possible. Linda says that nobody knew where she was during this time, including her mother and father. "They had detectives out looking for me."

"So I moved back to Knoxville, moved back in with Mom. Clara [my half sister] had moved out. I got a job landscaping and was a nanny. This is when I went to school at Pellissippi. Things were kind of off and on. It was like I was making steps to improve and to better myself through education and working. But every now and then, I would screw up. I would go through little phases where I'd party a little bit... I've always had a job since then. I moved

out on my own...

"At the age of twenty-two, I got into an abusive relationship. He was thirty-two. We moved to New Orleans. I knew him a long time but would never go out with him because he was a heroin addict... an on-again-off-again heroin addict... But we would just run into each other. We just clicked, you know?" she snaps. "Anyway, I agreed to go out with him as long as he would completely cut the heroin addiction off... He did for a while... the first year, I'd say. Then he got back into it. To make a long story short, he [at one point] had to go to jail [for it]..."

Linda and Bill were together for two and a half years. "He'd swear he'd get therapy, and I kept thinking he would... Through this all, I kept a steady job. I was still stable, but, of course, how can anyone say they're stable when they're in an abusive relationship?

"We'd been together eight months before he started hitting me. The whole time we were together, he hit me a total of four times. It was usually related to the heroin... him getting off or whatever. And he had a jealousy thing...

"He loved me a lot, more than anybody else had ever loved me. And that really attracted me... He would say, 'Nobody will ever love you as much as I love you... You should appreciate that.' It was... a form of entrapment... And he beat my self-esteem down... he was insulting. He'd call me a bitch, a slut, although I was totally faithful to him, a whore, everything in the book. And of course he was always crying on his knees the next day.

"I stayed in it for the self-esteem. He fascinated me. He

was worldly, well-read, charming, attractive. Even my mom said so. He looked very clean." But Linda's feelings for him are mixed, "He was anal-retentive about cleanliness. He was very posessive... controlling. I couldn't have any friends." In addition, she states, "He had expensive tastes, and he would always drink. He had a drinking problem. And he couldn't keep a steady job. I was working for the both of us, most of the time."

"It got a little complicated," says Linda. "He had a daughter from a previous marriage... Towards the end, I was there out of having too big of a heart, mainly for the daughter... She was seven. And she'd stay with us a few weeks out of the summer. Her mother was a recovering heroin addict too. And, see, she had just relapsed during one summer, and I found out about that. And Carrie --she's so precious-- would say things to me like, 'I wish you'd marry my daddy so I could have a nice mommy.'"

What caused her to make the break then? Without hesitation, Linda responds, "The last time he hit me."

Bill's mother had wired some money down so he could go to school. "I encouraged him to go..." Linda said, "He was <u>so</u> smart... Well, Bill got frustrated because he thought his mom was sending the money to the Western Union, and she had sent it to <u>my</u> bank account... So he went to the wrong place to pick up the money. When he gets home, he's mad at me and yelling and stuff. So when I get home with the money, he asks for some of it so he can buy a bag of weed [about $40].... She had just sent down enough for tuition, not even enough to cover books... I was like, 'Hello...' And he was like, 'Man, it's my money. Give it to me.'

And I was like, 'Bill, your mom had to borrow this money.' So we got into a little tiff...

"I then threw the money down and said, 'Do what you want with it. It's your life... What would you do if it weren't for your mother? Where would you be if you didn't have someone to bail you out all the time?' As I said this, I was walking into the kitchen. And he came into the kitchen and started shaking me. He was like, 'You make me so crazy! You make me so crazy!' Before I knew it, he had me on the ground. See, I punched him to get away. He had me like this," she motions with her hands on her neck. "And I busted his lip... It wasn't anything major. And he pounded me to the floor... I thought my back was broken. This was the middle of summer, and I was on the floor in the hottest room in the house, the kitchen, and I couldn't get up. And he's yelling at me, 'I'm meeting with the guy in the honor's program tomorrow, and look what you did to me!'" She's pointing to her lip as if she's him. "And here I am laying on the floor, and I can't get up. 'I can't believe you busted my lip.' And I'm thinking, 'Loser.' And then I was quiet. I didn't say a word. I was just waiting for him to leave. I knew he would leave. It took me a good half hour to get up... I had to roll... I knew what I wanted to do. I said, 'This is it. There is no going back.'"

So had she been plotting to leave all along? "I knew that I wanted out, but I kept thinking about Carrie... I was wishful thinking... 'Cause he was doing the school thing. And I thought, well, once he gets into that he'll get totally involved in school and forget about himself, and his esteem will rise, and then

something is going to happen. I was wishful thinking. I was waiting for a sign. But if I didn't see a sign, I was going to get out. I thought school might have been the answer... I was thinking school might make a difference..."

"So, I called the battered women's hotline just to reinforce because I did not want to go back after this point. I was like, no, I'm not gonna wait around for change. It's not worth it. This is slowing me down trying to help him along. And I'm not being very helpful if I'm enabling him. This is what really reinforced it: they told me, 'The chances of him not abusing you again are about 1%... whether he goes to therapy or not.' I probably would have gone ahead, but that really made it concrete."

Linda did not tell Bill where she was going. She stayed with a friend from work. "I had to get a shot for the pain," she reported. "What he had done was he had bruised my kidney. I could barely even drive."

"After a couple of days and planning and getting the moving truck and getting my car fixed for the road trip, I went over there and I packed all my stuff up in two hours and headed off to Tennessee."

Did he ever try to contact her again? "Oh yes. He called my mom. He cried, he begged, he pleaded, he did everything, he tried to put a guilt trip on me... I refused to see him for the longest time. I met with him once, someplace public, to get some of the stuff I had left... He's called me a couple times in the past year, but he's been totally respectful about not coming by where I work. I've run into him a couple of times, but we've not gone out

or anything," Linda says.

Are they friends? "No... I still have feelings for him... I see him as a sick person that I've spent a lot of time with and been through a lot with and will always think about and wonder how he is doing and hope that one day he'll change, but I don't see it happening. It would be a miracle."

Would she ever go back to him? "No," Linda says with decision. But, she adds, "I'll pray for him."

So, it's been three and a half years since she left her abusive relationship, and, believe it or not, there hasn't been any more "screw stories." She hasn't been in any other destructive relationships, and she and her mother "get along great now... I've grown up a lot, and so has she."

What about "partying"? "This past semester I made straight A's," she smiles, "for the first time ever... I don't go out when I'm in school. I maybe went out twice the whole semester. Maybe once in a blue moon I get drunk, like if we're celebrating somebody's birthday. But I <u>don't</u> drive."

What about drugs? "I totally feel in control of my life," she says. "I don't like pot. It just makes people stupid and hungry. Coffee is my drug of choice," she laughs. "I'm into being healthy... a lot more health conscious. I don't even take aspirin... I take vitamins. They're about the only pill form I've taken. I like hanging out and drinking a cup of tea or whatever."

"I feel... my self esteem is much higher. I'm working on myself. I'm not in any relationship, and I'm liking it thay way. I'm looking forward to... going to school and getting that

education. It's nothing but moving up at this point. I think that I've been in enough crappy relationships and have learned from them, and I've been around enough people that I'm a better judge of character... As long as I have an education, and I'm doing something that's rewarding."

Does she ever have doubts? "You know, sometimes I get stressed out about school, you know, things that get people down and out, and then I'm thinking, 'Oh God, maybe I haven't resolved all those crazy things that have happened in my past. Maybe I should go to therapy. Maybe that's what's making me do this now, making me be stressed out,'" she laughs. "But, yeah, it's like I've gone through a long enough stretch of time without seeing a therapist or feeling like I need one... I feel like I have such good, well-rounded friends right now that I feel that they have been my best therapists."

Linda has been waiting tables at a local restaurant for a few years now, as well as going to college and doing relief work at a psychiatric residential treatment center. Her life sounds stable, but today she's moving back to New Orleans. She has planned this move for a while, and her belongings are half-packed as we speak.

"So why are you moving?" I asked her near the end of my interview. "It's a beautiful city," she responds enthusiastically. She mentions the music. "I love jazz and the blues, and it's such good therapy. It's a fun city. I like the people. And my dad and my little half brother are there." What does she plan to do there? "I'm moving in with a girl. I know her from before." Is she wild and crazy, I wonder. "No," she laughs. "She already has her

degree and is going to school there... No addictions... She's very goal oriented." Linda plans on going to school also, to complete her bachelor's degree.

What does she want to be when she "grows up"? "A social worker and a waitress," she replies confidently. "I think that would be a good balance. Being a social worker would be emotionally rewarding. I'd want to work with adolescents because I've been in adolescent treatment. Being a waitress I could earn extra cash. It wouldn't be as involving. It would be a good contrast."

Linda sums up her life at this point by saying, "I feel so well-balanced now... more a whole person. I think if you work through things, you get a better understanding..." Regarding how she changed, she says, "I think I evolved gradually... I'm still evolving."

As I leave her apartment at Fort Sanders with a car load of clothes and belongings she didn't want to move with her ("Sure, I'll take them!"), I can't help but admire Linda. She had survived a rough past, and her future looked bright. She seemed so well-adjusted, open, and honest. I believe the adolescents she will work with will relate to her well and find her easy to talk to. She will accept them as they are. Linda's strength and resilience, in sum, gave me renewed hope and optimism about the future of troubled youth.

Case Study #3: Matt's Story

Matt sat in his apartment, the lights were out, and he looked at his method of killing himself. It was planned; he was going to drink a bottle of Clorox bleach. (As a priest, he had seen a woman in the hospital after drinking bleach to end her life. Her pain was agonizing, but evenually she died.) Matt had called his parents and a very dear friend earlier that day, but he did not tell them of his suicide plans. Apparently, he just wanted to talk to them one last time. He had gotten a neighbor to watch his dog.

"It seemed like everything that I could possibly have wanted in my life seemed to be falling away... I just thought, I have lost everything... I have lost everything," reported Matt.

He had just left the Roman Catholic priesthood, moved out of state, and was working at a convenience store. "I didn't know what I was doing with my life. I felt hopeless and saw it getting no better. I saw where I was, living alone in my apartment with a crazy job and crazy hours, and I saw it getting no better."

"I looked at this bottle of Clorox. I was about ready a couple of times. I picked it up two to three times and started to tilt it back to drink out of it. And I'd put it back. I got it to my lips once... I sat there for two and a half hours looking at this way of killing myself.

"And it was like a miracle in a way. It was like all of a sudden --I don't know what clicked in me-- but I was like, wait a minute, hold the fort, look at yourself, Williamson. Here I am at the point of wanting to off myself, and I literally thought right

there --something in the flash of an instant-- no matter what the hell I have to do, whatever that is, it ain't as bad as this, sitting here with this [Clorox] in the dark, thinking am I going to or not. Ain't nothing that bad, you know? And I started laughing. I literally did... Look what I was doing. And I couldn't blame it on anyone else for once (not my parents, the church, you name it). It was like, the buck stops here..."

I'm sitting with Matt in his comfortable home which he shares with his wife of three years (and a miniature collie). He smiles a lot, calls me by name frequently, and is, in sum, a very agreeable and amiable person to be around.

"I just did all kinds of exciting things after that..." he says. "Good things, wonderful things." Clearly a major transformation had taken place. Matt calls it an "attitude adjustment," simply realizing that "ain't nothing that bad." That event was eight years ago, and Matt has since settled contentedly into a marriage, an exciting career in social work, and, on top of that, a brand new house.

Matt has an extensive educational background. He received his B.A. in liberal arts (a history degree), a masters in divinity, a masters in theology, and a doctorate in theology. He also has his masters in social work, a license in clinical social work, and is a qualified master social worker, as well as a certified hypnotherapist. "You know," he tells me, "I figured out once that I have twenty letters in my first, middle, and last names. And I have twenty-three letters after that... That's a little obsessive compulsive, don't you think?" I think it's impressive.

Matt was ordained into the Roman Catholic priesthood in 1984, after getting his undergraduate degree and completing seminary. He served as an associate pastor for two churches. "While I was a priest," he comments, "I was doing social work in the name of ministry." In Chicago, he worked with an inner city gang. He worked with prostitutes to get them off the streets and fought slum lords for better living conditions. Additionally, he had run a soup kitchen in Cincinatti and had worked in a prison in Wisconsin. When he tells me this, I comment that he's worked with a lot of different people. He responds sincerely, "I have been blessed to do that." As a priest in a large parish, Matt found himself with work he was not able to do, so he hired a social worker. "I first started learning about social work [as a separate field] through her," he said.

In 1989, Matt decided to leave the priesthood and moved to Tennessee. He really didn't know what he wanted to do with his life; he just wasn't satisfied where he was. It was around this time that Matt almost killed himself. "I had actually stopped drinking for [more than] a year. I was not drinking," said Matt, who's a recovered alcoholic. "But all that did was now I had all this pain I was dealing with and feeling without being medicated."

When asked about his alcoholism, Matt tells me his problems with drinking began in the ninth grade. He doesn't tell me much about his years as a drinking alcoholic but does say with pride that he earned his ten year chip this past year. He reaches under the neck of his shirt and pulls out a chain with his first chip on it. He looks at it and reads, "April 11 [his sobriety date]."

Matt discusses Alcoholics Anonymous, which he has been going to for "years and years." "The problem with alcoholics is not the alcohol," declares Matt. "The temptation is not dealing with life... A.A. helps you deal with life, which does a whole lot to help with the drinking."

Does he still want to drink? "I am one of those who truly believes I am just a drink away from losing it completely. But in a way my problem and my blessing is not drinking these days... It's living life." He continues, "I've had my days where I had an urge to drink, use a drug, something like that... But I don't have these overwhelming urges to drink... every day.... I go to A.A. not so much because I'm afraid I'll start drinking and all that. It just helps me deal with life."

After moving to Tennessee, Matt finally found direction when someone suggested to him that he go into social work. In 1990, Matt started working towards his masters degree in social work and began employment in that field. He moved into Dismas House, a community for college students and ex-offenders just released from prison. (An operating premise behind Dismas House is that both college students and ex-offenders are in transition and can form a mutually caring and supportive community together. It helps ex-offenders get started on the right track and gives college students, especially those interested in social work, a wider view of social problems.) After being a student resident there for a while, he was house manager for a year.

Matt also had several jobs working with disturbed youth. He served as a psychiatric technician in residential treatment and as

a staff person for a runaway shelter. After graduating with his masters degree, he did counselling within people's homes for kids at risk of state placement. Currently, he is working at a therapy center doing individual as well as family therapy. He works largely with chemical addictions and has done some work with teenagers, as well as crisis counselling. He is looking forward to moving into a new job, which he starts this spring, as a therapist at an adolescent treatment center.

Matt talks about his career field. "Social work lets me work with people hands-on, not just listening, but also doing advocacy for them." When I ask what he means by advocacy, he says that he means, if necessary, helping a person get needed services or being a voice for them in government. "Not just counselling or therapy."

Matt also compares his role as a priest to his role as a social worker. "My spiritual background has been key for me, a part of everything I do. It is the one thing that has held constant from priestly ministry to all the different social work I've done." Matt makes it clear, however, that he does "not push religion in social work." To Matt, religion is a "way of attaining spirituality." Spirituality is "that something more." Religion is specific, while spirituality is general. "When a client asks, 'Why me? What's it all about?'... that person is moving into the realm of the spiritual." Matt says that, when he switched from being a priest to being a social worker, he moved from "just talking about spiritual questions to literally doing real hands-on work." This seems to satisfy Matt's desire to help people and "share God in his life." In fact, Matt says, "I sometimes feel like I'm doing better

ministry as a social worker."

Because he is now "a social worker doing therapy," he also discusses the difference between the roles of therapist and social worker. "A therapist, like a minister, listens and helps people find their answers. A social worker, then, takes it a step further. A social worker is a doer. I will help you do what you need to do to find your answers... I am a social worker first."

With his different perspectives, then, what does Matt think causes change in individuals? Matt responds, without hesitation, "Two things which seem to be universal. I've seen them both in ministry and social work and have known them personally. Number one, when a person decides they do not want to lose anything else. No matter what I have to do to make changes in my life, those changes can't be as bad as where I am now.... Bottoming out, literally. And the second thing, this is on a co-equal plane... is finding a relationship with somebody. I see in that person what I can be, and that person understands and accepts who I am."

As a social worker, Matt says, "The biggest thing that will make a difference with a person is if you just be... just be with that person.... That's more than just sitting there but showing genuine concern, genuine empathy... In being genuinely empathic, somehow I let the other person know that I'm still in the process of learning, and, in fact, I can learn from you. It's a two-way deal. What I try to do with people coming into my office is not so much to say 'get over it,' but 'I can help you get through it.' So the assumption is that, for them to get through it, I have had to have gotten through some similar things. If I haven't, it makes it

tough for me to talk about it with them."

Matt has obviously "gotten through" some difficult times in his life. He has not only overcome his abuse of alcohol but also his strong desire to commit suicide. Matt declares that he now has an "attitude of gratitude." "Since then [his attempt at suicide], nothing has ever been that bad... Still crazy things happen, but I know I can get through them," Matt says with confidence. Beyond that, Matt has surpassed his mere ability to survive. He is now in a position to help others, with empathy. He can serve as a credible example of what they too can achieve.

Case Study #4: Sue's Story

A friend had referred me to Sue when I mentioned that I would be interested in interviewing a person who had been a chain smoker and had given up smoking. Little did I know the gold mine I was about to discover when I set up an appointment with her. After I mentioned my topic of change to Sue, she told me that she would be willing to discuss her giving up smoking with me, if I wanted, but actually she felt that her biggest achievement was getting out of poverty. As I later discovered during the course of the interview, Sue had undergone many major changes in her life, climbing out of poverty being just one.

Actually, Sue's life began comfortably enough. "I grew up in a pretty affluent neighborhood," she begins her story. "We were pretty well off. My mom was a stay-at-home mom. My dad had a good income, college graduate... I went to private schools..."

"When I was fourteen, I started dating my first husband. We dated all through high school. I got pregnant my senior year in high school, and then we got married.... I was seventeen. We got married when I was still in high school, but nobody knew it. We were secretly married."

"I didn't know I was pregnant. That summer [after she graduated from high school], I was working in a clothing store... anticipating going to college, and I found out I was pregnant..."

"I had to give up going to college and just keep working... At the time, since I just had a high school diploma, I was having difficulty finding work that paid anything. So I ended up working

a switchboard for a department store until my child was born... It was a very low paying job. We went ahead and told my parents that I was married once I found out I was pregnant. Then we got an apartment."

Since she didn't realize that she was pregnant before she got married, why did she get married so early? "In love... youth... know everything-- right?" Sue laughs ruefully.

"It ended up that he was quite violent. It ended up being a... physically violent relationship... He had a raging temper throughout the pregnancy and after she was born."

So how long did they stay together?

"Well, it was 1965 when I was pregnant. There weren't any shelters. A teenager with a high school education and pregnant does not have a whole lot of options. I didn't have the option of going home because no one was real happy about my situation. So I was kind of stuck... And after my child was born and the violence continued, I was able to move out and get another low-paying job."

"As is very typical of domestic violence, you go back a lot of times. You go back and forth and back and forth until you are either killed or you figure it out... one or the other. It wasn't really that simple. It went on for years. It went on for, gosh, three or four years where he would say he was really sorry and he loved me, and I would go back, and things would be okay for a month or so. And then he would explode again, and then I'd move out, and then he would come back and have this other reason why it was different this time. Each time it was like, well, he went and he prayed about it, and now it was going to be different. Or he went

and he got counselling, and now it was going to be different. And then there were just different [reasons]... It just kept going on and on... I wasn't interested in dating or things like that. I wasn't interested in being divorced... [I was] still in love with him, still loved him... Looking back with what I know today, it was just a very typical battered woman's syndrome... what it does to you emotionally, what it does to you physically... going back and believing what no one else in the world would ever believe... the old going back and thinking you'd get a different result even though you're doing the same thing."

Was she ever getting any help when she moved out?

"No, I was always moving out on my own."

Did she tell her parents?

"My parents knew that he was very violent. There would be times I would go home for maybe a day or two, and I would be all bruised and black-eyed. As is typical, it [the violence] escalated... He definitely could have killed me. It was very very violent."

Did her parents ever tell her to move out?

"No, it was more, 'You made your bed, now lie in it' sort of attitude."

"There were times that... he'd stay at home from work to keep me from going to work so no one would see how beat up I was... It's amazing what you'd allow... but I was young and part of a syndrome and got caught up in it thirty years ago..."

"<u>The</u> moment, <u>the</u> thing that changed that was-- he had never been violent toward our child, and one day he was coming at <u>me</u>, and

he threw something at me, and it missed me and hit her and knocked her out. [Her daughter was about three years old at that time.] So, even though a logical person would think this person [her daughter] is being harmed just seeing the mother getting beat up, that's not what you think when you are in the middle of it... But at that moment he hurt her... Immediately, I could end everything... I couldn't end everything [just] because he hurt me... At that moment, I connected his violence to hurting her."

So how was her daughter? Was she okay?

"I called the doctor. She wasn't out very long... I was in constant contact with the pediatrician. I did whatever he told me to do. She didn't have to go to the hospital or anything, but it was scary."

"That was it. I never let him come back. That was when it was done, when I finished it... The moment that that [relationship] ended was the moment that my child got hurt."

Sue moved out for the last time. She had secret locations, changed her job, "changed everything." "He would always pursue me," she said. "He stalked me a lot... But there were no stalking laws. There were no violent shelters. There were no female crisis centers. There was nothing, absolutely nothing you could do, except be killed... [or] just run and hide. Either you successfully hid or you got beat up again or you got killed."

Sue says that she was married to her husband and together with him "maybe four years" before she left. At that time, the law where she lived stated that if a married couple was separated for two years, either spouse could get an uncontested divorce. Her

husband didn't even have to be there. The attorney that filled out the divorce papers for her did it gratuituosly because she didn't have any money to pay him.

"At that time, I was just trying to... work and make the most money that I could. I took a test with civil service and got into a program to be trained to be a draftsperson, and I designed roads for a while... And it was through that that I thought, well, maybe I really could go to college because it was a state job, and they had an office on... campus... And if I could get transferred to that office, then I could take some classes while I worked... They worked with me around my schedule... Once I started doing that, I started trying to take more and more classes. Then I started seeing that there was a chance that I could get my education... It opened up the possibilities for me, being right on campus and taking a few classes and passing them and starting to gain a little confidence that I could actually do that."

"When you're in domestic violence, you have no self-esteem at all. I mean you have none. You really do not think that you can do anything. And the abuser typically tells you that, tells you that you're stupid, that you have no brain, all sorts of things. And when you're locked in that syndrome, and you're being beat up, and your world is closing in, and you're being isolated... you've got a long way to climb out of that to have the confidence to think that you can actually go to college and get a degree...."

So for three semesters (one year), Sue went to school (full time) and worked (full time), while she raised her daughter as a single parent. "But I was really having trouble getting the money

and pulling it together financially..." she said. "So I dropped out thinking I would get back in in a year or less."

It took eight years.

"And it was on my mind the whole eight years. How can I get back?... I never dropped the dream," she continued. "It was always on my mind, I had to get that education... It was two-fold. One is it was always going toward the dream and [two] realizing that I had to go toward the dream because my situation wasn't ever going to change [without a college education]... I couldn't afford health insurance. I couldn't afford car insurance. I couldn't afford car maintenance. I mean, it was just always living hand to mouth, just enough for some food... really difficult."

"I could not get out of the poverty. I slowly, over the years, realized that the only way I could get out of the poverty was through education. I tried to get welfare, couldn't get welfare because I had gone back to school... And then you couldn't get welfare if you were educating yourself and training yourself [which Sue was always doing in order to find better paying jobs]. You had to be jobless and not improving yourself. I couldn't get any assistance there, and I became a little more clever at what was out there..."

"I started looking around for financial sources [to pay for school]. There was a column in our local newspaper... where you ask for help... and I wrote in the column asking if anyone knew of any grants or financial sources to let me know because I really wanted to go back to college. And a couple of people contacted me and let me know of some grants that would be available." They

panned out.

Even though Sue did receive some grant money, it was "still very much a struggle," she said. "I held down three jobs, went to school. Every semester when I'd register, I would do deferred payment, and I'd not have a clue where it was going to come from. But my philosophy at that point was I have just got to be in school, and it will all work out. But if I don't register because I don't have the money, I won't be in school. If I register, I'll figure out how to do it. At one point, I sold my refrigerator and had to keep my refrigerated stuff in an ice chest," she chuckles. "I mean, whatever it took."

"At that time, my major was foreign language. So I started translating documents at home. That way I could stay at home with my child and get paid to translate documents. And [I was] teaching on campus, English as a second language and Spanish as a second language."

"And after I got back to school, after the eight years, then I was so scared that something would interrupt it again, that I began taking maximum hours, every semester, every summer, everything that I could. I was so scared that if I even laid out for a summer that I would never get it done. And my philosophy at that point was I'm really in poverty if I'm not in school, and I'm really in poverty if I am in school. So I'd rather be in school and be in poverty because at least then I've got the hope. So it didn't make a whole lot of difference whether I was in school or not. I just didn't have any money either way."

"I lost the apartment I was in and went into a government

housing office, and they said, 'Oh, we have a long list.' And I just sat there, and I had my child with me, and I just started crying, and I said, 'I have nowhere to go. You either give me an apartment, or I'm sitting in this office until you do.'" She laughs, "And they gave me one. It was kind of just always trying to... pull it together."

"Once I decided that education was my way out.... I just didn't deviate from that. It was like, I'm going to get into school no matter what. I'm going to take as many classes as I humanly can no matter what. I am going to get this degree as I can not stop until I get this degree."

And what about her daughter?

"She was in public school. She was a latch key child. She had a little key that she wore around her neck. And when she'd get off the school bus, I'd try to schedule my classes where she wasn't at home alone but about twenty or thirty minutes, but she'd let herself in."

Was her ex-husband paying child support?

"He didn't pay that. I sued him for the back due child support, and eventually I won that. But I was already back in school at that point. It took years to win that. He took it to an appellate court twice fighting it, but eventually I did win that..."

Sue had other victories as well. She won the Foreign Language Department's Most Outstanding Romance Language Student Award and was hired by them to teach as an undergraduate. "In 1979, I graduated with a degree in Spanish and a minor in French, then went

to graduate school while I was on the roll. What I really wanted to be was a college professor in Spanish... I was on a track to get my Ph.D."

However, Sue came to a "crossroads" after one year of graduate school. She had known for a while that the university that she went to had an inbreeding policy which dictated that she had to go to another university in order to get her doctoral degree. However, her daughter didn't want to move.

"When you're very poor," Sue told me, "you move a lot because if the rent goes up five dollars, you move... And she [my daughter] had gone to a lot of different schools, and she was about to enter high school. And she asked me, please, just let her go to one school for high school, which I thought was a pretty decent request... If I went to another college for my Ph.D., I would have to move her in the middle of high school. That was one factor. Another factor was money." Sue knew that it would be a financial struggle while she worked on her doctoral degree. She also had friends who already had their Ph.D.'s who weren't getting paid much. "And my daughter, I wanted for her to go to college and be able not to struggle like I had. So I had those three things that were working on my mind..."

"One of my relatives mentioned to me that, if I went to law school, I could be a lawyer in three years which would have me out of law school one year before my daughter graduated from high school... So I prayed a lot about that. And I decided, well, I would go take the LSAT, and, if that worked out, I'd apply, and, if that worked out... I wasn't determined to do it. It wasn't

something I had ever dreamed about doing or something I was particularly attracted to. It was strictly a financial career decision."

Sue took the LSAT and scored highly. She applied to law school and was admitted immediately. She even got funding, a few grants as well as some student loans. It seemed as though her path was laid out before her, so Sue went to law school.

During Sue's first year, she was not allowed to work (school policy) but was required to attend law school full time. "It takes every single thing you have... I was just studying all the time, and I was hardly sleeping. And one night in the middle of the night, I had to go to the emergency room because I was just-- I had made myself physically ill. And there was a female doctor there... another turning point." Sue points out. "And the female doctor looked at me and said, 'What happened to you?' And I said, 'I'm in law school.' And so she goes, '<u>Oh</u>, I see. I understand.' She says, 'You know you're going to have to make a decision that you will have to sleep, and you will have to eat good food, and there are certain limitations you will have to place. And if you do not, you will not survive." And after that I said, 'I will do what I can do, but I have to place limits. I can't do it all...'"

"I just hadn't slept," Sue continued. "I hadn't eaten. I just studied, studied, studied... In law school, it was a very fierce competition. [The university] had at least a 50% attrition rate... And there seemed to be an emphasis on flunking students out... So when you get all these assignments that no human being could possibly complete, fear drove you to try to complete them...

"But that was my turning point... She [the doctor] made a big difference, she made a really big difference... At that time, I was in school to become a professional woman, and here was a professional woman who had been through a pressure cooker type school, so I knew she knew, who looked at me and talked to me about it and said, 'You can make it without doing this to yourself...' So it wasn't like just somebody who didn't understand who came up saying, 'You can't study so much.' It was somebody who understood."

Sue made a lot of "important changes." "What I would do was I'd let myself have six hours of sleep for two to three days, then I would give myself seven hours... and on the weekend, I would give myself two eight hours. It was very rigid. And the only time I would allow myself not to study was on Friday night... I had no social life. I didn't do anything else. But those were the little gifts I gave myself... And I ran every day, between one to three miles... It was a tension release; I did it for my mind. I really needed that... I started cooking. One of my friends in law school really liked to cook, so we had an agreement. If we would split the cost of the food, he would cook, and then he would give me my food for the week for me and my daughter..."

After three and a half years (in May of 1983), Sue graduated with a juris doctorate degree. After passing the bar exam (the first time) and then getting sworn in by the state Supreme Court, Sue officially became a lawyer on October 7, 1983.

Sue then tells me about an interesting twist of fate. "I had applied at a law firm, and... the clerk of court in the parish...

was running for reelection. And he had been clerk of court for about twenty years, and, for the first time, it looked like he was going to lose... And it happened to be to a woman, and the reason that the polls were showing he was going to lose was that in 1982 the legislation had passed the Battered Women's Act placing upon the clerk of court a duty to make petitions available to women who are victims of domestic abuse to get court orders (protective orders), and he had not had any interest in that, and so he had not done anything to comply with that, and the woman that was running for clerk of court... made an issue of that and said, 'See, this has been a law for a year,' and he hadn't done anything, 'He doesn't care about women. He doesn't do his duty,' and so he was losing on that issue.

"Right about that time, I had applied to the law firm that was legal counsel to that clerk of court, and the clerk of court had gone to the senior partner of the law firm and said, 'I need somebody to set this up... I want this whole program set up for battered women,' and the law firm had no women at all. And there was my application and resume sitting on his desk," Sue laughs. "And he called me in, and he said, 'Would you have any interest in setting up a program for battered women as an attorney?' And I said, 'Boy, would I?!' So, he hired me, and I spent the first year of my law practice setting up a program for battered women and representing the clerk of court who, by the way," she adds, "did win."

"So then I started doing other law with the law firm, but I continued working with that clerk of court to create one of the

best battered women's programs that I have ever seen in the United States... Thought it was quite interesting... from battered woman to person who was able to affect the law... It was kind of the circle comes around because that was the same parish that I had been battered in, and, when I got hired as an attorney, I set up the program which allowed women who were victims of domestic violence to come in with no money and no lawyer and get a protective order... and to go through the whole court proceeding without an attorney and without any money and... to get the protective order and to get the enforcement. And I worked with the sheriff's department and the judges, and I called people together, and I organized the program, and I got everybody working together. I got the sheriff's department to enforce it which, back then, law enforcement-- domestic violence was something they did not want to be any part of-- that was personal... So I got involved in setting up educational programs and getting their cooperation and... started working with the battered women's program where I was a [volunteer] legal consultant... and legal trainer... It was a very exciting time..."

But Sue's story does not end there. "My daughter grew up, went to college, graduated, and married somebody she had been dating since high school... They both had design degrees, so they ended up on the west coast to get jobs in their field... They're best friends." Sue shows me all the pictures she has of her daughter around her office. "She's everywhere," she smiles.

After her daughter married, Sue said, "I thought for the first time I could go back and look at what I would like to do instead of

doing what I had to do to get her through college... I just felt like I had options that I had never really had all my life. I was just always having to work, work, work, and take care of my daughter and trying to get me educated and trying to get her educated."

"I finally decided that I wanted to make some changes, and I wanted to make some geographical changes, and I wanted to make some career changes... And I looked [around the nation], I went around and looked a lot at where I wanted to be, and I decided that I liked Knoxville, and I ended up here... I've never regretted it either. I love Knoxville... great place. I think I really should be on a tourist board," she says laughing. "Because it's just wonderful," she continues. "Perfect climate, friendly people, good economy. It kind of has everything, seasons..."

How long has she been here?

"Since about 2:30 on August 16, 1992," she laughs. "It was about 2:30 P.M." I've noticed that dates are important to Sue. "They're markers..." she comments. "My marker dates... This was a big, big change."

Sue had originally come to Knoxville on a job offer which she ended up turning down. This job involved "working a lot with banks and savings and loan failures," she said. "I really wanted to do a little more, see what God had in store for me, how I could make the world a little better, how I would have a chance to give back, because I felt like I had gotten so much..." Sue set out on her search and eventually landed a job that enabled her to become corporate attorney for a nonprofit organization. Sue is satisfied

with this job and her "one in a million" employer. She finds her work both meaningful and fulfilling.

Sue has made another major change since moving to Knoxville; she got remarried last August. It seems unnecessary for me to add that this marital relationship is not abusive. Earlier, when talking about her previous marriage, Sue indicated she now has no tolerance whatsoever for physical abuse ("If ever anyone even began to even think, I mean... I would never tolerate that.") This apparently is very far from the reality of her current relationship. Sue talked with me eagerly about her family's plans for the upcoming holidays and seemed quite comfortable with her new spouse.

Having undergone so many different changes, what does Sue think causes positive, long-term dramatic change in individuals?

"I think that there is a point that a person realizes that their life needs to be different, and it's not going to be different unless they can get focused on something. It's really almost like, from that moment I decided education was going to get me out, it was like education was that little pinpoint of light down the long dark tunnel... And I just never quit seeking that light... I think there's something that has to burn inside of you."

"I think you really have to identify something that will get you there. You have to know what you want. You have to know you want to change. You have to identify what is going to get you there and keep your eyes on it and not get deterred. When I didn't have the money to register, I registered anyway. I mean it's like,

it's a track. And if you don't have that kind of focus, if you can't identify it, and you can't stay focused on it, it's going to be real hard to get there..."

"I think there's something to be said that you find yourself in something. Your life, everything around you, you just very much want it to be different... It's hopelessness... Hopelessness was the driver, I think. This is it. It's not going to change. No matter what I do, it doesn't change. No matter how I try to change it, it doesn't change. This is it. This is my life. You know, how can I... What can I do to change it? It's not all these little things that change it. It's gonna be something profound that is going to have to change it... What can really change it? I don't know. I think sometimes you may have to be tossed side to side to discover it..."

After working several jobs with limited potential, Sue eventually realized that she needed a college education to pull herself out of poverty. "Something inside you says, focus on your goal, on what will get you there, and then it's like... It's just a track. Nothing could deter me once I reached that point... No one could stop me. There was no question in my mind... I had people say, 'How are you going to do that? You're a single mom. You don't have any money. How are you--' 'I don't know. I'm just doing it. I'm just doing it.'"

I mention her obvious persistence and hard work. But Sue explains, "When you get focused, and you're on track, it doesn't even seem that hard. Because you're not making decisions. It's not like, well, am I going to school this semester? Well, am I

going to go full time or not? Well, what am I going to do? In a way, so many stressors are released because you know what you are going to do. You are going to go to school, and you may have to shuffle and try to find a job and try to do some things. But the one thing you know [is] there is a thread down the center of your life, and that is going to get you out. That is your burning focus. Everything else has to work around that."

Looking around Sue's office, it is hard to imagine that she has ever been poor. The plush office is in typical lawyer style... a big wooden desk in front of a picture window, upholstered furniture, oriental rug on the floor, and certificates on the wall. So far removed is the struggle Sue had fought in order to gain her respected and well-paid position.

At the end of the interview, Sue looks at me and says, "Don't paint too bad a picture of me." "What?" I respond, honestly surprised to hear her say that. She had been so confident throughout the interview, with no sign of self-doubt until now.

Hopefully I restored her confidence when I responded, with all sincerity, "If I was to paint a picture of you exactly as you are, it would be beautiful."

Case History #5: Tom's Story

"So, it started when..." I prompt him.

Tom laughs for a while. "Is that my cue?" he asks.

"Yeah," I reply, laughing with him.

This is the third time I've met with Tom in order to interview him. He seems to be a very busy person at this point in his life, but he is more than willing to help me with my project and seems open to talking to me. Tom and I had several scheduled appointments together, many of which were postponed before we met. The first two actual interviews were mostly about what he was doing now with his life, what he thinks causes change in individuals, and Alcoholics Anonymous (which he loves to talk about). These interviews were cut short when he had to go to work or visit his mother (who was in the hospital at this time). It is this last interview, in the lobby where he works (his choice of location), that finally provided me with his case history. Although Tom had been willing to tell me about his past all along, he seemed to put it off for a while (at least through the first two interviews). When he finally does tell me his story, I find out why.

"I'm gonna try to keep this not long and drawn out," he says, "Okay?... I first started drinking when I was [a freshman] in high school, to be accepted... That led me to... the first time I ever got in trouble with the law. I was drunk and... I got together with some other guys, and where we were going to school they came up with this rule, and it upset us... We decided to vandalize the school. We were caught pretty soon, two to three days later. But

those were the kind of behaviors... wanting to be more popular-- let me do something for you so that you'll notice me-- get me recognition... That's why Tom Smith drank, to be accepted."

"I look back today, and most of the things I did in my life... I did for other people... to get that acceptance... I believe that the human race... we want attention, we want to be noticed, we want to be liked... we want to be loved."

Tom received consequences for his vandalism of the school. He had to go to summer school and pay a fine to repair the property. He reports not much drinking after that; "I kind of had to walk the line." His parents sent him to military school ("to straighten my behavior out"), and he graduated from there with his high school diploma. "My dad passed away my senior year in high school, right before I graduated. I was real angry and upset about that."

"I worked that summer, and there was some drinking, but really not a whole lot. I'm sure I was not in the addiction stage at that point; I wasn't going out drinking, mind set to get drunk..."

"From there I went to college. I played around... I drank. I hung out... I was unsupervised. I was away from home. And I was having fun... Flunked in a couple years. You know, I played that game... and finally it caught up with me..."

"After I flunked out, I was involved with a lady... and, uh, eventually, through some behavior that wasn't socially acceptable-- I'll just put it that way-- she became pregnant, and we had to end up getting married... That's when I had to go to work. It was 'get serious' time... I wound up in the construction field... It [the relationship] was pretty unhealthy... She was seeing some

other guys, and I was kind-of doing stuff on... Heather, I don't mean to be real spotty about this, but there's a lot I don't remember because of the drinking..."

"I would stay out late, stay at the office, stay with the guys, drink... I think that's when my alcoholism really took off. Because we were drinking straight whiskey and chasing it with 7-ups... Sitting out there, till all hours of the night, at the company, drinking and talking, all these sessions... We were going to do all the things that you might want to do in the world if you were aspiring to be famous and big and powerful and rich." Tom laughs at himself in reflection. "I don't know how many times... how many barstools, how many hours I've wasted, sitting on a barstool and just drinking and talking, and all of it, never ever, none of that ever materialized... I mean all of that B.S. When I think back on it, I remember... sketching things out on napkins and trying to read it the next day and being like, 'Forget it!'" Again he laughs at himself, "There was so many times back then and drinking that I came within five minutes and two beers of having it all figured out... What happened?!"

I asked him if all the pressures of his marriage and job had anything to do with him drinking. "Yeah, and dealing with life and family and bills... I wasn't ready. I wasn't emotionally mature enough. Yeah, but what I know now is that when I started drinking... I pretty much shut myself down to emotional development... With those added pressures, it gave me a real good excuse to drink. That's all I needed was a good excuse..."

"Marriage lasted for a total of two years. Stayed with that

company after the divorce. We had a child. He went with her... The drinking kept on, never slowed down, never missed a lick. Eventually ended up losing that job... got fired from that job, wrecked a car, wrecked two cars, I think, actually..."

Did it have anything to do with his drinking? "Yes, yes, yes," Tom responds. "My boss called me in one day after I wrecked the first car, and he said, 'You are an alcoholic.' And I remember sitting there and facing him and laughing, and I said, 'Ha! Alcoholics drink in the morning, and alcoholics live under bridges.' There's another... rationalization. That was my way of seeing it, denial..."

"Got into the nightclub business in Nashville [in the early 1970's], and that was perfect for my disease. They went hand in hand... Met a girl, another person who was into chemicals a lot... Alcohol and drugs beat her up a lot... We made several trips to the emergency room, things like that... One crazy trip after another... She O.D.'d, tried to O.D., took too much, drank too much... There were five years in there, in that nightclub, that it was that way every day. It was drugs every day and drinking. Because when you worked at the night club, you were gonna drink. I mean it was right there. I mean we were dealing drugs. And of course, if I had them, I did them."

What kind of drugs? "Marijuana, cocaine, pills-- lots of pills."

After five years, Tom left that business. He reports, "I went to Florida as an escape... The heat was on." "The law?" I ask. "Yeah." Tom got into the construction field again, building

swimming pools, "all the time using drugs."

"Drugs became more common than the drinking during this time... I worked a lot using pain pills and drinking. Had a shot, took a couple pain pills, then went to work. Of course, when I was in Florida, it was more of a lax atmostphere, and we could do things like that. I was pretty much my own boss at that time."

Tom reports that pain pills became "quite common" for him at this time. When I ask Tom what he means by pain pills, he explains that he means prescription drugs like Tylenol 3 or Codeine. "It changes your mood... That's why I used it, for the effect... the same with alcohol."

"Came back to Nashville, started work again (construction). Ended up going back to the company that fired me. Worked for them for a few more years."

"Got married to this girl... Imagine that! That was... I don't know... gonna make it better. But it just continued. It got crazier. It was real crazy. There was a lot of fighting and jealousy..."

"She had a child when I first met her, about six months old. He still calls me Dad, and that was great. I still love him, and we talk. So that's something good and positive that came out of that."

Tom and his wife had a child, another boy. Eventually, Tom decided he wanted to move to Arizona. "I went ahead to take this job..." Since the boys were in school, they stayed in Nashville with their mother until the end of the school year.

Tom says, "I can look back now, and I can see I left to get

away... Geographic change... The heat was on again... family... It just wasn't comfortable... new place... gonna be different... Family was... trying to get me to change, act like a human being... I just wanted a new start, new friends, new faces, new job, more money..."

"So you didn't want to actually change yourself?" I ask.

"No, no, certainly not," Tom says emphatically. "Things were okay. It was just those people."

"So anyway, got out there... Immediately got into cocaine, almost daily... Every bit of money I was making I was spending on drugs. I was the only one out there. Both the boys were back here in Nashville. So I did nothing but partied solid until they came out, maybe six months later... By the time they got everything packed up and then got out there... I mean, you can imagine. It was just... wild... when they came. And she [his wife] was ready to go [separate from him]. She was ready to leave... And that was real traumatic for me. I wanted her to stay. And I went further and further into the drugs and alcohol to alleviate, to soothe, that pain... She finally ended up leaving. She packed the car and left."

They were divorced in 1980.

"I stayed in Flagstaff another six months. Kind of bottomed out there, got fired from a job. My boss found out I was druggin'... drinking heavy and using cocaine. Ended up getting a job in Phoenix, moved down there, and lived there for the next about eight years.

"But things were going okay... I got a good job with a big

company, and things were good. There was money growing, and things were starting to pop... I was still doing a lot of drinking. I don't know. I kind of just survived there. I stayed with this one company for two to three years. Got a job with a smaller company there, and they were drinkers (the two owners)... I got into some pretty embarassing, some humiliating, situations there around the company, around the bosses, where my drinking got out of control, and they had to take me home. And that happened more than once... Stayed with that two to three years... Then went to another company out of another town. And the drinking and the drugging didn't slow down at all. It was back full swing. The two kids came out and stayed with me..."

"How did that happen?" I ask. Tom explains, "They just wanted to come out, and she [his ex-wife] said it was okay. I convinced them that I was doing okay."

However, Tom admits that their family situation was real unhealthy. "I mean, I was hiding the drugs, but obviously I couldn't hide the drinking... I was maintaining enough to hold the job and support them. And they were acting out according to what they saw. I mean, they would not go to school... There was always a problem. There was always a conflict going on in that household... Me trying to make them behave and me misbehaving. You see how crazy that is?"

"That finally collapsed. They had to go home. The bottom fell out. I bottomed out... out of money, out of an apartment, fired again."

The oldest son returned to Nashville before the youngest. "I

was living out on the street. I had moved in with this girl... This girl threw me out because she was tired of my behavior and kept [the youngest son] in the house with her... And I was living in a vacant house I'd broken in... I did whatever I could to survive. Out in Phoenix, the grocery stores have liquor departments in them. I would go in there daily and steal booze and go out back and drink. And that's where I lived for a week, I know."

"Stranded, called Mom, and said, 'Mom, I want to come home. I'm sick. I'm tired. Would you buy me a ticket?' And she did. And I had to ride a bus," he laughs. "I hated it."

Actually, Tom says, he went through detoxification before he returned to Nashville. "One day my son came and he says, 'Dad, you're killing yourself. You're done in. You've got to do something.' And he found me the number to call a Detox Unit. And I did, and they came and got me. And I got straight there for a month or two, and then I was on the road back to Nashville."

"I ended up going back into the construction industry... I was still sober, still dry. I wasn't doing anything to stay dry, but I was still dry. I was walking around an alcoholic without a drink in my hand. I was not going to any [A.A.] meetings."

"Eventually, money in the pocket, feeling good, car... all those things start making me feel better, and I start drinking again. You know, if you don't change anything, all those behaviors, eventually you'll go back to the drink. Dry a total of six months. I go back to drinking, and things start happening pretty quickly. I wreck a company car, lost a job, ended up going

to my first treatment [center]."

What prompted him to go? "There was a lot of influence by my family. They were real disappointed, understandably."

"The treatment center helped. I picked up some tools." But, Tom says, "I thought I could handle it on my own." He talked about what he needed to talk about in treatment, but he didn't do any more than what was necessary "to get by." He thought that he'd do "some of the stuff they suggested," but he knew that if he wanted to do something bad enough, he would. "That's kind of the attitude that I took. I'll take your program and work it my way," he laughs.

"And that didn't work. It worked almost a year. I had gotten back on my feet again, out of treatment, got me a good job... ended up going out and drinking. Actually what happened that time was I went out and got some pain pills. I wasn't going to drink... Talked myself into getting some pain pills because I can handle it. I just wanted a little pressure-reducer... however you want to rationalize it. And of course... that was the first step back into drinking. That was like throwing gas right on the fire. My disease was already there."

Tom started drinking again right after that. "I ended up totalling a truck, hitting a bridge head on, and could have very well killed myself that night. I don't-- I do remember leaving the restaurant I was at. I don't remember hitting the bridge though... that blacking out, that passing out.. I do not remember hitting that bridge. But I remember waking up in Vanderbuilt Emergency and them telling me all about what happened. And all the shame and all

the guilt... Going through surgery and coming out having my jaws wired shut, having fractures in my skull. I was lucky. I was blessed. But for the grace of God I wouldn't be here... I had lost control, simply. And that's what happened when I drank and drove."

Was this his bottoming out then?

"No, no, no. Six fractures in my skull, operations, vocational rehab. I'm probably drinking within three months of near death."

I'm thinking to myself, What does it take? He falls, he falls again, he falls again... This is getting rather repetitive here. Can we fast forward please? If I didn't already know the success that Tom ultimately realized, I would have definitely thought that this man was beyond hope. I now understand why Tom put off telling me his "drunk-a-log" (as he had called it). His life was depressing, but I bear with him.

The truck Tom totalled was another company vehicle. "Needless to say," he says, "I lost that job."

"I was drinking again, and it didn't take long for people to find out. And I wasn't working, and I needed treatment... It was hurting... It was hurting a lot... And I wasn't going to meetings. I wasn't doing what I needed to do, and the family knew what I was supposed to be doing 'cause they had been to the treatment center, family sessions, aftercare, and all that. So they could see me falling again real fast. With them in agreement and support, I went back into the treatment center."

So was this his own decision or was he still doing it for his

family?

"Both... I was doing it to please."

"Same treatment center, twenty-eight days [again]. I stayed sober, this time, about nine months. And then I started drinking again. I ended up in Memphis, got a good job. They put me in charge of an office in Union City, Tennessee... I worked there for a couple of years... Started drinking again, was controlling it... kept the job for that long. It eventually started getting out of hand. At one time-- it was a dry county I was living in up there-- I was drinking. I was drinking hard. I was missing work. I was in such bad shape. I remember one afternoon I could not drive very far [he was too drunk], so I went to the grocery store, and I bought Listerine and drank that. And I drank that for several days... lived off that. Talk about sick, sick, sick. I got real sick... I was passing out. You know, it has a lot of alcohol in it."

Why did he go back to the bottle again? "I'm an alcoholic, that and all the stuff that was going on in my mind... stress, pressure, confused, angry, sad... pissed off at the world. Nothing was going right. I don't know, Heather. It's still questionable to me. You know, anytime I'm restless or irritable or discontented, just with my life, you know I'm gonna start looking for things to make me feel better. And what I know best is drugs. If I'm not willing to trust God and to do some work and to help somebody else, then I'm gonna end up being in depression. I'll sit home, and I'll isolate, and pretty soon I'll be thinking some pretty crazy thoughts. I mean, I know me well enough. And that's

why I need to stay active. That's why I do what I do today. Because I don't have time to be... I mean I'm grateful for what I have today, truly grateful...

"I was sick. That's all I knew to do. That's the immediate thing I knew to take care of the pain.

"I never would surrender, see. I always thought that I had what it took to be successful, what it took to know all, what it took to buy all... That's that ego... self-will. I know I can do this. I know I can beat this thing... I stuck with it... I was gonna beat alcohol... But it almost killed me.

"I can't tell you how many times I would quit. I'm gonna quit this. I'm never going to do this again. And pray to God, 'Get me out of this one, and I'll never ever ever do this again.' And the same day, that same afternoon, I'll be lining up a drink. Many times, I've said that. I'm gonna quit. Or I'm just gonna drink a drink or two, and I'm gonna control this. And that may work for a while. It worked for a while for me. But it didn't work for long. Because I had already gone over into that chronic alcoholism, that 'One drink is too much, and one thousand is not enough.'

"I played that mind game a lot. I wanted to stop, but I just didn't know how...

"You know, it's gonna be different this time. That's the lie that I always believed, and I believed it for many years. That it would be different this time, I'm gonna do it different, I'm gonna change brands, I'm gonna drink with different people, I'm gonna not drink as much, I'm just gonna drink in the afternoon... all those excuses."

"I eventually ended up losing that job... I ended up getting another job and transferring, moving, to Mississippi, stayed at a job down there, was doing pretty well, got back into the program, started going to meetings, was feeling pretty good, started getting a lot of money in my pocket... This was really a good paying job.

"I had tasted enough of that [sobriety] to know what it felt like, and it felt good. It felt good to be sober and clean and responsible, but I wasn't really willing to do what it took... It wasn't my priority, okay? So there wasn't enough emphasis on staying sober. I hadn't fully accepted my disease is what it was all about. Until my inner self can really accept that disease, I cannot stay sober. Until I can get honest enough, I can't stay sober. And that's the problem."

Back to Mississippi. "The job was getting ready to close down. It eventually did, and within three months I was drinking again. Came to Knoxville on an idea of starting a club up here, a sports bar... got two bottles of vodka and started to drink while I was driving. Drank the whole way up here. Got to Roane County, about thirty miles away from my destination, and I had drank all but a real small amount out of one of those bottles. And I didn't know where I was because when they [the cops] picked me up, they said, 'Where are you?' And I said, 'Birmingham, Alabama.'" He laughs, "I wasn't even close."

"So they said, 'Alright, you're going to jail.' I spent days in jail. I remember praying in jail. I remember getting on my knees and praying. I remember asking God to help me, that I needed help. And I felt different about it this time. I felt different

because there was not a thought in my mind about drinking. It felt like I had been relieved of that thought, that obsession. [Before] I could not go through a workday without drinking, without thinking about drinking alcohol a lot.

"I spent twenty-one days in jail. I had the money to bail myself out, but I wouldn't do that. I'm not sure why. I guess I felt safe there... I just... I'd been beat, and I knew it.

"I got into DRI here in Knoxville, stayed twenty-one days... I started talking about a lot of things I had never talked about in treatment... went to halfway [a halfway house], worked on myself... issues, personal things."

That was almost five years ago. Tom has been sober since.

"I credit a lot of my recovery to the fact that I've spent time trying to help others," he says. Tom has been an Alcohol and Drug Specialist now for almost two years at an adolescent psychiatric treatment center. This is his first paying job in that field. Beyond this, he has done volunteer work managing recovery houses and has even opened two of his own halfway houses for individuals recovering from chemical dependency. These houses are "a place where a person can have a safe and clean environment to get back on their feet and work themselves back into the mainstream and still have support."

Tom is also still going to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, "an average of five a week." "I usually beef up on the weekends because I don't get to go much during the week. I love to go to them."

What caused him to finally make that change and give up

alcohol? What made that experience in the jail cell different from all the other "bottoming out" moments and "wanting to change" moments?

"I think probably the willingness to want to change. I don't think it was there before. I think I wanted to do it on my terms. I think the willingness to surrender to the disease.

"I felt like the pressure had been relieved. It wasn't there anymore. I guess because wanting to drink has never been an issue since that time. And I think before it was always I wanted to do it. I wanted to stop, but I wasn't willing to give it up. I kind of harbored it in the back of my mind that one day I was going to be able to drink and do it okay... to be successful at it."

At this point in the interview, Denise and Sandra, two young adult A.A. volunteers, walk into the lobby. They are just arriving at the treatment center in order to help Tom facilitate an A.A. meeting with the adolescents there later on that evening. Tom greets them and asks them to sit down, saying to me, "These ladies could probably give you some pointers." After I explain to them the topic for my research paper and Tom explains where we were in the interview, they both are eager to participate in the discussion.

Here follows excerpts from the resulting dialogue:

Sandra: I think it's one day you all of a sudden realize there's a different way... one moment. Prior to that, you could have tried a thousand trillion different things. But it's one moment of clarity where all of a sudden--

Tom: Everything focuses.

Denise: Either that or you're just so sick of living the way you're living that you become willing to do something different.

Tom: (laughing) It's like I said a while ago... I felt beat...

Denise: I was broken.

Heather (to Tom): So you're never tempted to drink anymore?

Tom: I've thought about it, but I don't crave it. I won't say I haven't been tempted because I notice bars when I drive by them. I notice liquor stores... I think about it, but not a long time.

Sandra: It's not something you think about often because you know you shouldn't do it. I'm trying to think of an example for a person who isn't alcoholic... You know something you can't do, but you might like to do?

Tom: Yes, yes, like overeating.

Sandra: Or shopping too much. You might like to take that roller coaster ride off the cliff, but you know--

Denise: You might like to bounce a ten thousand dollar bad check, but you know you shouldn't do that. So you don't. (*She laughs.*)

Sandra: You realize it's no longer just about a drink... It's no longer about a drug. It's about insane behavior. And you know that means you're insane. And that's when it's like, "Oh, I don't want to do that anymore."

Tom: For me, it was being emotionally, physically, mentally, and

spiritually bankrupt. It's like I heard someone say, it's as if you're standing on a stage, and all the lights are going around. And all the spotlights, at one time, come to focus on you... the physical, the mental, the emotional, and the spiritual. That's when you've hit your bottom. It's true of all chemically dependent people. You have to hit your bottom in order to want to get better.

Sandra: That's right. It all has to all come at once, which is why it comes so differently for so many different people.

Tom: This is it.

Heather (to Tom): Could you explain that spotlight analogy for me?

Tom: Well, if I'm standing on stage, and there's only one [light] on me, then I've got an escape. I'm not physically beat yet, so I've got an opening I can go.

Heather: So, do you think it's when you become suddenly aware of how bad your problem is? When you don't see anything but black?

Sandra: For me, it wasn't everything is bad. If I had known how bad it was, I would have run from it. I wouldn't have sat in my meetings and gotten sober if I had known how bad it was at that time... all the things I really had done.

Denise: 'Cause you don't see all that in the beginning.

Sandra: One of the blessings of alcoholism is that my God kept me by way of black outs, by way of delusions, by way of lots of things from exactly what I was doing in my mind. Had I known what I was doing, it would have been really general insanity. So, you know, when I came in [to A.A.], I decided, okay, this

is better. This is better...

Heather: So, you saw a light?

Sandra: ...Yeah.

Tom: Hope.

Sandra: Yeah, hope is what it is.

Tom: See, probably all of us-- when I drank, I thought alcohol was my answer. I was not looking for anything else... because that's why I drank.

Heather: So do you think that moment in jail was what changed you?

Tom: No, I think it was over a period of time. I think that's where it culminated, that's where it took place. I think that was all a part of what happened up to that time. It didn't just happen [*he snaps*] like that for me.

Denise: Right, exactly. 'Cause you'll see women... their sobriety is contingent on getting their kids back... <u>If</u> I can [get my kids back]... I got to the point where I was like, I don't care. I don't care if I have to lose my right arm. I just want to stop feeling this bad...

Heather: So, did you realize while you were in the jail cell that your life was going to be different from then on?

Tom: No, no... Jail was sort of a comfort place for me at this time... I had money to bail out, and I didn't leave there. And I don't know yet [why] except that it was God working in my life. I just didn't want to be out of there.

Denise: It was safer in there than it was out.

Tom: Sure it was. I think that it was a transition for me or a

turning point where I was given the time to realize where I wanted to go, what I wanted to do. And I just wanted not to suffer anymore. That's basically all I thought about in jail. I just didn't want this anymore. And that's what I prayed. I said, I give up. I said, I need help. Not a complicated, long... I just said, I'm tired of this fighting.

Heather: So you hit rock bottom?

Tom: I hit my bottom. Everybody's is different.

Sandra: I've been there [in jail]... Seventy-six days. The first three times never phased me. Jail never does anything to you till you want to get better. And the fourth time I went, I spent every day in jail, morning and night, thanking God for keeping me in a safe place, for letting me-- I wrote this funny poem while I was in jail, and, if you knew me, this isn't me. But I wrote this poem about this bird, and I felt so free. And I felt so free in that jail as if I could fly out those bars. And that's what the program [A.A.] does. It allows you to be in a jail cell (I was in solitary confinement for six days), to sit in a jail cell that small and love <u>who</u> you are, love <u>where</u> you are, and be grateful because you know it's <u>over</u>.

At this point, the interview abruptly ended. Tom had stepped out momentarily to get the adolescents together for their meeting when he steps back in the lobby. "We're ready," he says. The three of them walked into the A.A. meeting to help lead other addicts on the road to recovery.

As I left the facility, I couldn't help but feel joy and optimism regarding Tom's recovery. I'm reminded of the Biblical Parable of the Prodigal Son. "Take the fatted calf and kill it... Let us eat and celebrate because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life. He was lost and is found."

During the interview, I had felt like Tom was a doomed drunk. His story was rather motonous to me... been there, done that. His life as a drinking alcoholic could be summed up in a few lines: he moved, got a new job, made more money, messed up again, lost his job, and the cycle continued. The only thing that stayed constant in his life was alcohol. And nothing, it seemed, not even near death, would move him to give it up. His life seemed to be on a downward spiral, and I wondered what it would take for him to "hit bottom" and rebound.

What fascinated me is that the actual turning point in Tom's life was, in a way, undramatic. It wasn't when he almost died in a carwreck. It wasn't when he was out of a job, kicked out of an apartment, and living on the streets. It wasn't when he was too drunk to go to the store to buy more liquor so he drank a bottle of Listerine and made himself extremely ill. Tom was on his way to Knoxville to open a bar, clearly not a sign of improvement, when he happened to be pulled over by the cops (no wreck this time) and chose he'd rather spend some time in jail versus bailing himself out.

Clearly something critical happened in that jail cell; Tom experienced an epiphany.

I have no doubts that Tom underwent a transformation then that

changed the course of the rest of his life. He now has a completely different lifestyle and different way of seeing things. Previously a "hopeless alcoholic," Tom says that wanting to drink is no longer an issue for him. He no longer tries to escape bad things in life; he is willing to accept his alcoholism, take full responsibility for his poor behavior, and speak to others about his past. Formerly not able to stay sober for a mere twelve months, he will soon earn his five year chip. What a story of inspiration for anyone who feels stuck in a rut. Tom's rut was twenty-five years long.

Tom obviously has gotten beyond his own addiction and now is capable of helping others, especially those with chemical addictions. He says, "It's only by changing me that I can become an instrument of change for others." Tom's life now revolves around "carrying the message." As a full-time Alcohol and Drug Specialist in an adolescent treatment center and an active volunteer for recovering alcoholics, Tom says, "I can share with [others] my experiences and the hope that I've found that life is worth living."

Discussion

There are many different theories within the social work and psychological perspectives as to what causes change in individuals. When I began my research, I must say I leaned towards a behavioral perspective. People make changes to gain rewards and avoid punishment. I probably had this perspective largely because it was a working philosophy at my place of employment. Treatment, at the adolescent psychiatric residential center in which I worked, consisted of behavioral modification. Based on their actions, clients were rewarded and punished largely through a level system. Inappropriate behavior led to concrete consequences which could include a level drop with corresponding loss of privileges. Positive behavior led to positive reinforcement such as verbal praise and a higher level with additional privileges. This was, I believe, a largely effective way of promoting change in the adolescents with which I worked. I saw many adolescents make changes for the better while they were there.

However, this behavioral perspective did not completely explain the phenomenon of change for me. I still had many unanswered questions. As I said at the beginning of my report, I always wondered about the dramatic "turn around" cases, the hard-core clients who wouldn't change "no matter what," and then, suddenly it seemed, made a three hundred and sixty degree turn for the better. I always was intrigued and wondered, "What happened?"

I also have always had a strong belief in the individual. I suppose I am like the existentialist who says, "The critical

ingredient for change is the client's wish to do so" (Krill, 1986, p. 190). I have always believed that a person cannot make another person do anything. At the facility in which I worked, I would avoid power struggles with the adolescents. If a client told me she refused to get out of bed in the morning, I would always say, "That's your choice... I'll give you five minutes to think about it. But if I come back down here after five minutes and you're still in bed, [such and such] is your consequence." Usually, the client would decide she'd be better off out of bed and would get up. Although I was able to influence her, however, I strongly believe a person will change only if he/she wants to, but not if he/she doesn't.

This combination of thoughts from the behavioral and cognitive schools of thought were still not enough to satisfy my curiosity, however. These theories did not, in concrete terms, tell me exactly what transpired at the moment of change. What caused the person to want to change? Why didn't he want to before? What made the difference between then and now?

It wasn't until I began interviewing people about changes they made in their lives that I began to learn more in order to answer my questions. After several interviews, I began seeing some trends. Individuals often voiced similarities in their experiences with change. I heard several repeated themes, even exactly repeated sentences. It was then that I began to form my own more specific hypothesis as to what causes change in individuals.

One of the first things that I noticed was that individuals often focused in on a moment of change. This moment wasn't

necessarily a moment in which anything spectacular happened. They just remember it as a moment in which they came to a new awareness. For example, in Jim's case, he "zeroed in" on a spring day at Morgan County Jail. He suddenly came to the conclusion that to want to get high all the time was "sick." He suddenly wanted to change.

Another thing that I noticed after interviewing several people was that that moment often was a bleak time. For example, in Linda's case, the moment in which she is on the floor, beaten by her boyfriend and unable to get up, is not a moment of hope but a moment of despair. However, it is enough to "push her over the edge"; it's enough for her to finally decide it's time to make a change and leave. This aspect of "dark moments" fascinated me because I always thought an individual would be inspired to change when he/she "saw the light." The fact that many of the individuals I interviewed were apparently driven by "hopelessness" intrigued me.

At the same time, however, I believe that some positive thought was necessary for change to occur. The person had to believe that there <u>was</u> a way out. For example, in Matt's case, once he realized how bad things were, once he realized "ain't nothing as bad as... sitting here with this way of killing myself in the dark," he <u>laughed</u>. He suddenly realized, "Ain't nothing that bad, you know?" As he explained it, "This was <u>as dark as it got</u>. I knew the light was <u>anything</u> better than this... I had been in the light and managed to screw it up." He knew that by resisting the urge to kill himself, he would make a move back

towards the light.

Similarly, Sue describes her situation of being trapped in poverty. "You find yourself in something. Your life, everything around you, you just very much want it to be different... It's hopelessness... This is it. It's not going to change. No matter what I do, it doesn't change... You know, how can I... What can I do to change it?" Sue eventually realized that education was her way out. She refers to it as "that pinpoint of light." "Nothing could deter me once I reached that point [awareness that education was her way out of poverty]... No one could stop me." Sue worked herself out of her situation and accomplished what many would have considered impossible.

Finally, in Tom's case, while in jail, he felt that he had been beaten by alcohol. "I just wanted not to suffer anymore," he said. Tom had known for a long time that he could give up alcohol and be sober; he had gone through treatment programs before, learned some things, and was well aware of A.A. However, he wasn't willing to give the alcohol up. All that changed in the jail cell, though. "For me, it was being emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually bankrupt," he said. He prayed, "I give up... I'm tired of this fighting." Apparently, "hitting rock bottom" resulted in a rebound effect. "You have to hit your bottom in order to want to get better," he comments. That desire, that willingness to do whatever it took to get better, enabled Tom to become (and stay) sober.

Paradoxically, then, it seems as though both despair and hope are necessary for change to occur. It seems, then, that positive

change is a marriage between dark and light, that fine point when night turns into day.

All this made me aware that, more than anything, change seemed to result from cognitive processes. Although an event often helped to shape a person's thoughts, it was the individual's thoughts about the event that led him/her to change. Sometimes, the events that take place are trivial in comparison to the person's monumental shift in thought. For example, Jim was just walking outside on a spring day when he had a sudden awareness that resulted in him changing his whole life. Similarly, in Tom's situation, it wasn't the catastrophic events (like a near-death car wreck, for example) that caused him to change, but simply being given "the time to realize where I wanted to go and what I wanted to do." In fact, cognitive theorist say that people do not see and react to actual external events but to the images of them that the brain creates (Maultsby, 1975).

This emphasis on cognitive processes caused me to look more closely at cognitive theory and research this theory's perspective on change. According to general cognitive theory, "the principal determinants of emotions, motives, and behavior is an individual's thinking" (Werner, 1986, p. 91). According to Alfred Adler, probably the original proponent of the cognitive approach, "A person's behavior springs from his opinion" (Werner, 1986, pp. 92-93). Similarly, "inaccurate perceptions lead to inappropriate behavior" (Werner, 1986, p. 92). As Tom said, "I thought alcohol was my answer... that's why I drank."

Change, then, is a result of "expanding or modifying

individual consciousness until perception more nearly approximates reality" (Werner, 1986, p. 93). As Jim explained it, when he realized that his drug abuse was a problem, "it was like a door opening psychically." "Cure," then, "is the development of rational consciousness" (Psychotherapy, 1955). To put it another way, Max Siporin states that behavior change requires, among other things, "change in a person's situational attitudinal definitions" (1972, p. 99). Personality change, likewise, "concerns a new... definition of one's life situation" (1972, p. 99). For example, Matt called his change an "attitude adjustment," simply realizing "ain't nothing that bad" (i.e. nothing is worth killing yourself over). Matt now knows that he can get through difficult times and expresses a new-found "gratitude" towards living.

Existential theory seems to fall completely within the cognitive category (Werner, 1986, p. 103). In summarizing a 1962 article by Thomas Hora explaining existential psychotherapy, Harold Werner states that "complete understanding of one's mode of being tends to bring about a changed attitude toward life. Change occurs when a person can see the totality of her situation" (1986, p. 103). Tom seems to express a similar notion when he says that, all of sudden, "everything focuses." He compares this situation to "being on a stage and all the spotlights hitting you at once." Similarly, Linda, when speaking about her giving up drugs, told me that she began seeing that using drugs was connected to "bad things happening." "I started putting two and two together."

The case histories of the individuals I studied seemed to lend evidence to the existentialistic concept of Freedom of Choice.

Donald Krill states, "Despite one's past... [one] always has the capacity to change himself. He can choose new values, or a new lifestyle. This does not always necessitate years or months of 'working something through': it may occur within days or weeks" (1986, p. 190). In fact, one of the "two key concepts" differentiating existentialism from psychoanalytic theory and behavior theory is the "belief that every individual has the capacity to shift his style of life radically at any moment" (Krill, 1986, p. 196). Matt, for example, said his change of attitude hit him "all of a sudden." Linda decided to leave her boyfriend, for the first and last time, at the moment when he last hit her. Even Tom's shift in attitude seemed to occur unexpectedly.

However, there seems to be a question about whether or not change can occur that quickly or not. For example, Jim says that he believes his change was actually a gradual one and that the moment he experienced outside on that spring day was representative of a larger experience. Tom, also, stated that he felt his change occurred over a period of time. "I think that [the jail cell] is where it culminated, that's where it took place. I think that that was all a part of what happened up to that time. It didn't just happen [*he snaps*] like that for me."

I think the difference in opinion may be largely due to a difference in one's definition of change. Does one define a change as the the moment when things radically shift or as the process in which things build up to that shift and then the continued maintenance of the new behavior afterwards? Do changes occur

differently for different people? Can some changes be graphed as a gradual slope and others as a sharp angle? Or are all changes a combination of slopes and sharp angles?

Personally, when I began my paper, I defined change as "dramatic" and "long-term." By this, I meant that I was focusing on radical shifts (versus changes that appear more gradual like maturation). I also wanted to focus on changes in action that endured for a long time. (Although I did not ask those I interviewed how they maintained that change, I ensured that indeed their changes in lifestyle remained constant.)

Prochaska and DiClemente offer a different look at change. They developed a model of change called the "Stage Model of the Process of Change" (1982, 1986). They created this model after studying people who were self-changers (individuals who accomplished significant change on their own, without formal outside help). Change, they decided, is rarely a sudden event, occuring in a moment of transformation (although they do not deny such changes do occur). Rather, change typically occurs gradually, in stages or steps.

Prochaska anc DiClemente's "Stage Model of the Process of Change" involves the following steps: Precontemplation, Contemplation, Determination, Action, Maintenance, and Relapse. These stages can be shown in a cyclical form as well. Precontemplation can lead to contemplation which can lead to determination. Determination can lead to action and maintenance, which can be an effective end to the cycle. However, sometimes a person relapses. If this occurs, the person starts again at the

precontemplation stage.

Precontemplation is defined as a stage in which the person is not even considering change. If the precontemplator is told he has a problem, he may be surprised more than defensive. That person is simply not even thinking that there might be a problem or that change is even possible. To hear that there is a problem or a way to change is news to the precontemplator.

Gradually the person may begin to see some causes for concern or reasons to change. Here, she enters into the contemplation stage. At this stage, the person both wants to change and doesn't want to. She may see both sides of the issue, the pro's and the con's, and is weighing them out in her mind. The precontemplator is ambivalent and tends to think, "Yes, I see that there may be a problem, but..."

Determination, the next stage, is a point when the balance tips in favor of change. Sometimes this occurs suddenly, as if all the weight is taken off one side of the scale. Sometimes, it's more gradual, as if more and more weight is slowly being added to one side. Prochaska calls this process (the slow tipping in favor of change) "preparation" for change (Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross, 1992). Those in determination often say things like, "This is it. Something has got to change. What can I do?"

Action, the next stage, is the process of doing something different, actually changing one's behavior. The person decides what needs to be done and then does it.

Finally, maintenance is the continuance of the action. Marlatt and Gordon say that this is the real challenge in all of

the addictive behaviors (1985). It is not so difficult to stop drinking as it is to stay sober.

Relapse is a common phenomenon in addictive behaviors. However, a slip need not turn into a disastrous relapse. According to the Prochaska and DiClemente model, relapse can be considered, in a positive light, as just another step in the process of change that leads to stable recovery. Commenting on this, William Miller states, "The challenge in this stage is to recover from the slip or relapse as quickly as possible and to resume to the change process... It is typical in problem drinking (as well as in smoking, weight control, drug abuse, and so forth) to go around the wheel of change several times before finally escaping through the permanent exit of maintenance" (1995, p. 92).

I personally found this model of change to be very insightful, however I differ in opinion on some points. First, I define change more as a <u>moment</u> of determination that results in long-term action, than as a long-term <u>process</u>. I consider pre-contemplation as a stage of no-change (a baseline, if you will), contemplation perhaps as a stage of pre-change, determination as the moment that results in a change of action (the next stage), maintenance as the continuation of this new behavior, and relapse, I guess, as a change back to the old behavior (which causes me to question whether or not the person "really changed"). However, these opinion differences are more about semantics than a disagreement about the actual stages involved in a change.

Did I see these stages (as defined by Prochaska and DiClemente) in the people that I interviewed?

In regards to the precontemplation stage, I don't recall anyone actually discussing this stage, as such, but I do not doubt that it exists. I remember being in such a precontemplation stage regarding a major change in my life (at this stage, I truly did not realize that I had a problem).

Regarding the contemplation stage, this can definitely be seen, probably most obviously, in Tom's case. ("I wanted to stop [drinking], but I wasn't willing to give it up.")

The determination stage can be seen very clearly in all the cases I presented. This is the stage of change on which I focused; determination, in my opinion, caused the change in action (the next stage). I also believe that there are differences in degrees of determination, and that this affects the strength of the resulting behavior. For example, Jim did not resolve to give up drugs forever, but decided to say no "for now." Apparently, he still had some ambivalence about the issue. As a result, he did use marijuana after that decision, although ultimately he gave up drugs completely. On the other hand, Tom became completely willing to "surrender" to his disease of alcoholism. In his mind, he gave up drinking completely and, as a result, never drank again. According to Werner, "Cognitive theory, with its view that the *content* of a person's behavior is usually based on what he thinks, recognizes that the *intensity* of his acts depends on the strength of his will" (1986, p. 104).

Regarding the maintenance stage, I must take issue with Marlatt and Gordon that this is necessarily a difficult stage. Again, I believe that the resulting ease or difficulty of this

stage depends on the determination of the individual. Sue, for example, when I mentioned the obvious persistence and hard work necessary for her to get out of poverty, replied, "When you get focused, and you're on track, it doesn't even seem that hard because you're not making decisions." Tom, too, said that he no longer struggles with the urge to drink. "Wanting to drink has never been an issue since that time." However, Jim, who seemed the least decided to change, said that marijuana was "the hardest [drug] to quit." Perhaps I did not see a lot of struggle within the maintenance stage because I looked for individuals who made clear-cut, long-term changes.

Likewise, relapse was not a major issue in my interviews either. Although Jim did eat marijuana cookies after being released from prison, he did not seem to have to go through the whole cycle over again (especially not the precontemplation stage). He seemed to just become redetermined and continued working on being "clean." Sue, perhaps, could have been considered to relapse when she returned to her husband again and again before she ultimately left him; similarly, Tom relapsed several times with alcohol. However problems with relapse cause me to question whether or not the individual was ever determined to make a true change. In fact, both Sue and Tom say that all the <u>little</u> changes they made didn't make a difference. They realized they had to make a big change in order to escape their problems. Sue ultimately became resolved to leave her husband to escape the violence and, later, to get her degree to escape the poverty. Tom became determined to completely abstain from alcohol. That, in my mind,

is when true changes took place in their lives. Determination, in my opinion, is the key to success.

William Miller, author of "Increasing Motivation for Change," seems to agree when he states, "Client motivation is a key issue in recovery" (1995, p. 89). He defines motivation as "recognizing a problem, searching for a way to change, and then beginning and sticking with that change strategy," in short, "recognition and action" (1995, p. 91).

Miller describes six common elements found to be effective in therapist intervention aimed at strengthening motivation to change. These elements can be remembered via the acronym FRAMES: Feedback, Responsibility, Advice, Menu, Empathy, and Self-Efficacy (Bien, Miller and Tonigan, 1993; Miller and Sanchez, 1994; Miller, 1995). Miller explains how a therapist can implement these elements as well as the rationale behind them. As my paper is not about therapist interventions, I am discussing these elements because some of them are evident as elements involved in the change processes of those I interviewed (even without a therapist).

For example, feedback, the first element according to Miller, has to do with feedback a therapist gives his client regarding her <u>personal</u> situation. The individuals I interviewed seemed to give feedback to themselves, if you will, about them<u>selves</u> and their current situations. Put another way, change involves personal reflection.

Responsibility, the second element, involves emphasis on a client's personal responsibility and freedom of choice. All the individuals that I interviewed took responsibility for their lives

and chose to make personal changes. This acceptance of personal responsibility was probably most evident to me in Tom's case. He stated, "The alcohol is not the problem. The alcohol is but a symptom of my disease. My thinking [is the problem]... Until I start doing a self-searching or moral inventory... of me and taking responsibility for my actions and my disease, then I'm not going to get any better." Similarly, Mike realized, at his moment of change, that "I couldn't blame it on anyone else for once... The buck stops here."

Advice involves giving the client "clear and direct advice as to the need for change and how it might be accomplished... The key element is a clear recommendation for change, given in an empathic manner" (Miller, 1995, p. 94). Although, in my opinion, a person can change without advice (note my case studies for evidence), advice can be helpful as Sue's case illustrates. Sue states that the doctor who advised her to start sleeping, eating good foods, and taking care of herself made "a really big difference" in her life. Sue felt that the doctor "really understood" her situation, as she too was female and went through a "pressure cooker type school" (not unlike Sue's law school).

Menu, the next element, involves giving the client different options or choices to choose from. All the individuals I interviewed had at least two obvious options to choose from (to change or not to change) and sometimes various methods of change as well (some more effective than others). The key here, I believe, is for the individual to feel that he <u>has</u> a good choice, that he has a way out. Sue states that when she was pregnant and being

beaten, she didn't have "a whole lot of options." Therefore, she stayed with her husband. Later, when she was a single mother and living in poverty, she reached a point of "hopelessness" when she'd tried different options to get out of poverty (different jobs) and they didn't work. "No matter how I try to change it, it doesn't change." Eventually, however, Sue realized that education was her way out. Once she realized this option, nothing could deter her. (Miller seems to indicate that menu means giving the client various alternatives. I'm not sure how important it is for the client to have more than one good option out, although I'm sure it could be of benefit. People often prefer as much choice as possible.)

Empathy involves treatment being client-centered. I touched on the issue of empathy when I discussed Sue's doctor advising her to change her life. Matt also talks about the importance of empathy as a therapist. Obviously, the individuals I interviewed had "client-centered" treatment, as they treated themselves.

Finally, the last element in effective counselling is self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982). Miller states, "Without some degree of optimism that change can be achieved, there is no motivation" (1995, p. 94). He further paraphrases an article by Rogers and Mewborn (1976) by saying, "Fear of negative consequences in itself is not enough; the person must also believe that he or she *can* change" (1995, p. 94). This final element, in my opinion, is critical in the change process. Again, this can be seen in Sue's case when she finally builds up enough courage and self-esteem, after her abusive relationship, to take some college classes. Without that self-efficacy, change would never have occurred, even

if she had wanted her situation to be different.

In sum, I believe the FRAMES model gives therapists many important elements to think about when trying to motivate clients to change. I also think that the FRAMES model shows elements that may or may not be obvious when an individual is involved in the process of self-change. Some elements (such as self-efficacy) seem more important to me than others (such as advice).

Additional research has given us further insight into the phenomenon of change. The work of Prochaska and DiClemente (1986) suggest that the questions of "Is there a problem?" and "What can I do?" often occur at the same time. Miller suggests that "the client's willingness to admit that there is a probem may in part be determined by the perceived availability of acceptable alternatives for resolving it. Why go through the pain of admitting that there is a serious problem if there is nothing to be done about it, or if the change strategies are unacceptable?" (1995, p. 99).

Miller continues that when a person perceives a risk, or a discrepancy between one's goals and one's present state, he often becomes upset. He may become angry, sad, frightened, or agitated. "This is an uncomfortable state, which is one reason why it is so motivating" (1995, p. 99). The individual may resolve the discrepancy in one of two ways, either by risk reduction or by fear reduction. "The risk-reduction route involves changing behavior, doing something to reduce the risk (e.g. stopping drinking)... The fear-reduction route, by contrast, involves cognitive changes to decrease the perceived discrepancy: denial, rationalization, projection, and other defensive strategies... Because a state of

discrepancy arouses aversive emotions, the person will use one or the other route to escape from it" (Miller, 1995, p. 99). In Tom's case, for example, he frequently used the fear-reduction route, when he denied he had a problem, rationalized that it wasn't really a problem, and blamed others (or his current living situation) for his problems. In contrast, he chose an actual risk-reduction strategy when he gave up drinking.

What makes the difference in which approach an individual will use? The work of Rogers suggests that self-efficacy is key (Rogers, Deckner, and Mewborn, 1978; Rogers and Mewborn, 1976). Self-efficacy refers to the individual's "perception that there is an effective and realistic change strategy available and that he or she is capable of carrying it out. If the client perceives that such a change method is available, he or she is likely to pursue it as a risk-reduction strategy. If not, then the client is likely to use defense mechanisms to reduce the discomfort of perceiving the the discrepancy" (Miller, 1995, p. 100). To get back to Tom's example, when he chose fear-reduction strategies, he apparently did not see giving up alcohol as an acceptable alternative (either one that he was willing or able to do). When he finally did give up alcohol, he "felt different about it this time." Tom no longer felt the urge to drink and therefore believed he could successfully avoid going back to the bottle.

The research, then, seems to support my own finding that change results when an individual becomes aware that he/she has a problem and that he/she can overcome it. Both awarenesses are necessary. Without one or the other, a person won't be

sufficiently motivated or able to change. If you know the way out, but there's no reason in your mind to stop what you are currently doing, you won't change. On the other hand, if you don't like your current situation, but you don't know how to get out of it, you won't change either.

On the other hand, I don't think people necessarily are focused on both the positive and the negative awarenesses at the same time when they decide to make a change. They seem to focus on either the positive or negative awareness, and already have the other awareness tucked in the back of their mind. For example, in Jim's case, his transforming moment was when he realized that being addicted to marijuana was "sick." He didn't tell me that he thought at the same time, "But I know I can give it up," although he apparently knew he could. He instead focuses on the negative which seems to propel him toward the solution of giving it up. On the other hand, Sue didn't have to be hit in the head to realize that poverty was a problem for her. She wanted things to be different but didn't know how to make them so. For her, finally seeing the "light," seeing that education would be her ticket out of poverty and somehow she would afford it, was what got her out of her rut. She already knew she wanted a change; when given the solution to her problem, she ran with it. In either case, a mere awareness of the solution or a mere awareness of the problem would not have been enough. The person needed both in order to change.

Conclusion

Perhaps one of the most important conclusions to be drawn from my paper is that people can indeed change. That may seem a bit obvious and redundant for me to say, but I would like to emphasize this point. So many times in society we come across the notion that people are stuck in their current situations. We hear of the cycle of poverty, the trap of domestic violence, the addictive nature of drugs, and the recidivism rate of those who commit crimes. Often we become dismayed by the vast number of people who don't change. Social workers become burnt out in their field and switch to different professions. Laws are made to keep offenders in jail or put them on death row. Studies are performed showing the failure of various treatments, and the media portrays classic images of individuals who have problems and are apparently never going to alter their ways.

I wanted to do my study on something different. I wanted to focus on the minority of individuals with hard lives who do change. It would have been very easy for me to get case histories of clients with which I worked (changing names and places to protect confidentiality), to give their dismal and horrible histories, and question whether or not these individuals could indeed change. It would have been easy to write about the various faults in the treatment programs I've come into contact with. It's easy to write about what's wrong in this world; I wanted to write about what was right. Surely, we can benefit more by focusing on the positive and learning from those individuals who take the bitter lemons in their

lives and make lemonade. Surely something miraculous, in a way, has occurred in the lives of Jim, Linda, Matt, Sue, and Tom. Perhaps if we can find the common ingredients in their transformations, we can use this knowledge to create more changes for the better.

Many researchers have had much to say about the positive power within the individual. Abraham Maslow, one of the most known theorists in the humanisic psychology movement, believed in the tendency of humans to move toward "self-actualization," a need to "become everything that one is capable of becoming" (1962). Donald Krill states that "emphasis on the primacy of instinctual drives is a way of viewing human beings at their minimum levels of functioning rather than their maximum levels. At this maximum level, man has freedom, the power to transcend his egotistical striving, courage to venture, and the capacity to endure" (1969, p. 49). Indeed, "today the entire movement of humanistic and existential psychology and psychotherapy is founded on this 'third force,' namely, the self-determination of the individual, as opposed to the other two determining forces: Freud's psychogenetic determinism and the environmental determinism of behaviorism" (Ansbacher, 1964, p. 779). Arnold Lazarus, who wrote on behavior therapy states, "To account for behavior solely in terms of external rewards and punishments overlooks the fact that human beings can be rewarded and punished by their *own thinking*" (1977, p. 552).

Clearly, the individuals I interviewed, although affected by external forces, were not controlled by them. Neither were they

controlled by any apparent "unconscious" forces. Indeed it was their own conscious thoughts about themselves and their lives that seemed to compel them towards action and a change in lifestyle. Krill puts it plainly when he says, "Human consciousness... is the power within man to change, to alter his lifestyle, his direction, and his sense of identity. It is an ever-present potential for a conversion experience" (1986, p. 197).

To get more specific about the critical ingredients necessary for change, it seems that motivation is key (Miller, 1995). This can be defined as truly wanting to change and taking action as a result. Motivation seems to be a major ingredient in the stage of change called determination (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1982, 1986). Determination is the point where the scales tip in favor of change; it is a defining moment in that beforehand a person's behavior remains the same, and afterwards a person's life is radically different. If change can be defined as passing through a threshold, motivation is perhaps opening the door, and determination is taking the first step into the next room.

However, two things are necessary in order for an individual to be motivated, in my opinion. Two things are necessary for an individual to want to open that door. One is to acknowledge that there is a problem and to not be satisfied where one is in life. The second ingredient is to believe that there is an achievable solution to this problem. This second ingredient involves both an awareness of a positive choice (a good menu item) as well as a belief in one's self (self-efficacy) (Miller, 1995).

Much emphasis is placed, by cognitive theorist and

existentialists on the freedom of choice. People make choices all their lives for the better and for the worse. My belief is that, given full knowledge about a situation, including awareness that one option is truly better than the other, an individual will naturally make a choice in which they are "moving towards the light." Most problems in this process occur due to lack of awareness or distortions in thinking ("private logic" according to Alfred Adler, "cognitive deficiency" according to Robert Sunley, 1968). This "disillusionment" consists of "faulty or irrational beliefs that are responsible for problematic behavior" (Krill, 1986, p. 192). "Change can be viewed as a result of giving up those very defensive beliefs... that interfere with the natural growth process" (Krill, 1986, p. 189).

According to Miller, therapists can help in this process or hinder it. Miller discusses several useful qualities for a therapist to have that respect the individual's ultimate power to change. Probably one of the most important qualities for a therapist to have is that of empathy (versus confrontationalism). Of course, empathy must be balance with providing the client with new information that can help expand a client's thinking (Miller, 1995). However, according to existentialists, a therapist is only a "midwife" in the change process (Krill, 1986, p. 189). It is the client who gives birth to his/her own change. In fact, those I interviewed changed without the help of a therapist.

In sum, then, let us respect the great ability of the individual to change, in spite of bleak circumstances and a difficult past. Let us not underestimate this ability as some of

the most "hopeless" individuals have undergone transformations. The human ability to think has great power, power that can enable one to transcend the rubble of one's life. Of great importance is an individual's motivation and determination to change. Motivation will not occur without a coupling of an awareness of the problem (and owning it) and an awareness the solution (and being able to achieve it). "The critical ingredient for change is the client's wish to do so" (Krill, 1986, p. 190). In the end, I hope we will leave this report with greater respect for the individual, his mental capacities, and his power, not only to endure, but to improve his/her life, and to better our world.

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