

Hope - Member Stories

Andria E-M, Hannah, and Erin C share how the spiritual principle of hope impacts their recovery in the past and present; Erick Z discusses how after almost two decades of sobriety, psychedelic therapy enhanced his experience of humility and transformed his recovery.

Chasing Peace in Rainbows, by Erin C

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But the first real moment of hope I remember came after a relapse. I woke up in a van at the bay. It had rained all night. The air was damp and quiet, and everything felt washed out. And then I saw it.

The Spirit in the Rainbow

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The sun was rising through the leftover rain clouds, the most amazing rainbow stretched across the water. The raindrops were still hanging in the air, catching the light. The whole sky looked lit from underneath. That rainbow felt alive, like it had been placed there just for me.

That was my message.

It felt divinely guided. A direct transmission from my Higher Power and my future self. The rainbow stretching across the bay felt like it was stretching into my recovery, into my future. The colors were vivid, layered, undeniable. Different perspectives held together in one arc of light. It reminded me that my life could hold contrast and still be whole. That beauty could exist after destruction. That something brighter was possible.

That was hope.

Hope in Early Recovery

Later, in sober living, I would wake up early just to catch the sun coming up...

I would stand there, sometimes exhausted, sometimes anxious, sometimes unsure of who I even was yet, and I would watch the sky change. And then I would wait all day for the sunset. No matter what kind of day I had, I knew it was coming.

Back then, those two moments were my hope. When I first entered recovery, I hoped for sanity. I hoped to get my family back. I hoped I could walk around without headphones on all the time, shielding myself from the world. I wanted a lighter spirit. I wanted to stay connected to the spirituality I had found while I was using, but I was afraid it would disappear once I got sober. I hoped the joy would stay.

There was a lot I wanted to fix.

I thought for most of my life that peace was somewhere else. If I got closer to the beach, or lived in the mountains, or moved to a different house, or even a different country, then I would finally feel settled. I called it wanderlust. But really, it was that I didn't have much hope for peace inside of me, so I kept chasing it outside of me.

I didn't have control over much. But I had the sunrise. I had the sunset. The sun rose whether I was calm or spiraling. It set whether I felt strong or broken. It was constant. It was dependable. And I did not need to ask who I had been the day before. This experience of steadiness began to teach me something about my Higher Power.



No matter what happens in my life, the sun will rise and the sun will set. And no matter what happens inside of me, there is something at my core that does not change—my soul's identity and the deep love my Higher Power has for me. That love does not fluctuate based on my performance. It does not disappear when I struggle. It is as steady as the sun moving across the sky.

I have achieved things in recovery. I have become self-sufficient. I moved to Mexico. I earned certificates and have become a counselor. I proved to myself that I am strong and determined. But strangely, achieving those goals did not create a genuine sense of peace in my spirit.

When I started my plant medicine journey, something started to change.

Contentment did not come from accomplishing something new. It came from stopping the chase.

Now, I don't feel like I am running toward the next place or the next version of myself. I still love the sunrise. I still wait for the sunset. But I am not using them to escape my life. They are reminders. They tell me that some things never change. They remind me that I am held in something steady.

What I hope for now is deeper than goals.

I hope for a calm nervous system. I hope for patterns of fear to soften. I hope for a deep love of myself. And more than hope, I trust that the next right thing will be placed in front of me, just as reliably as the sun appears every morning. For the first time in my life, I am not chasing the horizon; I am discovering contentment where I am.

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Heroin comes from one of the creators' most beautiful poppies. I developed a profound "love" for it. **Using heroin protected me from suicide.** Readers will likely know the opening lines of a Coleridge's poem:

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan

A stately pleasure-dome decree:

Where Alph, the sacred river, ran

Down to a sunless sea.*

The story of this extraordinary poem is that Coleridge wrote it when he was in an opiated dream. William S. Burroughs, the author of *Junkie*, said that he wrote his best works when he was not annihilated on heroin. One of the very important processes of 12-step groups is that we stipulate we can only represent ourselves; just as well, as there'd be a war between us regarding **who was right about creativity with or without drugs—Burroughs or Coleridge?**



In 1986, after rehab, an unfamiliar feeling flowed through my veins.

It gave me the strength to stand in queues. I hate them! Then good fortune landed me a paid job. I became a counsellor in an HIV charity, having graduated with a psych BSc. I trained formally on the job, to "be a counsellor," which really meant listener & undertaker. There were days that labor was so painful, particularly when people I had known from detox rocked up. They were clearly dying with AIDS, while I steered forwards with my own virus and survivor guilt— but I was not dying.

My life partner, John M, died from AIDS in March 1995. I plugged into the hope for our "chosen family" that we had built together. What I had not accounted for was that active, criminalized drug-users were not in a position to organize themselves. More importantly, the pain of watching so many lovely people die was heartbreaking: full stop.

A lorry-load of hope and years without needling my body were not enough to stop me . . .

I found out that a lorry-load of hope and years without needling my body were not going to stop me from returning to daily heroin injections. Thanks to the Getty Foundation, local drug workers, (sometimes using themselves), clinicians, and 12-step groups here in London, I regained my strength enough to establish a charity to honor John and to work to stay alive. I feel the following quote is worth the risk of invoking politics: In the words of Martin Luther King Jr., one of North America's greatest souls, "I have a dream."



I have a dream

My dream is that WE will join hands in work and solidarity to end the legal punishments meted out to people, who use drugs, when they are not harming others or their property. After all, when did the mass-incarceration of ANY group improve ANY OF OUR lives? Ibogaine HCL improved mine recently—hugely. Without opiates, I struggle with sore lungs, joints, & hyperactivity! That's where Psychedelics in Recovery (PIR) comes into its own. PIR is a novel 12-step community that uses psychedelic medicine as well as listening and talk therapy. It's an extraordinary family where we all qualify because regardless of whether our addiction wears the mask of drugs, codependency, sex, food, and so on—at its core it is a loss of control of ourselves. Socially, addicts are labeled as 'criminals' and their contributions to their community are invalidated because of their status. I personally think that describing an addict as a criminal gives them more credibility. Just because "crime" was a thing for many of us, doesn't make our countless contributions invalid. Indeed, some fellow citizens might even say it gives us more credibility... Whatever the truth about that, without Community, Hope and, Creativity, I would not be alive. THANK YOU. For Reading 🍀🍀🍀

Andria E-M // London UK4

* [Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Kubla Khan. The Poetry Foundation](#)

Breaking the Silence: Psychedelic Therapy and Long-Term Recovery, by Erick Z

I want to share my experience, strength, and hope to let others know that the therapeutic use of psychedelics is a viable path for recovery with tremendous benefits.

I have been sober for over 19 years in AA. While I was an enthusiastic recreational user of psychedelics at one time, I retired from that scene about a decade before I got sober. After I got sober, I still advocated for safe use of psychedelics for those who could handle the effects even if they were using them recreationally. Nevertheless, I kept my opinion on psychedelics to myself in AA meetings. I didn't want to become the center of controversy, and I respected the program's focus on alcohol recovery alone.



In my 18th year of sobriety, I found myself at a psychic crossroads.

Recently I started following conversations about the use of psychedelics in therapeutic settings. I decided that I no longer wanted to take the duloxetine that I had used as a crutch against anxiety for well over a decade. I was an active member of my AA home group with a service position, a sponsor, and a sponsee, but I could not find the inner peace I thought I should have with almost 20 years of recovery. I had the support of good therapists, but therapy wasn't helping.

I was interested in pursuing the use of psychedelics in a therapeutic setting, but it went against everything I'd learned in recovery. There was no way I was going to discuss trying psychedelics therapeutically in the rooms of AA and endure the inevitable controversy. In the parlance of 12-step recovery, I became "sick and tired of being sick and tired," about how I was feeling. And thus, I found myself attending a Zoom meeting of Psychedelics in Recovery.

The meeting's speaker was a man who had almost the same amount of sobriety time as me. He talked about being in a similar place as me—years of recovery that still lacking something essential. He went on to describe how he screwed up the courage to engage with psychedelics and how it benefited him. I was sold.

Psychedelic Therapy

I was able to find licensed mental health professionals who conduct psychedelic therapy sessions. After going through the intake process, I completed two sessions over the course of seven months. Looking back, I wish I had done this years ago because it might've saved me years of feeling lost without knowing the reason why. Using psychedelics in a controlled, intentional setting has dramatically shifted my sobriety.



The main benefit was that I finally experienced the idea of humility and being "right sized" as discussed in the AA 12 & 12*.

To me, this means that the grand sum of my existence – the ups, downs, stresses, ruminations, etc. – are smaller than a grain of sand at the bottom of the ocean. This is not to say that I now embrace nihilism. It means that I can live my life without thinking that every bump in my day has devastating consequences for my well-being. Psychedelics have strengthened my sobriety in ways I didn't imagine. My anxiety levels have dropped dramatically, and I maintain this through breathwork and other methods of self-care. I don't presently see a need for conventional therapy, but I am not closed off to the idea of returning in the future. Yes, I still have lousy days, but it is far easier for me to accept that this as an inevitable part of life, and I manage these days without getting sucked down the rabbit hole of my thoughts.

The part that surprised me the most was that I didn't really like the sensation of being under the influence. I still have the unused medicine in my refrigerator and I usually forget that it's there unless I notice it near my vegetables. It's unfortunate that the rooms of AA seem shut off from the idea of using psychedelics in recovery, especially in spaces that are opposed to the use of *any* medication prescribed by mental health professionals. The *Big Book** of AA was written in the 1930s. Much has changed since that time. You could be short-changing yourself if you didn't at least examine other options.

[*Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. 1952. *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*.](#)

[*Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. 1939. *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism*, 1st ed.](#)



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I didn't have specific goals at all when I came to recovery about four years ago. I began using psychedelics intentionally eight years ago, and since then, I have achieved a great deal. I feel like I've gotten to know myself—the real me without the constant trauma responses. I still get triggered, but it's easier to manage now. I don't think you ever truly arrive. I think it's a continuous, non-linear, lifelong journey.



Hope is the foundation upon which I exist. It is faith's sister.

Hope is a huge word for me. Recently, my cousin—the only member of my family I am not estranged from—sternly told me there's *"no such thing as hope"* and to *"choose my words."* Needless to say, I chose my response carefully. It read something like this: *Hope is the foundation upon which I exist. It is faith's sister. If I didn't have hope, I'm pretty sure I wouldn't be alive.* I am in recovery, attending three fellowships, and they are all based on hope.

I have contemplated and meditated upon hope. I am a member of a Unitarian Chapel, a very strong, connected community that recently had a service about hope. Its message was that hope is the foundation which gets us through difficult times. **Where there is uncertainty, there is hope. It resonated so strongly with me.**

Could Hope be for Fools?

I have a very good, wise friend who thinks hope is for fools. But if all of life is an illusion, it's surely better to have hope than not. In my life—my very full, crazy, unconventional, colorful, deeply traumatic life—throughout my childhood, teens, youth, and even today, I could not live without hope. Hope is a wish for the end of suffering, for change, healing, and growth. Hope makes sense to me because all things change. The only permanence is impermanence. What parent does not hope for a better life for their child than they had?

In the truly seemingly hopeless times—and there have been a disproportionate amount in my lifetime—the one thought that has seen me through is hope. I say to myself, "All things must come to pass." And indeed they must and do.

What of hopelessness?

It comes when I forget who I am, when I forget that I am connected to all beings, all things, all lives, all times. I know this because I have had this experience in my deep recovery work with psychedelics. In fact, it was my very first experience. It was like wanting to learn to swim but instead of starting in a shallow pool, diving headfirst into the Grand Canyon. I wouldn't recommend it at all, but I have no regrets. It gave me so much. **It helped me see who I really am—the eternal me, the me that is the source.** I knew there was nothing beyond this.

Through this experience, although my life has been marred by so many deeply traumatic experiences, loss, struggle, and living in survival mode, I know with an unwavering certainty that there is hope above all else. My life is part of a divine plan to help me return to source, in which we are all interconnected. So powerful a gift it was.



Recovery helps me return to me

The practical aspect of recovery—attending meetings, doing the work—reminds me of that divine connection. But at times, I lose sight of this through stress, physical and emotional pain, toxins of one kind or another, sometimes even through my own thoughts and ruminations. **But recovery helps me return to me.** What a gift it has been.

I remember as a child in Catholic Sunday service, the one and only thing that resonated and that I could be heard singing was the line from the hymn: "Hope, perfect hope, is the gift of Christ Our Lord."

I often express myself through the practice of writing Haiku poetry—short Japanese poems that evoke beauty and the senses, saying more with less. This one came through me whilst writing:

What of that word Hope?

As sure as the sun rises

We can believe

Some Thoughts on Step 2, by Douglas N

Step Two. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

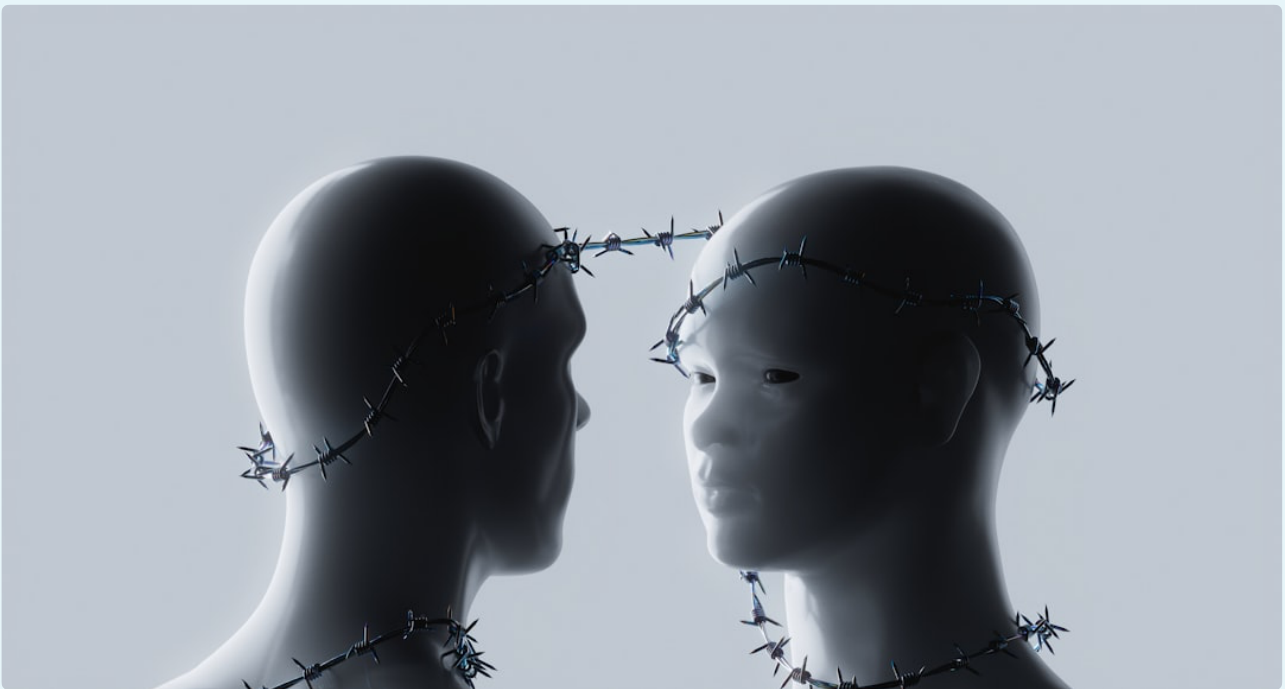
Hope

Split

We want to be well. We want to be whole. And still—we may find ourselves letting whatever is loudest decide, whatever is most urgent, whatever promises the quickest relief.

One voice may say: *hold it together*. Another: *burn it down*. Another: *just disappear for a while*. And somewhere under all that, there might be something quieter—not competing, just waiting.

This is a particular insanity: not that we're broken, but that we're divided. That our inner life can feel like a committee and nobody is chairing the meeting.



Ache

The ache may not be primarily for sobriety. It may be for coherence. To stop arguing with ourselves in the same old circles. To stop calling it “a slip” when it keeps becoming a pattern. To stop bargaining with consequences like we’re still the exception.

We don’t need to become perfect. We need to become one. An integrated inner sense that can hold.

So Step Two offers a simple possibility: maybe we don’t have to manage our way into wholeness. Maybe wholeness is something we could be restored to—if we can stop insisting we do it alone.



Counterfeit

And here’s what many of us may run into: it might not be the idea of a Higher Power that’s hard. It may be what we do with it.

We might make “God” into a prop. A permission slip. A stamp of approval on what we already wanted. A spiritual costume over the same old fear.

Perhaps we trade wholeness for specialness. Trade honesty for certainty. Trade surrender for control with nicer vocabulary.

Some of us may have inherited a Judge. A God with a clipboard, a God who sounds suspiciously like shame—and we might call that voice “truth,” then wonder why we keep hiding.

Sometimes we may bypass: float above the mess, quote the right things, declare ourselves "good," while the real work waits downstairs, arms crossed, unimpressed.

If our spirituality makes us less accountable, more defended, more performative, more sure we're right—it might not be restoring sanity. It may only be medicating the division.

Gathering

Step Two doesn't have to be a theological debate. It may simply invite us to admit the obvious: *Whatever we've been using as our highest authority may not have been able to make us whole.*

So we can become willing—not to adopt a new belief, but to allow a new center.

A Power greater than ourselves can mean something greater than our wounded perspective alone, greater than our panic, greater than our cleverness, greater than the voice that says, "I know what to do," while doing the opposite.

Maybe that Power is God. Maybe it's the wisdom of the fellowship. Maybe it's nature, time, truth, love, reality. Maybe it's the deeper Self beneath the survival strategies—the place in us that doesn't have to hustle for worth.

Whatever name we use, the invitation may be the same: let something true begin to organize us. Let our insides stop being a tug-of-war and become a team.

Not submission. Not self-erasure. A gathering.

Signs of Sanity

Sanity may show up small at first. No drama—just signals. A pause where there used to be reflex. A phone call we don't want to make but make anyway. A truth spoken plainly, without dressing it up.

Sanity can look like our values starting to sound like instructions, not decorations. It can be the moment we stop confusing emotion with direction. When we can feel shame without turning it into a verdict. When we can feel fear without worshipping it.

Sanity may be when we don't need to be impressive. When we stop negotiating with our own integrity like it's optional.

And maybe the clearest sign: we become teachable again. Beginner's mind. Less "we already know," more "show us."

Hope for Wholeness

Great Mystery—restore me to wholeness.

Not to an image.

Not to a performance.

Not to the version of me that never needs help.

Restore me to sanity:

to alignment,

to coherence,

to a life where my words and actions

can finally shake hands.

When I use You to bypass,

bring me back to the ground.

When I use You to feel superior,

bring me back to truth.

When I use You to avoid repair,

bring me back to responsibility.

Gather what's divided in me.

Lead what is afraid.

Soften what is hardened.

And help me take the next right step—

not to look spiritual,

but to become whole.