

# **PINK**e1ephant

Tampa Bay's Substance Abuse **MAGAZINE**

January/February 2009

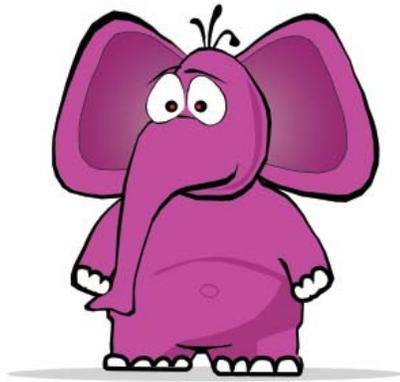
## **Pulpit Perspective**

Pastor Anthony McDaniel  
chimes in about  
substance abuse

**Pedro does a  
180**



**WE KNOW HE'S  
THERE** Now we talk  
about him



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**We Know He's There - Now We Talk About Him** - He goes unnoticed no longer, and while we are at it we expose his friend the 3000 lb gorilla too.

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[ editor's note ]

**Hot Off the Press**...wait do magazines even come off presses?



So here it is, our debut issue of the Pink elephant.

You are probably thinking to yourself "What in the world is this magazine about?" Well it's about

substance abuse. Now you are probably thinking "Why in the heck should I read this crap? I don't

have a problem". Well, if your daughter's boyfriend

has a problem it could soon turn out to be your

problem if he persuades your daughter to come over to

the dark side of the force. Your next response is "Hey man I don't

have a daughter." Ok, then your neighbor has a problem. With

that problem come the wrong types of riff raff which start hanging

around your house. Next thing you know your Xbox 360 comes up

missing and you were right in the middle of a Superbowl run on

Madden 2009. For the ladies reading this, the next thing you know

is that your favorite pair of diamond studs earrings is no where

to be found. I know, I know that no good SOB! (Now don't go

chasing your neighbor down next time you see him. Those were just

hypothetical).

You see sooner or later we all end up being affected by substance abuse in one way or the other if the problem goes unaddressed.

Hopefully by reading this magazine you will become more

knowledgeable when it comes to substance abuse. If, for whatever

reason, that doesn't happen, at least we have given you an avenue

to ask questions. That's right, we need your help in getting the

information out there. We have the access to the experts but we

need something to ask them. So send in your questions. If you have

a story send it in. If there is a program out there that you think

should be highlighted let us know. It's not just my community, or

your community. It's our community!

**Get Involved!** Send your questions, comments, suggestions and complaints (*yes even complaints*).

**We Want to Hear from YOU!**

[pinklephant@operpar.org](mailto:pinklephant@operpar.org)

## **What can be done for a family member who needs substance abuse treatment but refuses to get it or leaves treatment before it is completed?**

*The most common question is “How do I get my family member into treatment”. There is no one good answer to this very personal question. There is an old saying - if you’ve met one addict you’ve met one. Each situation is different and needs to be explored individually. Depending on the age of the person, who they live with, are they employed, do they also have co-occurring mental illness – all these questions should be explored with a treatment professional to get the best direction. There are legal routes that can be taken such as the Marchman Act as well as family interventions. These each have consequences that must be explored by the family to make sure this is the direction the family is willing to take. The most important advice I can give is don’t make threats that you will not or cannot follow through on – this will just prolong the difficult and frightening situation. Al-anon is a wonderful place for family to go and find support, relief and answers – I recommend it highly*

**- Dianne Clarke, Chief Operating Officer - Operation PAR, Inc.**

## **Why are prescription drugs so popular in the Tampa Bay area and what are some of the consequences and possibilities of long-term or short-term affects with abusing them?**

*They are so popular because they are so available, and this is not just a Tampa Bay problem. This has become an epidemic throughout the entire country. Over the last decade there has been a major push by drug manufacturers, trade groups, and even accreditation bodies to identify and treat pain. Manufacturers created new “wonder drugs” like Oxycontin © and claimed they were not addictive. This led to an incredible increase in the number of physicians who converted their practices to pain management clinics. Physicians who had been thoroughly trained in pain management techniques soon found themselves competing with physicians who were not trained, but who saw the financial opportunities to join this up-and-coming field. More doctors prescribing more drugs means greater availability. Kids begin raiding their parent’s*

*medicine cabinets for a quick high, often sharing with friends.*

*The primary prescription drugs being abused are opiate analgesics, and benzodiazepines such as Xanax and Valium. All of these drugs are mood altering and can cause physical dependence. In the short term they make the users feel good. Over time the body gets used to them, and more and more of the drug is needed to maintain that good feeling. In the long term the body and mind is craving the drug and the frequency of use continues to escalate. The good or high feeling is replaced with despair and desperation to find more drugs. As often as not, long-term consequences result in physical dependence, escalation of use, and an increase in the potency of the drugs being used. Mixing the above mentioned classes of drugs often leads to overdose or death.*

**- Gary Wenner, Vice President of Medicated Assstant Patient Services - Operation PAR, Inc.**

## **How can parents overcome the daunting task of raising children in “not so great” neighborhoods?**

*One successful method begins by taking ownership of the neighborhood . Creating a state of mind known as a “community “ is very important in the rearing of children. This can be achieved by developing relationships with other parents in the area struggling to raise well adjusted children in troubling environments. Being creative and open-minded are definitely assets in the task of overcoming limitations and obstacles. By using the skills of creativity, flexibility and relationship building, parents combat the external negatives by creating a secure and thoughtful internal sense of self for the child. The child sees himself as capable and self-reliant. Children growing-up in these negative environments, often need to be reminded that : “You live in this neighborhood, but the worst of neighborhood does not have to live in you”. This message can be conveyed in a slew of ways other than “preaching”: reading materials, trips to other parts of the city, participation in afterschool and drug prevention programs, ‘block’ parties with like-minded parents, etc).*

**- Maikel Belfor, Cornerstone of Success & Achievement (COSA) Program Administrator - Operation PAR, Inc.**

Part 1 of a 2 Part Interview with

# Paul Radkowski,

MTS IAAOC - Psychotherapist  
[www.liferecoveryprogram.com](http://www.liferecoveryprogram.com)



**You recently received the 2008 Outstanding Addictions Professional Award. Just to lay the ground work for this interview and your expertise in the field of recovery, could you please tell us a little bit about your background?**

Sure I'd love to. My academic career focused on psychology for my undergrad degree and then focused on marriage and family therapy for my Masters degree. In my professional career, I worked for numerous agencies, hospitals and addiction treatment settings, working with groups, families and individuals as a Family and Marriage Therapist, Crisis Counselor, Addictions and Trauma Specialist.

I've been very fortunate to have studied and worked with some great educators and clinicians and I continue to explore the latest research in the field of mental health and addictions, so I can implement this information and resources to the folks I work with to provide them with the best possible outcome for a successful and lasting recovery.

Over the years... through my experience and training in the field of addictions, I have been recruited to oversee the start up and co-creation of wholistic residential treatment centers including recruitment by the Government of Canada to initiate programs and supervise mental health and addiction specialists in some of the most northern and remote regions of the world.

The International Association of Addictions & Offender Counselors of whom I have clinical membership with, awarded me; the "Outstanding Addictions Professional Award" for creating what appears to be the only program of its kind, the Life Recovery Program... an entirely online all addictions recovery program. A program which is video based, i.e. me, talking people through their recovery journey and sharing with them all the therapeutic information, tools, encouragement and resources you would receive at some of the more wholistic... and if I may say so... some of the best residential treatment centres.

**What was the catalyst in your developing the Life Recovery Program?**

My work for the government in the North West Territories was pretty instrumental in developing the program. Working in

one of the most remote regions of the world, many folks would have to wait a significant length of time to get into a treatment centre.

Often there is major stigma attached to folks going into treatment regardless of what part of the world you live. A recent North American study indicated that as many as 70% of those with substance abuse issues do not seek treatment due to stigma. For folks with depression, up to 90% of folks who struggle don't seek treatment for the same reason... stigma.

I figured if you couldn't bring someone to the treatment centre for whatever reason, i.e. stigma, not being able to leave work, being on a long wait list etc.. then lets bring as much of the treatment centre to the people where they could access it right in their own living room. It's not entirely meant to replace traditional treatment (especially if someone is medically unstable), yet one would be hard pressed to find better tools and information. I thought of the worst case scenario... if someone could not leave their home for traditional treatment, they could still have access to a recovery program. This program is about providing people with a healthy, clinically based option.

Access has been a huge reason why most people don't get help and continue on for years with things slowly breaking down... their physical health, their relationships, self control, self esteem bottoming out etc. So I thought "lets make the access as easy as possible" and not just for the person struggling with a self-destructive behavior or addiction, but for the loved one as well. Addictions don't just affect the addicted individual; it will affect their entire family or social system. I see all too often where loved ones are struggling to know what to do with their addicted loved one, whether they are in treatment or not. It's much like what I call a "second hand smoke of the soul". If someone is addicted, they are getting the most toxic effect, but those in their proximity are also getting pretty beat up as well. I often hear loved one's "feeling addicted to the addicted" and in need of recovering from someone who is recovering i.e. they are in need of their own recovery journey as well.

I really wanted to bridge the gap as systemically as possible for not only the folks who are struggling with their own impulse/control issue, addiction or self destructive behavior, but for the loved ones in their circle as well. Not just provide change to the

addicted individual, but to change and improve the entire family, social system where all members can be present and “engage in the program” at the same time... without having to leave home.

Let’s make a program immediately and easily accessible via the internet. A program that is available to anyone, anywhere and at any time. A program they can engage in for up to a full year to provide folks with the greatest possibility of long term recovery.

**In very simple terms, Life Recovery Program provides online addiction treatment. In an article by Katheryn Stewet-Bruni you stated, “People have to wait anywhere from two to eight months to get into expensive treatment programs, and after spending a great deal of money they don’t get the tools they need to carry on after leaving. The online program I have created is designed to help these people and their loved ones in a completely confidential, anonymous surrounding.” What’s the basic gist of the way your program works? Also, you mention “tools”. What tools necessary to maintain recovery do people have after completing your program?**

Its unfortunate, it depends on the persons budget, health insurance etc... if someone doesn’t have the finances or insurance here in Canada, recent stats have reported that folks are waiting for 4 months to be “formally assessed” for addiction services and often another 5-6 months after the assessment to get into a program and these are waits within some of our largest cities!

The gist of the way my program works is that someone can turn on the computer, get on the internet, log into the program and have immediate access. It’s a 6 month program, the first 3 months is the foundational component, walking folks through their withdrawal process, doing a risk assessment, setting goals, challenging destructive core beliefs, setting healthy boundaries etc. The remaining 3 months is about getting into more of and overcoming the core issues that co-occur with addictions, the so called “common colds of mental health” i.e. depression, anxiety, trauma etc. overcoming anger and toxic or co-dependent relationships etc.

The program is mostly video based where folks receive a video lesson every two weeks with tools, information, resources, ebooks, homework exercises etc. to bring a greater sense of awareness and regain control over addictive patterns of behavior. Every week folks receive an encouragement email to remind folks of the process of recovery they are involved in and to support them to stay their course, follow through on their homework exercises etc. There is a peer support forum that is moderated by my self or another member of our clinical team so folks can find additional 24/7 support and an accountability partner. Once the person has done the program for the 6 months, they are encouraged to review regularly and as needed, make postings in the forum and are provided with monthly encouragement emails to help them stay their course for an additional 6 months.

The program is a bio-psycho-social-spiritual, wholistic approach to addiction. There are cognitive behavioral tools to help people get to some of the distorted core beliefs that lead them to addiction. A

component called the TFAB helps folks get to some of the physical responses... of identifying what some of the physical “red lights” are when they are starting to get fired up into a flight or fight, stress-panic response which often leads to acting out in addiction. Being able to recognize these responses gives one a greater range of choices... this being only one important component of the TFAB exercise.

A program providing the proper information and education to folks is of vital interest to us in getting people into long-term recovery. It’s amazing, the number of people whom I’ve work with who have left treatment centres and yet are unaware of Post Acute Withdrawals Symptoms, unaware that a substance will often leave one’s bloodstream within days or months (depending on the substance), yet will remain stored in fat cells and tissue for years at a time creating a range of symptoms that throw people off emotionally, mentally and even effect their physical co-ordination.

Long term substance use and addiction will damage the brain and effect the central nervous system for years to come. Someone may feel worse, as their body is getting “un-stoned” before they feel better. It’s vital that folks know what these responses are and that they are normal, a healthy indication of recovery. Many folks sabotage their recovery because they are unaware and thrown off by these post withdrawal symptoms.

People use to soothe... so it’s vital to give them alternative coping tools and strategies for when they are getting “fired up” with stress or a craving or whatever... that they have a variety of options of ways in which they can de-stress versus acting out in addiction. I use clinically proven tools and grounding techniques from the fields of energy psychology, applied kinesiology etc. Techniques that do not require any drugs, that folks can do anywhere at anytime and even prevent panic attacks. 🧡

**Interview continued in next issue.**



Operation PAR, Inc. has been putting families first since 1970, in its ongoing efforts to assist families experiencing the harsh realities associated with substance abuse and mental health issues.

We offer a full continuum of services for individuals with substance abuse and/or mental health disorders. Our services are provided on a sliding fee scale based on income. Insurance and Medicaid are accepted for most services.

## Some of Our Featured Services

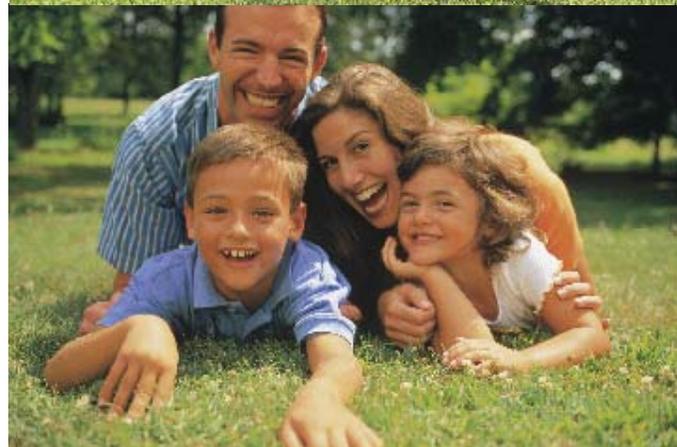
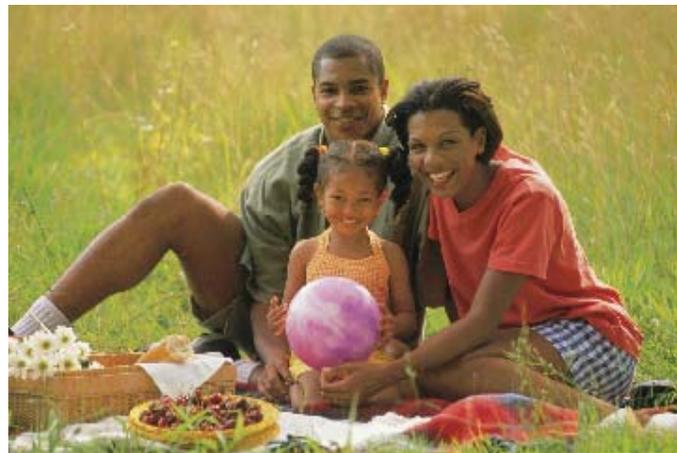
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# We Know He's There

## *Now We Talk About Him*

*by Pastor Herring*

I walked by your house last night and there was a very strong smell of peanuts coming from your living room! Now, before you start saying, "Ooo, you must mean my neighbors.", please be assured I mean your house. In fact the odor was so strong, I was wondering if the circus was in town and parked in your backyard. So, I crept up to your house, crouched down by your shrubs and peeked in your curtains and , oh my goodness, there was a big , fat, pink elephant right smack dab in the middle

of your living room! And that wasn't the strangest site!! No, the strangest thing was that your whole family was just sitting there watching TV, eating snacks, chit chatting away, just like he wasn't even there!! I walked away thinking, "Am I crazy or are they?"

The above scenario may seem silly but, unfortunately, it's a scene played out in homes all across America. The term "elephant in the room" refers to a major situation that's going on and affecting everyone but people are very uncomfortable talking about it. Like the poem says, "We talk about the weather. We talk about work. We talk about everything else -except the elephant in the room." Eventually, we all just end up pretending it doesn't exist – there is no elephant in the room. The subject becomes taboo- forbidden - unmentionable – banned from discussion in the home. This may provide a semblance of peace, an appearance of a happy home, but in the end – YOU CAN'T LIVE WITH AN ELEPHANT IN YOUR ROOM!!! He's too big. He eats waaaay too much! And finally, he's got NO natural predators. Unless you do something to get rid of him, he's going to be around along time!!!

There's no shortage of elephants to go around. They may go by different names but they are all bad roommates! Alcoholism,

substance abuse, domestic violence, child abuse, mental illness. No matter what the elephant's real name is, we've let him in, made him comfortable and given him a nickname. Mom's just tired and that's why she sleeps all the time and the house is a mess. NO! She's suffering from major depression! Pop believes in discipline and that's why he beats us with a belt. NO! Pop is a child abuser!!! On and on we spin our tale of fantasy. No food in the house- facing eviction for the millionth time- it's the recession. NO! Somebody in charge doesn't know how to handle money!!! Rev. Thomas F. Fischer in his Ten Commandments of Dysfunctional Families lists the First Commandment as 'Thou shalt reinterpret reality to preserve the perfect fantasy.' Eventually we become so good at this that we no longer even admit that there IS an elephant in the room. Charles Peguy, French poet and philosopher, says, "We must always tell what we see. Above all, and this is more difficult, we must always see what we see." Pretending something isn't there will never make it go away. We have to act. We have to do something. Today is the day to take action. It's like the old elephant joke - What did the hotel-owner say to the elephant who couldn't pay his bill? 'Pack your trunk and clear out.' Today we tell the elephant to pack his trunk and get out! Tell the elephant. Say to the elephant. In other words, COMMUNICATION is the key to getting rid of the elephant in the room!

---

*There's an elephant in the room.  
It is large and squatting,  
so it is hard to get around it.  
Yet we squeeze by with "How are you?"  
and "I'm fine" ...  
And a thousand other forms of trivial chatter.  
We talk about the weather.  
We talk about work.  
We talk about everything else -  
except the elephant in the room.  
Terry Kettering*

---

"Oh, yea, you think it's that easy? This isn't some elephant joke. This is real life. It's not going to be easy to get that elephant out of the room." Well, living with an alcoholic ain't easy either! Ask the victim of domestic violence how easy life is. Talk to Jessica, an eight year old whose family was in the midst of a horrific divorce. By horrific I mean mom punching dad in the face in the school parking lot. Jason, her twelve year old brother, being taken out

of the house in handcuffs, after attacking their mother with a screwdriver. Horrific! What has eight years in this crazy world taught her? "Life is hard". That's what she shared at church one Sunday morning. It wasn't what the church wanted to hear. It wasn't what they expected to hear. They were used to the pat answer to the question, "How are you?" being "Fine. Just fine." That was the answer they were comfortable with. But instead of comfort Jessica offered them truth -"Life is hard". The longer the elephant lives in the room, the harder life becomes. In case you're still trying to work out the furniture arrangement to include a 13 ton large grey mammal with huge ears and stinky breath, let's dig a little deeper into those reasons we already mentioned as to why we can't live with an elephant in the room.

**HE'S TOO BIG:** He takes up way too much room. His bulk and weight impedes your free movement. Before you make a step you have to gage where you are in conjunction with the elephant. There are places you can't go because he's there. You are always conscious of his over powering presence. Always aware of the limitations placed on you. Take Sherri, for instance. Twenty –six years old. Mother of three special needs children - all from different fathers -all from fathers who physically, sexually and emotionally abused Sherri. After years of drug and alcohol abuse, Sherri was finally getting her life together, both for herself and her children. She worked as a life coach for special needs clients. She said repeatedly how much she enjoyed her job and how much her clients meant to her. At Christmas, she even shared her presents and Christmas dinner with one of her client's family. Then, with no seemingly apparent reason, Sherri began to steal from her clients and not in a cleaver way. She was leaving a very apparent paper trail. It was just a matter of time before she was caught. Sitting in group one night, she sobbed over and over, "Why can't I ever get it together? Why do I keep messing up?" Very quietly, her counselor asked her, "Sherri , were you abused as a child?" With wide eyed amazement, Sherri looked up." Well yea, but what's that got to do with anything? It happened when I was little. I don't talk about that" What Sherri soon realized was that UNTIL she talked about it, she was never going to move beyond it! She would never reach her destiny- never get past her childhood injuries. The elephant in the room was blocking the exit. First, she had to remove the elephant. Only then could she move on.

**HE EATS WAY TOO MUCH:** Because an elephant can only digest 40% of the food he ingests, he has to eat a large volume of food. He consumes everything he can. His survival depends on it. A normal elephant spends 16 hours a day collecting food. Since he moved into your house, it is now your job to keep the elephant fed. What does he eat? He eats your time. He eats your energy. He eats your dreams. He feeds on your hope and regurgitates your faith. Keeping the family secret is hard work. It takes a lot out of you. You remain hyper vigilant, ready to destroy anything that threatens to expose the truth. You believe your only way out is to keep the elephant quiet so no one will know he's there. But there's only so much time in

the day. Only so many years to be lived. You have to decide how to spend that time. Like Red says in Shawshank Redemption, "get busy living or get busy dying." Dying is continuing to exist as though everything was fine when it isn't. Living is refusing to continue the fantasy one more day. Living begins with speaking the truth OUT LOUD. Telling the elephant, "pack your trunk and get out!".

**HE HAS NO NATURAL PREDATORS:** No natural predators. That means unless something outside the norm happens, the elephant is going to live a loooong time! Sometimes those outside circumstances happen in the form of a DUI arrest and FINALLY everyone has to admit Janie has a drinking problem! You catch Timmy in your jewelry drawer and wise up to the fact he's not borrowing your gold bracelet to go to the prom. He's stealing it to go to the pawn shop. Unfortunately some of us take really good care of our little family elephant. We run interference on a daily basis just to make sure these very things DON'T happen. Then we pray like anything that Johnny wakes up one day and gets his life together. It just doesn't happen that way! Remember- no natural predators. If you want that elephant out of your life once and for all you are going to have to be the one to do it! But you don't have to do this alone. There are professional guides and elephant hunters that will assist you in your expedition for the truth. They're called counselors! Talking is their business. Call one today and start talking!

Somebody has to stand up and "see the things they really see." Somebody has to be the one to break the silence. Somebody has to start the conversation. A survivor of the Jim Jones massacre, speaking to a reporter about the time she first became a member of his church, said, "I felt so uncomfortable when he would bring people up to the front of the church and "discipline them". I knew it was wrong. I knew something wasn't right. But I looked around and I thought, 'Am I the only one that thinks this way.'" If she had only spoken up, she would have realized there were many, many others that were thinking the same exact thought. It is when we begin dialogue that we finally realize we are not alone. It is also through that same dialogue that we become strong and unafraid. Start talking and don't stop until there's not an elephant left in any room of your life! 

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# Making Amends

*There is no greater freedom than that which comes from being able to confront our past  
- with honesty and responsibility.*

*by Pastor Herring*

Making amends CANNOT be the same as making it right, because, sometimes, making it right- just ain't possible! Step 8 in AA's Big Book states: Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them. That's what the Big Book says. As an explanation of how that works, the book goes on to say, "Now we go out to our fellows to repair the damage done in the past. We attempt to sweep away the debris which has accumulated out of our effort to live on self will and run the show ourselves. If we haven't the will to do this we ask until it comes." And that's where so many of us get stuck. Oh, we can make the list, all right. And quite a long list at that! It's the 'repair the damage part' that gets us. So many of us. So many of us mothers watching our children live out the effects of a childhood lived in the land of insanity. A place they lived, not by choice, but because they were born there during our struggles with addictions. Each day of our sobriety is bittersweet. Yes, we cheer that we are no longer bound to a substance or behavior. But, our victory dance is cut short by the sobering reality of what we have done to the innocent. In a further explanation of Step 8, the Big Book mentions will or lack thereof. As far as our will, that's not what we're lacking. Motivation-determination- why, we'd move heaven and earth if we could undo what we did. No, it's not our will that keeps us from moving on to that grand Step 12. We not only have the will to do this, we possess an obsession with accomplishing this step. The phrase that traps us is "repair the damage". You see, what we've done is not repairable.

everything is repairable if we have the will and submit to our Higher Power!" "Try harder." "Ask longer." "If you can lick your desire for drugs, you can do anything!" Oh, how I wish that were so. As a pastor working for many years with single mothers of at risk children I can not tell you the number of times I've sat with a mother who, having overcome her addictions, still sits with tears streaming down her face, proclaiming, "How can I move on knowing what I did to my baby?" A simple "Make a list. Ask for forgiveness." just doesn't quite cut it. How do you repair the damage done to your baby when your alcoholism – your need for a drink- results in a diagnosis of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome- with PERMANENT birth defects? How do you move on when everyday you come face to face with the consequences of your actions? You hope. You pray. As each year passes year you want desperately to believe the doctors were wrong. But then, the teacher's conference. "Johnny's a lovely child. Beautiful. So full of energy." (Here it comes) "Unfortunately, he seems to lag behind the other children. He's also having a great deal of difficulty with paying attention. He'll have to work on those things if he's going to succeed." HE'LL have to work on those things! You know all too well who's really at fault. You are! Unbelievable as it may seem, Johnny's situation is small potatoes compared to some other children's stories. How do you move past infecting your baby with HIV? How do you move beyond one of the many men you partied with molesting your little girl while you were passed out drunk? Not to mention, the physical, emotional and verbal abuse you served up night and day. Nope, a simple "make a list – sweep away the debris- repair the damage" is not going to enable you to move

I can hear the outreach and the cries of horror! What? "Why,



on. And move on you must. Both for yourself and for your children. You must come to that place where you realize what is necessary for your growth and theirs is not just forgiveness for your deeds- not just making amends. In order for you to move beyond your addiction you must be released from the CONSEQUENCES of your deeds. Without that release, you remain imprisoned by your past. And so do your children.

Hannah Arendt says it so profoundly. " Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to a single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever, not unlike the sorcerer's apprentice, who lacked the magic formula to break the spell." Isn't this a perfect description of where so many of us are? Locked in a prison of our own making, our life having been reduced to a one act play. There we sit, waiting for someone or something to unlock the door and set us free. And is it any wonder so many women suffer from magical thinking? We've been fed a steady diet of fairytales and wonderland since we were too little to think for ourselves. The beautiful princess pricks her finger and lives out the rest of her life asleep in a coma, awaiting her Prince Charming. The poor, unfortunate Cinderella, through no fault of her own, finds herself living in unbearable circumstances, her entire future resting on a glass slipper that, hopefully, only her foot is tiny enough to fit. If you think living in Never Never Land is bad, how about those of us who live in the Land Down Under, the land of "If Only". If only I hadn't met that man. If only I hadn't dropped out of school – got pregnant- went to prison – blah blah blah. Well, we did! And while we must live with the consequences of our actions, we do not have to be defined by the consequences of our actions. Our life is more than just one act – no matter how horrific the act or how long the

act lasted. What I did was bad but who I AM is good. Making amends is more about the process than the final product. Like Christopher Columbus, who set sail to discover a quicker way to the Orient and, IN THE PROCESS, discovered a whole new world, we too set out, thinking we're going to make other people feel better about we did to them and, IN THE PROCESS, discover a whole new world for ourselves. A world in which our very belief system is shook to the core. Our paradigm is shifted. And just as Columbus was limited by a false belief about his world, we too have been limited by false beliefs about our world. For most of us, the most damaging belief is others come first and we come second. (If we place at all!) How many times have we heard the illustration about the flight attendant – "If there is a drop in air pressure, an oxygen mask will drop down. Please place the mask on your own mouth before you try to assist someone else." Hello! Remember Step 8. That list of people we need to make amends with? Well, guess whose name needs to be at the top of the list? Yep, you guessed it! Our own! Kauffman says, "The supreme act of courage is that of forgiving ourselves. That which I was not but could have been. That which I would have done but did not do. Can I find the fortitude to remember in truth, to understand, to submit, to forgive and to be free to move on in time?" To move on in time. To be free. Free from my past. Free from my self imposed limitations. Ah, but what's the criteria that's needed in order for that to happen? Forgiveness of myself by myself.

Listen to this beautiful statement by Dag Hammarskjold. "Forgiveness is the answer to the child's dream of a miracle by which what is broken is made whole again, what is soiled is again made clean." Isn't that what we all yearn for? To be made whole? To be made clean again? The entire foundation of the Christian faith rests on this desire AND this possibility!! Most religions have



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some promise of restoration in their doctrine. We can't just stop at sobriety. We must keep moving into restoration. Restore- to bring back to its former strength. The former strength we need to reach is not the strength we had before our addictions overcame us. If we had been strong enough then, we'd never have made such a mess of our life. No, the strength we need to seek is the strength we were born with. The strength we had before life's circumstances strangled us. The strength given to all of us at the time of our creation. Remember, Oz never gave the Tin Man anything he didn't already have. There is innate strength in every one of us. There is a courage. A resilience. In order for us to tap into it, we need to pull back the curtain on the lie that we are less than others because we succumbed to our addictions and they didn't. That because we DID damaging things, we are damaged.

It is from this position of inner strength that all requests for forgiveness need to emanate. If the person we ask to forgive us does so, this strength will assist us in the relationship rebuilding process. However, if the person we ask to forgive us refuses to do so, it is this same innate strength that will enable us to keep moving forward towards our own destiny, even with the painful reality that some may not choose to come with us. To not move on is to remain locked in a cage of failure, dancing and doing tricks, in hopes of winning our freedom. No, if someone else won't open my cage of failure with their forgiveness, then I'll reach through that cage and open it myself, emerging with humility, gratefulness and a determination to live a life worthy of freedom. In setting myself free, I also free my captor. The guard of the cell is just as much in prison as the one locked up. Think of the energy the guard expends in keeping the prisoner in his place. SOMEBODY has to stop the insanity! The very act of redefining yourself, also redefines the person you hurt. You both move from victims of the past to conquerors of the future. The questions are

no longer, "How can I undo what I've done to them? How can I change their past?" but "How can I help them live in the present? How can I help them achieve their destiny?"

There is no greater freedom than that which comes from being able to confront our past – with honesty and responsibility for all we've done- and yet celebrate who we are. Not just accept, but truly celebrate! When I can look at the "man in the mirror" with an acknowledgment that actions taken by me altered the course of someone else's life and yet still see a person worthy of all the good life has to offer looking back at me- that's true freedom from my past!

An example of this truth is depicted in the Biblical story depicting the life of Jacob. If you want the entire story, it's found in the book of Genesis, chapters 25-33. Jacob lived as an adult, haunted by the fact that he had stolen both his brother's birth right and tricked their dying father into blessing, him, Jacob, instead of his older twin brother, Esau. This was a BIG deal in their time. A big, irreversible deal! What Jacob did totally altered Esau's life. Cut to Jacob, many years later. Now he's a husband and a father and because of his past actions, he isn't even living in his own homeland. So, he has a dream and in that dream he hears God tell him it's time to go home. Time to take his family and return to the land of his birth. Sounds great, except- returning home means facing his brother- more specifically, what he has DONE to his brother. Quite a dilemma. Here he is, knowing his destiny awaits him. Knowing this is the time to get moving towards it. Yet, also knowing the path to his destiny leads right through his brother and, more importantly, right through the consequences of his past. Talk about fear!! Whoa, was Jacob afraid! And, as usual when one operates out of fear, he reverted back to his old way of doing things. When Jacob thought about his brother, he could only

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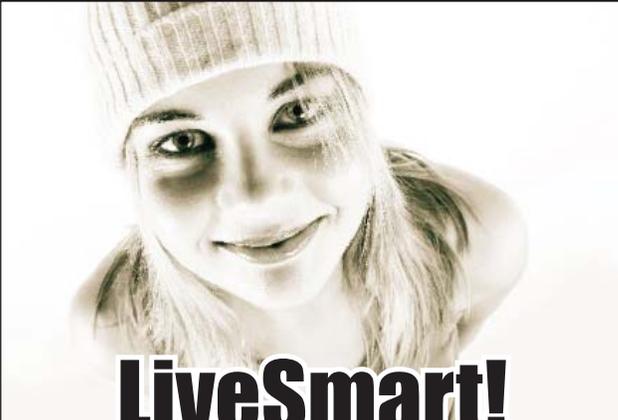


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see him as he was in the past- a victim- a victim of Jacob's selfish, deceitful ways. So once again, Jacob tries to buy Esau. Jacob knows he can't give Esau back his life, so, he does the next best thing and sends gifts to him – major gifts! (You know, like I can't make up to my kids that their life is full of chaos, but I make sure they get to Mickey's Merry Christmas every year, even if I can't pay my rent) As Jacob draws closer to that dreaded face to face meeting with his brother, even being with his family is too much, so he sends them on ahead of him. (talk about escaping responsibility.) Night comes and Jacob is alone – alone for the first time in many, many years. With no distractions, Jacob finally has to face himself. What follows is a night described as "wrestling with God". Remember, it was God who had told Jacob to go back. Can't you just picture God & Jacob? Jacob saying, "No, I am not going back there! You can't make me!" But God, with all His wisdom, knows that the path to the future is always through the past. On and on, they struggle. Finally, it's almost daybreak and God knows this has to stop. A person can only run so long. God says, "Enough!" Jacob relents but cries out, "I'll stop but you have to bless me!" And how does God bless him? He changes Jacob's name! In the Hebrew culture this is huge! They believed your name described your character, the very essence of who you were and what you did. Old name- Jacob- which means heel catcher, supplanter, one who takes the place of. The exact description of the harm he had committed against his brother – Jacob took the place of his brother when their father passed on the blessing. And it was that single action that Jacob spent the rest of his life running from. New name – Israel- meaning to prevail. Never again would Jacob's past rule over him. Never again would Jacob's past determine Jacob's future. Jacob is free!!! Jacob cries out, "I have seen the face of God." The face of God? As day breaks, Jacob looks up to see his brother coming over the hill. Esau runs to Jacob and embraces him. Looking in Esau's face, it suddenly hits Jacob! Esau sees him as he is in the present. What Jacob had done when they were young wasn't even part of Esau's reality. Realizing the enormity of this, Jacob again cries out, "I have seen the face of God!" The face of God! There's that phrase again! The face of God is not just a face of forgiveness but a face of release. Esau doesn't hold anything against Jacob. Esau is looking at Jacob as though nothing bad had ever transpired between them. Jacob was off the hook! An important detail in this story is that when Jacob proclaims, "I've seen the face of God", this is the second time he says this. Jacob had already received and ACCEPTED a release from his past actions. It had occurred the night before, when he was alone - wrestling with God. Yes, it was wonderful that Esau had released him but if it had not turned out that way, Jacob would still have been free. When we no longer define ourselves by our past hurtful actions, others won't either.

"But sometimes in the reflection of somebody else, we can see our own magnificence. By experiencing the love of another person, we can see how great we are." That's from Don Miguel Ruiz's book, The Story Teller. That's what I believe Jacob saw when he said, "I have seen the face of God." I believe he saw someone who loved him and, reflected in their eyes, Jacob saw his own magnificence. Even when making amends will not make things right- even when we have done something that permanently alters someone's life - we can still look in the mirror and see our own magnificence. We are never going to be able to undo the harm our addictions and selfishness caused our children. We can't give them back lost years but we can give them future ones! What a great gift to give to your child! A future with a magnificent mother!! 🌸



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# HOPE for Pedro

by AC Blevins



What does a typical daily routine hold for a 9 year old? Maybe you pretended you and your friends were your favorite Transformer or one of those hobbits from Middle Earth. Maybe the group imagination thing wasn't your cup of tea and you preferred to imagine you were a super-hero that worked alone like Superman, Spiderman, or Wonderwoman. What other activities would a 9 year old have to worry about? I mean at most you are in the 4th grade. Last time I checked 4th graders weren't splitting atoms or changing the oil on an 84 Coupe Deville during activities hour at Oak Elementary. Well, if you're Pedro Williams at 9 years old you are hustling up clients for your shoe shine business in Redington, Pennsylvania before ending the day with a rum and coke at the neighborhood bar. I know what you're saying, "What 9 year old is capable of giving a quality shoe shine?" Listen, in Pedro's world, when you shine shoes for guys in the Mafia and local Pimps, your shines better be quality or you might be figuring out which shine goes best on a pair of cement boots, capiche!

Let's rewind the script to the 1960's were times were tough in Redington, Pennsylvania and things were divided by race. (Hopefully your race was the one with most of the perks in town) In other words, you pretty much made it by any means necessary. Unfortunately, Pedro's mom did just that. She was a prostitute and ran a Speak Easy. Now a Speak Easy is basically your modern day alcohol store. Bootleg liquor for sale- run right out of your house- and pretty much highly illegal! As you can imagine Pedro's mom was pretty popular in the neighborhood. His mom's business transactions were a good thing for Pedro's social standing. He was able to kick it with the blacks, whites or any race without a problem. Now when it came to his mom's business transactions and a healthy learning environment...yea, not so good for Pedro!

If you thought moseying up next to a 9 year old drinking a rum and coke at the bar would be crazy, what about a 5 year old kicking back with a glass of wine? That's hold old Pedro

was when he had his first drink! Pedro's mom had some clients over (for the Speak Easy side of business) and they were drinking having a good old time. Like any curious 5 year old, Pedro wanted to see what was up. So he snuck into the room and hung out under the table while the adults conversed. The adults got up and moved the party to the next room but didn't secure the alcohol. Well, like any curious 5 year old, Pedro picks up a glass of wine and has a sip. Pedro said the wine was like "a warm cup of cocoa or tea" - minus the marshmallows of course. He continued to sneak a drink or a glass until he didn't have to sneak anymore.

Now we hit the fast forward button to when Pedro is 9 and running his own shoe shine business. Pedro sort of gets adopted by the Mafia/Pimp/neighborhood bar scene- anything he wants, they provide. Money on the pinball machine- he gets it. A 100 dollar bill at Christmas- he gets it. A rum and coke or any other alcohol beverage- he gets it. Pretty crazy! Well, it gets crazier! Pedro's older brother (Pedro has 2 brothers - a younger one and an older one) comes home from Vietnam when he is 7, and happens to bring some Thai weed with him. Apparently the Thai people make their weed the way they make their food - with a little kick! Just like most 7 year olds who are in awe of their older brother, Pedro is in awe of his older brother and his Thai weed. So Pedro's brother passes him the joint, and Pedro tries pot at the ripe old age of 7!

Well, Pedro out grows the shoe shine business around 11, which happens to coincide with the neighborhood bars shutting down. So he spends most of his day smoking with his older brother. Pedro said he was afraid that his brother would cut him off so he "hit the joint so fast and so hard that

it usually made him sick". That pretty much deters him from smoking weed, but instead of giving up drugs, he turns to other drugs. Given Pedro's acceptance with all races, whoever he was chillin' with at the time determined what drug he was doing. This pattern continues until Pedro is 16 when his mother passes away. With his older brother gone, Pedro now takes on the responsibility of raising his younger brother and making sure he finishes school. So Pedro turns to selling drugs and robbing rival drug dealers.

Unlike most careers there isn't a retirement program when it comes to selling drugs and committing crimes. Nope, no gold watch and a pension to look forward to. It usually ends in one of two ways - jail or death and for those that don't get it, sometimes both. For Pedro, jail comes at 18 and continues off and on for him until he is 42 years old. Those 24 years spent in and out of the system include continuing to drink while in jail (by combining radiator fluid, rotten fruit, sugar and a trash bag - sounds thirst quenching), paying off his probation officer so he doesn't have to show up, fathering 2 children, and a stint working as a dock foreman. After Pedro's 3rd stint in the system he finds himself faced with the 3 strike law - meaning if he gets caught again, it's life in prison. Even though he knows he is continuing to do the very thing that will get him that life sentence, Pedro goes on a binge. Drinking and getting as high as he can, as quickly as he can, Pedro decides to add one more activity to his solo party - prayer. He doesn't even know who he is praying to but he knows there is someone up there that will listen if you ask them to. So he prays. (He also continues to get high and drink and ends up passing out for 3 days.) Then a knock at the door comes. Pedro wakes up in his own vomit and urine, still high from his binge. He stumbles to his feet and answers the door. It's the landlord. He tells Pedro he has 1 hour to get out before he calls the cops. As the landlord walks away he says, "Oh and I know you're selling crack cocaine". This is the moment that will turn out to be Pedro's epiphany. He knows the next knock at the door won't be the landlord. It will be a life sentence or, more likely, the Grim Reaper himself! Pedro takes this realization as the answer to his prayer and decides to change.

A mission in York, Pennsylvania is where Pedro began his sobriety. While at the mission Pedro meets two gentlemen that take him to a 12 step program. Pedro credits them as putting him "on the path of turning his life around". Now, you would think that two individuals that had a such a great impact on your life- like keeping you out of a coffin - you would remember. Pedro says he can't remember their names - what they were wearing. Hell, he said he couldn't even point them out in a line up if his life depended on it....and it DID! I find that almost as odd as a 9 year old at the bar tossing back a pitcher, watching the game. Pedro has an explanation for it. He believes they were angels.

Pedro has always had a reputation of providing for his family the best way he knows how. He made sure his brother graduated from high school with a diploma, even when he didn't. He provided for his 2 children up until he lost contact with them. He continues to do the same with his new family, except this time he stays on the right side of the law while continuing his sobriety. His day begins at 4:30AM- that's right 4:30AM! He gets his step-son ready for school by ironing his clothes and preparing his breakfast before waking him up. Then he repeats the steps for his wife, cleans the house and then heads off on his to make the world a better place.

Pedro spends his days volunteering his time between various not-for-profits like Operation PAR, Inc. There Pedro is in charge of organizing materials and handouts for the LiveFree! Substance Abuse Coalition for Pinellas County. Every morning



around 8:30am Pedro comes in and makes the rounds. He stops at every office saying hello and making sure you smile before he leaves and heads to his desk. Hell, people that get paid to show up at work don't come in with Pedro's "Mr. Blue Bird on my shoulder attitude!" He shows up for free and with a great attitude! Pedro's day at Operation PAR ends around noon if nothing major is needed. Then he heads off to do his part in helping those that are where he was get to where he is today. I guess you could say, he heads off to be someone's angel!

As you can imagine a life like Pedro's doesn't come without regrets and Pedro has his fair share. He said his number one regret is not being a part of his children's lives. He knows and accepts that there are consequences that come with some of the choices he made, no matter why he made them. I asked him if there was one piece of advice that he could give someone in recovery, what would it be. He said "They need to go after their sobriety as hard as they went after the drug they chased."

At 45 years old, clean and sober for 3 years, please join Pink elephant in congratulating Pedro Williams in doing a one-eighty! 🐘

For this issue's Pulpit Perspective we sit down with Pastor Anthony McDaniel of Abundant Life Ministries located in Largo, Florida. Pastor Anthony has headed up Abundant Life Ministries, with his wife Kendra, since 1995. Pastor Anthony has gone on record before saying "We try to be a life giving church. We want to be a fellowship for the believer and influence to the unbeliever. If anybody comes in off the street we want to be relevant to them."

Well relevance for Abundant Life Ministries is Praise and Worship! This isn't your mom's old "grab the hymn book and turn to page 80 while Sister Marge warms up the organ" praise and worship. They bring down the house, concert style, under the direction of team leader Pastor Kendra McDaniel.

So if you are looking for a good Bible believing church in the Largo area that will love you and minister to you Abundant Life Ministries is your answer. Now let see what Pastor Anthony has to say about substance abuse.

**Is substance abuse an issue you are dealing with in your church or your community?** *Yes, and have for the entire time I've pastored in Pinellas county (since May '95).*

**Do you believe substance abuse is a physical issue or spiritual issue or a combination of both?** *Combination of both.*

**What do you feel qualifies someone to run a faith based treatment program?** *It starts with a commitment and appreciation for balance. I have not found a "silver bullet" in helping substance abusers but a combination of the following: accountability, motivation, training, support network outside of treatment facility, a strong inner desire to change, an understanding that "through God all things are possible." A balance between faith, psychology, accountability, patience and lots of love.*

**Tell me how providers could be more effective in the prevention and treatment of substance abuse.** *Not being afraid to address the inner core of people and understand that emotions play a big role in people's abuse. Engaging the whole person in the treatment is critical: body, soul (mind, will, emotions) & spirit (the part that will live forever).*

**What is the closest experience you have had with substance abuse?** *An in-law is addicted to pain killers because of chronic pain from an unsuccessful surgery. I've seen them go through cycles of being clean, then lie to get more medicine, hide the medicine from spouse, use to some moderation until losing control and being found out which causes family problems. This individual has been through detox at least once or twice. 🍷*

**Abundant Life Ministries** - Pastors Anthony & Kendra McDaniel  
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# Amendment 1

*by Dayle Catterton*

In January of 2007, Amendment One to the Florida Constitution was passed by the citizens of the State of Florida by more than the required 60%.

One of the major objectives of Amendment One was to reduce taxes. It accomplished this by adding another \$25,000 homestead exemption, making the total exemption \$50,000.

The other major objective was to stimulant the State's economy by allowing homeowners to make their "Save Our Homes" tax savings portable. This allows homeowners to take their tax savings and apply it to the property taxes on a new home. Home sales data suggest this part of the amendment has yet to stimulant the economy.

What this means is local governments are left with the decreased revenue from the additional homestead exemption with no benefits of a stimulated economy. When combined with the taxing restrictions already placed on local government and reduced revenue because property values have decreased we have that so called "perfect storm". With reduced revenue, but no reduction in needed services, local governments face the challenge of what service does not get funded. Since local governments provide the funds for "social services" providers all over the state find ourselves with the same challenges, reduced revenue with no reduction in needed services.

In 2008 a presentation was given to the full senate that stated without question there will be significant reductions for the next two years, 6 billion over that time period. Numerous research has shown that substance abuse treatment and education reduce recidivism. Contact your local Representatives and let them know you do not wish to see any more funding cut from community based substance abuse funding. Your vote counts! 🍷



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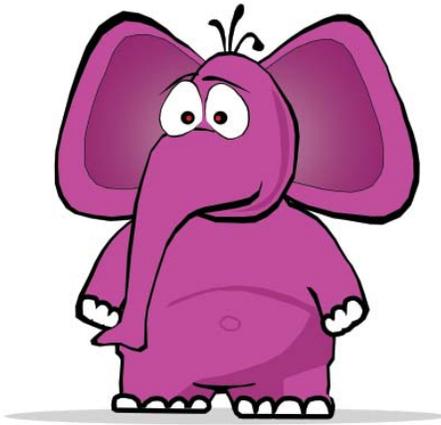
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