

Gratitude Friday – 9 5 25 National Recovery Month and the Giants Whose Shoulders We Stand On

Note to readers – as a practice of gratitude, for over five years I have posted a weekly gratitude musing at Billstauffer.net. This week, I decided to post it at Recovery Review as well given the content.

Just in case anyone may not be aware, September is National Recovery Month. As this [link explains](#), National Recovery month was first established by SAMHSA in 1989 to celebrate addiction recovery. The initial focus was on the theme “treatment works.” This was before the rise of the recovery movement. In 1989, the focus of support efforts was on the acute treatment model, because that is all that existed. That began to change as a direct result of advocacy from the authentic grassroots recovery community. Our national recovery community wanted to center celebration

on recovery instead of treatment, and in that moment, our systems listened, the rest is history. We also began to extend recovery support into community. The big takeaway here is that the recovery community changed the care infrastructure in fundamental ways to focus on our resiliency. Grassroot efforts worked!

For those interested in this history, several years ago I conducted interviews with key leaders of the [New Recovery Advocacy Movement Saint Paul Recovery Summit Interviews](#). The interviews include [Bill White](#) - Recovery Historian, researcher, and author of Slaying the Dragon, [David Whitters](#) - Founder Recovery Consultants of Atlanta Inc, [Carol McDaid](#) - Cofounder McShinn Foundation Principal at Capitol Decisions Inc. [Ben Bass](#) - Executive Director of the Recovery Alliance of El Paso TX, [Tom Hill](#) - Senior Advisor SAMHSA and senior advisor White House ONDCP (retired), [Dona Dmitrovic](#) – (then) Senior Advisor Recovery to SAMHSA, [Phil Valentine](#) - Exec Dir, Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery (CCAR), [Johnny Allem](#) – Who led Society of Americans for Recovery (SOAR) the first national RCO, [Bev Haberle](#) - Exec Dir PRO-ACT of The Council of Southeast PA, Inc (retired), [William Cope Moyers](#) - VP public affairs / community relations Hazelden Betty Ford, [H Westley Clark](#), MD – Dir CSAT SAMHSA US Dep HHS (1998-2014), Betty Currier - Organized Friends of Recovery of Delaware and Otsego Counties, [Mark Sanders](#) – Author, curator Museum of African American Addictions, Tx & Rec, [Cathy Nugent](#) – First grant officer RCSP – SAMHSA and [John Winslow](#) – Founder, Dri-Dock Recovery Center & International Recovery Day. It remains an honor to have had the opportunity to conduct these interviews with these giants of recovery advocacy and to preserve this part of our history.

Our systems of care have begun to understand what we always have. Recovery from addiction is a long-term process with a myriad of pathways that people use as they move into and to sustain recovery. For many of us, this leads to so strongly identifying with recovery that we form what is called a [recovery identity](#). I confess, I am one such person.

Recovery month has a set theme, [Recovery is for Everyone: Every person, every family and every community](#). There is also a day to honor those who do this work, [National Addictions Professionals Day](#), on September 20th. Thanks to John Winslow whose interview is linked above, we also have [International Recovery Day which is on September 30th](#).

People who work to serve individuals experiencing addiction are our unsung heroes. They show up, day in and day out. Having worked on the public care side for several decades, I can tell you that these dedicated servants work long hours for pennies, often do with little positive regard for their efforts. I know of people over the years, even those with advanced degrees whose families qualified for public assistance because reimbursement is so low and the administrative burdens are so high. They put in many extra hours to work through the mountains of paperwork so they could actually work with those they were charged to serve. When I needed help in the mid-80s, I got it because of people dedicated to doing this very difficult work were there for me. At times, even now our system is the barrier. Care access challenges, administrative burdens around every corner and unfunded mandates remain serious challenges to helping people get well. Grateful for all of you out there in the trenches who show up despite all of those road blocks. You are my heroes.

The logo for National Recovery Month is displayed on a purple rectangular background. The words "NATIONAL RECOVERY MONTH" are written in a large, white, distressed, sans-serif font. The word "RECOVERY" is split by a stylized infinity symbol, which is colored in shades of pink and teal. Below the main text, the words "RECOVERY. HOPE. HEALING." are written in a smaller, solid-colored font, with "RECOVERY" in pink, "HOPE" in teal, and "HEALING." in pink.

Everything we have come from grassroots, recovery advocacy efforts. I became aware early on of the history of the publicly funded treatment. I learned of all the efforts that these recovering people and their allies went through in the 1970s to ensure care was there when I walked in the doors of the center in the mid 80's. Later, I learned of the efforts federally of people like [Harold Hughes](#) who held hearings with actress [Mercedes McCambridge](#) in the US Senate. Here in Pennsylvania, State Representative [Milton Berkes](#)'s crowning life time achievement was "Berkes Bill." The [Controlled Substance, Drug, Device and Cosmetic Act 63 of 1972](#) it created, among other things our state funding system, the one that a few years later meant that there were doors for me to walk through. I found an interview with [Representative Berkes in the PA House Archive Oral History Project](#). Because of community led efforts, it became [PA Act 50 of 2010](#) and established our [Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs](#).

I was present at the first recovery rally held in our state capitol rotunda, it was organized by [Dona Dmitrovic](#), who is the Acting Director of the Office of Recovery (OR) at SAMHSA. She helped found PRO-A, the statewide recovery community organization of PA since 1998 where I now work. The rally was in 2000 and it was focused on recovery for the first time! A state representative broke her anonymity in the rotunda, for the first time in our state history giving others the courage to recover out loud. These are these chapters in our recovery history that build upon earlier efforts. Newcomers of today will take things in directions that at this moment are beyond our wildest dreams. Built on the work of those who came before us. We are all part of this wondrous story and can add our own chapter of how we moved it forward.

We have such a rich history. Harold Hughes was a recovering truck driver with a deep booming voice. He became Governor of Iowa and then a US Senator. He used his lived experience and his office to call attention to our plight and our potential. His work changed everything. Milton Berkes was an army vet who served in the South Pacific during WWII. He never drank, but addiction captured his attention because of a lot of recovery advocates who educated him on our condition and our promise. Because of what he did here in Pennsylvania, we ended up with services and a ladder out of addiction into recovery. I got to personally thank him before he died. Two men who did great things. Dig a little deeper and all of their efforts grew out of the work of the grand dame of recovery advocacy, [Marty Mann](#). Her advocacy on alcoholism as founder of the [National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence](#) or NCADD in the 40's, 50's and 60's set the stage for all the advocacy efforts that came afterwards.

My Recovery Month started at the [Recovery Month Kickoff Luncheon](#), held yesterday in the Columbus Room at Union Station in Washington, DC. It was the first time in my life I was able to attend this event. The thing that resonated with me the most was that this time, leaders from several national recovery organizations came together to make it happen. That fact is perhaps the brightest point of light and a facet of hope for our future.

This recovery month, I celebrate all these giants, and countless others who saw what needed to happen and who have fought for decades to ensure services and support were available for future generations. I am grateful for those visionaries who years ago realized we needed to shift the paradigm from addiction and pathology to recovery and resiliency. Millions of us can recover out loud. We no longer hide in shame. We will not go back into the shadows, not ever. I am grateful for the opportunity to continue working in the tradition of the pioneers who came before me and to help another generation to take the lead.

I am grateful for recovery and the opportunity to do things that have meaning and value to my time here on earth.

What are you grateful for today?

Post link - [HERE](#)