

ROAD TO RECOVERY NEWSLETTER

Created by Dual Recovery at Warren Washington Association for Mental Health
to support individuals in recovery

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A Woman in Recovery

BY AMY JOHNSON

For a long time, I whole-heartedly believed I could achieve a happy, healthy, and sustainable recovery without dealing with my trauma. I often thought, "what good can come from reliving those memories I worked so hard to forget?" And besides, I had thought, "wouldn't doing that lead me right back to using?" So instead, every time I tried to get sober in the past, I followed an imaginary checklist of what I thought every person in recovery should do. Strong desire to stop using? Check. Complete a twenty-eight day stay in an inpatient rehab? Check. Outpatient treatment? Sober living environment? Good support network? Check, check, check. What I did not do was see a therapist, however, for fear that I would have to face my trauma. This was one of the biggest anxieties I had in my life. I thought if I even talked about it a little it would consume me. Albert Einstein once said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over but expecting a different result. This is essentially what I was trying to accomplish but failed. It is no wonder I could not attain the happy and healthy recovery I wanted so bad. My very last time trying to get sober I knew I had to do something different. My unwillingness to talk about and face my trauma was only encouraging me to continue to self-medicate and never truly start the healing process. I was so lucky at this time to have the guidance and support of someone I looked up to help me pursue intensive therapy. I will not tell you it was easy. It was a slow and arduous process that I struggled through, but it did get easier in time. The first time I told my therapist my trauma story I remember thinking, I can't believe this is the first time I have ever said these words aloud to another human being. It felt like I was finally able to start unburdening myself. I felt freer. Having the courage to face the trauma I endured has been instrumental not only in my recovery but also in my growth as a person. I know from experience how truly scary it is to relive those awful memories of times we would rather forget but having the bravery to stand up and face your trauma is something to be proud of and never regret.

**INTERESTED IN SHARING A PIECE OF YOUR RECOVERY STORY?
PLEASE CONTACT REBECCA RYAN AT RRYAN@WWAMH.ORG**

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HEALTH & WELLNESS

How Telling Our Trauma Stories Can Help Us Heal

BY AMY JOHNSON

I made a silent oath to myself to never talk about my trauma because I thought no one would understand. Even just the thought of saying it aloud was painful and terrifying. And honestly, I thought if I told my trauma story I would break down and never recover from it. But keeping those memories suppressed has only made it harder on me. The more I tried to avoid thinking and talking about my trauma, the more these painful memories invaded my mind. Telling our trauma stories can help us take back our power over them and begin the healing process. If and how we decide to tell our story is a highly personal decision and should involve someone we wholeheartedly trust. For me, that person was my therapist. I still remember the very first time I told my trauma story because that was the day I truly started the healing process. From my experience, I can tell you that it will not be easy, but it will be worth it. According to an article in Psychology Today, Seth Gillihan describes some of the many ways that telling our trauma story can help us heal that I am going to highlight below.



- **Feelings of Shame Subside.** When we keep our trauma a secret, it reinforces the notion that it is something to be ashamed of. I know the longer I went with out talking about the trauma I endured, the more shame and humiliation I felt. By telling my trauma story to someone I trusted and receiving the support and encouragement I needed, it helped me realize there is nothing to hide.
- **Unhelpful Beliefs About the Event are Corrected.** After we experience a traumatic event, many of us will experience a shift in the way we view ourselves, others, and the world. I know after I experienced trauma, I often felt weak and untrusting of others. According to Gillihan, one of the key components of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which is one of the most effective treatments of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), involves sharing our trauma story. This helps us gain insight about the truth of what happened.
- **The Memory Becomes Less Triggering.** There is no doubt that revisiting painful and long-buried memories of trauma can be upsetting and overwhelmingly difficult. It can be a trigger for some very strong emotional and physical reactions and sometimes flashbacks. But it is through the telling and retelling of our trauma stories that those negative reactions tend to diminish in time and relinquish the power they hold over us. The very first time I told my trauma story I had an intense physical reaction. I was crying, shaking, and felt like I was going to be sick. When I talk about my trauma now, it is still difficult and will probably always cause me some level of discomfort, but I now control my trauma memories, they do not control me.
- **Trauma Memories Become More Organized.** Our memories of trauma are often disorganized, fragmented, and chaotic. They tend to be detached from a clear narrative and context. Recounting our trauma helps to organize the story with a beginning, middle, and end. We can better understand where and when it happened, as well as our own reactions at the time and afterwards. By putting our trauma memories into a cohesive story, it becomes more manageable and much less of a threat.





Trauma (Cont. from page 02)

- You Find a Sense of Mastery. By telling our stories, we find that we are not broken. We begin to understand that our reactions to trauma make sense and are normal. When I finally had the courage to face my trauma, I felt stronger and more confident. I felt more resilient. I knew if I could overcome my trauma, I could overcome just about anything in my life.
- You Begin to Make Sense of the Trauma. According to Dr. Powers in Psychology Today, “As humans we gravitate toward processing and trying to make sense of our experience.” This is especially true of people who have experienced trauma, as we are driven to make sense of the senseless. Every person experiences trauma differently, thus every person has their own, unique meaning of that experience.

The full article can be found here: www.psychologytoday.com/the-healing-power-telling-your-trauma-story.



HOT TOPIC OF THE MONTH

Post-Traumatic Growth

BY AMY JOHNSON

Psychologist Victor Frankl once said, “In some ways suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice.” After experiencing a traumatic event, many of us feel that our lives will never go back to normal or be the same ever again, however, there is a mounting body of research showing the opposite to be true. Not only will many of us recover after a traumatic event but we will also demonstrate growth in our lives. In the mental health field this phenomenon is known as post-traumatic growth (PTG). According to an article in Psychology Today by Adena Bank Lees, LCSW, the term PTG

was coined in the mid-90’s by psychologist Richard Tedeschi and Lauren Calhoun and refers to a theory that people who endure psychological struggle following adversity can often see positive growth afterwards. And it is a lot more common than you may think. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) estimates that about fifty to seventy-five percent of people will show some measure of growth after trauma.

It was when I finally started talking about and making sense of my own trauma that I saw tremendous growth within myself. I strongly feel that I am a better person because of all the adversity I have overcome in my life. I am more understanding and empathetic of others. I value my friends and family more. My purpose in life has shifted and holds more meaning to me. In addition, helping others through their own adversities because of my own experiences has made me feel like I did not suffer in vain. It has given me more hope about my own life and future. And as difficult a road as it has been, I am not sure I would change a thing because I have gained so much more than I ever lost from my trauma. Hidden under all the layers of grief I have uncovered beautiful gifts of

hope, strength, courage, and resilience.





SPECIAL FEATURE

The Inside Scoop

BY AMY JOHNSON

I recently had the pleasure of interviewing Wendy Berry, RN, CARN, to help shed some more light on trauma and substance use disorders. Wendy first became interested in mental health as a student specializing in psychiatric nursing and she is now the Director of Clinical Services at the Caleo Counseling Clinic through Warren Washington Association for Mental Health (WWAMH), as well as a psychiatric nurse and therapist. She has been working in the mental health field for many years and has extensive experience in working with and understanding addiction. Here are some of the key pieces covered in our discussion:

Q: How likely is a person with PTSD to develop an addiction?

A: Seventy-five percent of people with substance use disorders report histories of abuse and trauma.

Q: Why do people who have experienced trauma often turn to substances?

A: People use substances to self-medicate in order to reduce mood instability.

Q: Can talking about trauma be a strong trigger for people in recovery?

A: It is very important to have some stability in your recovery before addressing trauma. The thoughts and feelings that will surface require that you have the skills to cope or this could trigger relapse. People need to have a toolbox filled with coping strategies to manage thoughts, feelings and emotions. Another approach is that a person receive concurrent treatment for mental health and substance use at the same time.

Q: Can you walk me through what your therapeutic approach would be for someone who has PTSD and is in early recovery?

A: I would use cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). We would talk about a client's fears and the trauma they experienced. I would help them to recognize negative thought patterns keeping them stuck, and replace these thoughts with healthy, productive thinking. We would also work on developing healthy coping skills to manage stressors and build self-esteem. Often, CBT is used in conjunction with medications, such as Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRI), to help manage symptoms.

Q: How important is it for a person to tell their trauma story?

A: It is important to the healing process for an individual to talk about traumatic events in a safe environment where they will not be judged. Finding a therapist you can trust is an important component of recovery too.

Q: What advice would you give someone who wants to get help for their trauma issues but is scared or ashamed?

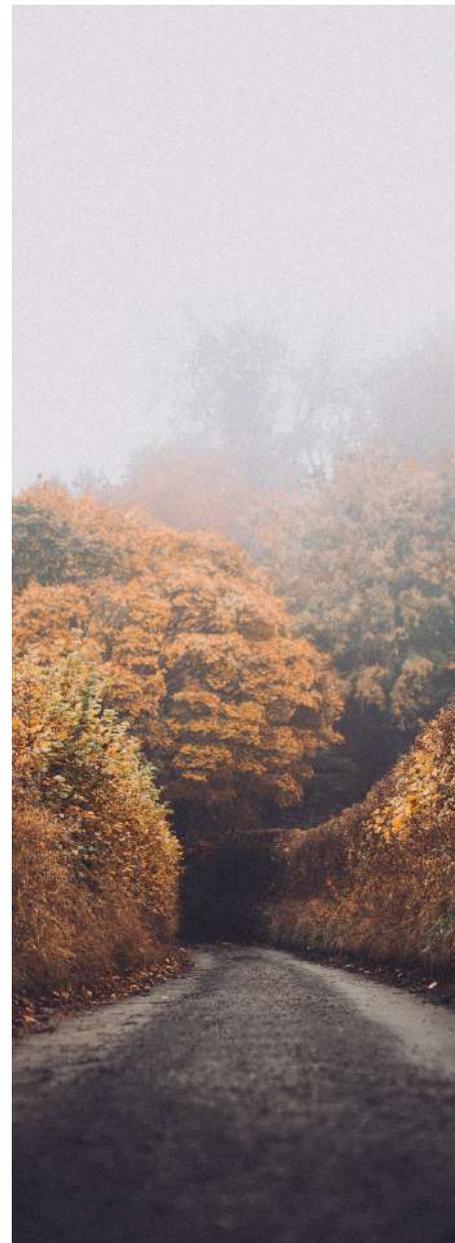
A: I would encourage that person to reach out to a peer who they trust and is doing well in their own recovery. Discuss your fears and ask them what steps they took to find success in their recovery.

Q: Can you talk a little about post-traumatic growth?

A: I always say, do not waste the pain that you have from experiencing trauma but use it to learn, grow, move forward and help others.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add?

A: I just want to mention how important I think it is to treat a person as a whole and not in fragmented parts. I favor and use more of a holistic approach myself and I believe we are moving toward a more integrated treatment approach. Also, I cannot stress enough how important it is to find a therapist who has experience and a solid understanding of trauma and addiction.





COMMUNITY UPDATES & RESOURCES

NEED HEALTH INSURANCE?

Just a reminder that the Adirondack Health Institute (AHI) has their Enrollment Assistance Services and Education (EASE) program to help individuals and families obtain health insurance coverage through the New York State of Health Marketplace. The COVID special enrollment period has been extended to December 31, 2020. Anyone interested can call 1-866-872-3740 to set up a FREE appointment or visit their website at www.ahihealth.org/ease.

NEED FOOD?

The Salvation Army of Glens Falls is holding contactless drive-thru food pantry events on several Mondays through the month of October. The drive-thru pantry will be open from 10am-12pm on October 12th and 19th at the Six Flags parking lot (33 Round Pond Road) in Queensbury. Food is available on a first-come, first-served basis.

LOCAL RECOVERY RESOURCES

Hope & Healing Center, Hudson Falls | Website: www.facebook.com/HopeAndHealingRCOC/ | Peer Support: 518-812-5813
Healing Springs, Saratoga | Website: www.sararecovery.org/healing-springs/ | Peer Support: 518-306-3048
AA Meeting Schedule: www.district13.aahmbny.org/ | AA Hotline: 518-793-1113
NA Meeting Schedule: www.abcdrna.org/ | NA Hotline: 888-399-5519



THE DUAL RECOVERY TEAM



Amy Johnson



Rebecca Ryan



Amy began her journey with Warren Washington Association for Mental Health as a resident in treatment housing. Amy's experiences on her road to recovery led her to her current position as a Peer Specialist and she now celebrates over two years in recovery. Amy is very passionate about her role in supporting her peers in their recovery journeys and is excited to express some of that passion here within each newsletter. Amy has her bachelor degree in Childhood Education from SUNY Plattsburgh and she is also a Certified Recovery Coach. If you would like to get to know her more, or are in need of peer support, please feel free to reach out to her via email or phone.

Rebecca is a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW) and has been working for Warren Washington Association for Mental Health since 2014. Rebecca became the Director of Dual Recovery in September of 2019 and has been eagerly exploring new ways to serve and support not only members, but the community at large. The purpose of this monthly newsletter is to provide you with some fun articles, personal stories, seasonal updates, and more that can hopefully help in each of your recovery journeys. Please feel free to reach out to Rebecca with any thoughts or ideas for future newsletters, or if you are interested in learning more about Dual Recovery. Happy reading!

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