



Recovery Takes Flight

Although I could use my given name, my brothers in the program had other ideas. While I was neither a lieutenant nor injured in combat during my military service, they chose to call me “Lieutenant Dan” or “LT.”

I was born on a relatively normal day in a relatively normal hospital to a relatively normal, albeit young mother. I was put up for adoption shortly thereafter. A month later I was adopted by a sharecropper’s son and his wife who were unable to have children. My parents always made sure that I had the necessities of life and then some. They raised me right and you never saw through the cracks or how hard they worked to make sure that I was taken care of. They never really drank outside of social situations, and they certainly did not use drugs. **They were, by and large, what most people would consider perfect parents.**

I never really got into a whole lot of trouble in school. The minor in possession of alcohol charge I caught when I was 17 was a portent of things to come.

After graduating from high school, I went straight to college. I used two semesters away from home as my playground to experiment with drugs and alcohol. I did not go overboard but I also ended my tour with a 0.1 GPA. Later that year, I would join the Navy. My drinking and eventual drug use increased exponentially. Thankfully, the only person I put in harm’s way was myself. By the time my service contract was over I would say, in hindsight, that I was an addict and alcoholic. If there was only a program for folks like that. But I was not ready. I would go on to marry a wonderful woman, have two beautiful children and have what seemed to be a decent career.

Unfortunately, my drug and alcohol use increased. I started drinking after work and sometimes even during work. I would stay out all night or get plastered and hope that the cocaine I had on me would sober me up enough to get home. I would have drink receipts longer than I am tall. It is dumb luck that I never got a DUI or DWI. Family functions were no different - I would usually make a fool out of myself somehow. I barely remember a trip to Cozumel where I showed up to a black-tie dinner drunk, covered in sand, wearing flip flops, and speaking French - IN MEXICO!

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“The years that followed were a blur of alcohol and methamphetamines... when the SWAT team kicked my door in, the worst place to be is behind the door with a loaded shotgun.”



In 2004, my grandfather passed away and I teetered towards the edge of the turnip truck. I felt abandoned. It was not his fault, but I made it my fault and made it all about me. I fell deeper into my vices. My mother would be diagnosed with pancreatic cancer shortly before Mother's Day in 2005. I could not handle the thought of losing her too. She asked me to go to chemo with her to keep her company. She deserved that much and more. I went once. The last time I saw her was the day we turned off her life support. Instead of grieving, and being present for my family, and my father, when the nurse came in to ask if my mother was an organ donor, I was promptly removed for threatening staff with bodily harm.

The years that followed were a blur of alcohol and methamphetamines. Somewhere in there, I was arrested for felony possession and aggravated assault on a peace officer with a deadly weapon. I mean, when the SWAT team kicked my door in, the worst place to be is behind the door with a loaded shotgun. Somehow, I ended up doing about 7 years of probation. I never

failed a drug test, but I will be damned if I was not high right after I left the probation office. A move to Florida was more of the same but it was more alcohol and cocaine. My wife at the time was promoted at her job which brought us to Atlanta.

I say that I wished we had never moved here but that did not matter either. What happened would have happened no matter where we were. The first time I met with the shadow-people, I called emergency services on myself and ended up in Ridgeview. I was not ready and just faked my way through the program. It was more of the same and in mid-2015, she had finally had enough of the misery I brought her and our children. I was out on the streets, and she was left with the pieces and all of the financial burden. What did I do? Well, I sure did not turn my life around. I connected with someone I met at Ridgeview and went wild in Atlanta. That is a longer, darker story. It was true misery. Atlanta will eat you alive.

At the end of my run, I was living in a tent in an open field behind the Goodwill in Powder Springs. I

wanted to just be done and stop running. I was, as they say, tired of being sick and tired. I had run everyone out of my life and had nothing but a tent and the clothes on my back. I was also a wanted man in Cobb County. I walked to my house and asked to get some warm clothes for the winter. I ended up telling my sister-in-law at the time what she could do with herself and where she could do it after she questioned my being there. Her husband got involved and there was violence. He also called the police. They asked what happened and, even though he started it, and I finished it, I said nothing. I was arrested for violating my probation.

On Veterans Day 2018 at around 3 AM, I was released from Cobb County jail. I walked from the jail back to my tent in freezing drizzle and found it had been destroyed. As I sat on the wet wooden pallet, a voice in my head (for the record, it has only ever been my voice in there), which was not mine, told me to get up and leave. Even though weird, disembodied voices aren't the boss of me, I did just that. After nearly 20 miles of

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Thank you George Morlan for thinking outside the box and noticing our individuals who walk to work could use umbrellas!

Send us you ideas - or better yet take action like George, we are grateful!

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The Extension | 1507 Church Street Extension
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- David Schwickerath, Board Chair
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A member of our staff or Board of Directors would love to come to speak to your group about issues related to homelessness, addiction and recovery. Give us a call at 770-590-9075.

JJ BREMNER RECOVERY COMMUNITY

I wish I remembered the exact moment that I met JJ. I'm sure the reason I don't is that all the moments that followed were so extraordinary that I couldn't possibly remember our introduction.

I do remember where we met. It was the organization's first permanent home, originally an old warehouse built in 1929 by the Georgia Marble Company in Elizabeth, a near town in its own right that has since become an area indistinguishable from Marietta. This was the mid-1990's and the organization was the Marietta-Cobb Winter Shelter, but it wouldn't stay a shelter for long.



It was JJ who first said the vision for a treatment center for folks experiencing homelessness could be made a reality. I said prove it, and he did. Prior to that, after years of working in homeless shelters, I could count on one finger the number of guys on the streets that I knew who had gotten sober. Now, thanks to JJ and all those others who shared the vision, I know thousands of people who were once on the

street and are now in their own home, taking care of their families and contributing to our community.

Of course, JJ's name is on the building that became a reality in 2001 because what JJ said about people's capacity for change was absolutely correct. But I want to clear up a common misconception: The building itself is not named after JJ. The entire campus is a JJ Bremner Recovery Community. Our women's campus is a JJ Bremner Recovery Community. Everything this organization does and will ever do will be a JJ Bremner Recovery community.

Thousands of people in our community and beyond have a new life because JJ taught them, inspired them and when necessary, persuaded them to stay on the narrow and sometimes hard path to a better life. JJ saw the potential of our fledgling organization because he first saw the potential of those we served."

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tyler Driver".

Tyler Driver, Executive Director of The Extension

walking and being denied a bed at a local shelter, I was fed by volunteers at Homegrown Moto. Now I needed a nap. I walked next door to what I thought was maybe a tile store or a firehouse, curled up in a dirty rug under an old desk to catch a few winks. I woke up with three people standing over me. One asked if I was okay. Another asked if I wanted a hot coffee. The last asked me if I needed some warm clothes and wanted to come to a meeting. It just so happened to be the Sunday 1 PM Alcoholics Anonymous meeting at The Extension. It was full of people just like me. I was not alone.

I finally had hope.

At the end of the meeting, I picked up my white chip from Rick T. I was told that the AA room was also a men's winter shelter which opened at 8 PM if the temperature was cold enough outside. If it were not for Jason H. marking the temperature lower than it actually was, I promise I would not be here. His choice saved my life. He also explained that I should stick around in the morning if I was interested in the recovery program. I did stick around and was willing to do whatever it took to maintain my recovery.

On Monday, November 12th, I entered the recovery program at the men's campus. Over the next year, I would grow up. I would become employable again. I would forge amazing friendships and enjoy a camaraderie I had not experienced since my time in the Navy. Bruce, Coach, Cher, and Mr. Jordan and Tony I would learn



that I no longer had room for complacency and dishonesty in my life. I would also learn that there is life beyond addiction.

Now I had a program.

Was it all sunshine and happiness? Certainly not. There was some intrapersonal conflict, there was a time in which I stood up for my principles and, by extension, the principals of the program when I was houseman that led to my demotion back to resident. I was not happy about the hit to my ego and pride, but I learned how to deal with disappointment and how to accept and work through the consequences of my actions. I knew my side of the street was clean, so to speak, in regard to the situation, but I put principals before personalities and apologized for my actions. I would never have done that in the past. This was real growth for me.

Did everyone make it through the program? No, they did not. Some of our brothers are out there. Some of our brothers have passed on into eternity. I still think of

most of them from time to time. When I work a shift or visit the Extension, I see the ghost of my memory of them. Smoking in the smoking area, getting an award at a house meeting, anywhere really. They are home.

In October of 2019 I graduated from the men's program. In March of 2020, I started working overnights as an employee of The Extension as needed.

For almost 25 years I let my addiction take the place of my dreams and destiny. **Instead of putting my efforts into my addiction, I am putting it into achieving my dreams.** In January 2020, I went to Eastman, Georgia on assignment as a government contractor and learned that they had a flight school. I did not think much about it until December 2020, but I have also had a lifelong ambition to fly. I applied to the flight program at Middle Georgia State University and was accepted. I packed most of my things in a storage unit and brought the rest to Eastman.

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When I applied for my first-class medical certificate, which is required to fly, there is a little box on the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) medical certificate application that asks if I had abused drugs and alcohol at any time. If I had checked no and the FAA found out, I could have been permanently banned from obtaining a medical certificate of any kind. I was defeated and did not know what to do as the FAA had requested reams of treatment documents, personal statements, and all the things. I did some research and found a guy by the name of Lyle Prouse. He had gone through something a little worse than I had. His experience is detailed in the Big Book with his personal story "Grounded." Lyle told me what I needed to do, who I should use as my aviation medical examiner (AME). He also suggested I join a group called "Birds of a Feather" which is an AA group that caters solely to pilots. JJ M. gave me the name of a pilot who was active in recovery and had gone through what I was going through now. Jordan S. and I spoke at length, and he agreed to sponsor me.

Without a medical certificate, I switched to the aviation science management program. In

December of 2022, I graduated with an Associate's degree.

After nearly three years of psychological testing, neuropsychological testing, interviews, medical exams, and FAA mandated monthly drug tests, I was granted a special issuance medical certificate shortly after Veterans Day 2023.


I started flying as a student pilot at MGA on January 22nd of this year. In May, that little checkbox, and the result of my actions leading up to having to be honest and transparent with the FAA cost tens of thousands of dollars out of my own pocket. Dishonesty would have cost me everything. Even if, for some reason in the future, I am unable to fly professionally because of medical reasons or because it is almost prohibitively expensive, **I will have done more than most - I never quit trying, and I always showed up.**

In May of this year, I will graduate with a Bachelor's of Aviation Science and Management. In August of this year, I begin my Masters of Business Administration at the University of Alabama (Birmingham). In addition to being a full-time student, I work full-time in sales and have just purchased a home in the Eastman area.

I have rebuilt the relationships with my friends and family that I thought would be impossible. My children see me as a positive role model, and we have a relationship that I thought we would never have. My peers see me as a leader and someone they can trust.

When I was homeless, the only person that I served was me. I have changed my life in such a positive way that I would be unrecognizable to the person that I was almost 6 years ago. I continue to be a positive force and give back to the community at large by volunteering my time, mentoring others, and sharing my story so that others see that it is possible to change. We all deserve another chance, but we have to earn it through our actions, not our words. I am living proof that not only does the program of Alcoholics Anonymous work, but that we do recover.

If this once hopeless addict can recover, so can you. All you need is honesty, open-mindedness, and the willingness to do anything for your sobriety. The Extension, its staff, my brothers and sisters in recovery, and my network of like-minded folks in recovery have helped me every step of the way. For all of these things, I remain forever grateful.



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Therapist Q & A

THANKS TO CRITICAL GRANT FUNDING FROM AMERIGROUP FOUNDATION, we have been able to launch a Family Services component to our program. Family therapy is now a part of every client's individual recovery plan, and family education is available to our alumni and our wider recovery community. Our family therapist Karen Clark is an associate professional counselor and has provided expert experience and guidance for our growing program.

WHY DO YOU THINK FAMILY THERAPY IS AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF RECOVERY?

Family therapy plays a crucial role in repairing and strengthening relationships that have been impacted by drug and alcohol addiction. Involving the entire family in the treatment process is essential for the collective healing and support of the individual in recovery and their loved ones. The ultimate goal is to rebuild trust in the family unit as a source of unwavering support, love, understanding, and pride, all of which are fundamental for long-term addiction recovery.

WHAT IS THE MOST REWARDING PART OF FAMILY THERAPY IN YOUR EXPERIENCE?

From my experience, some of the most fulfilling aspects of leading family therapy sessions are observing the renewed sense of hope in the individual struggling with addiction, witnessing the family coming back together with an increased understanding of healthier relationship dynamics, and providing an opportunity for the entire family to heal.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO THE FAMILY MEMBERS OF SOMEONE WHO IS STRUGGLING WITH SUD WHO WANTS TO HELP BUT AREN'T SURE HOW?

It's crucial to know that you are not alone in this journey. There are numerous community resources available to support you. Addiction is a family disease that impacts everyone involved emotionally, physically, and financially. Research has shown that families of people with addiction are deeply affected by their loved one's drug and alcohol abuse. Sharing your recovery journey with other families can provide strength and comfort.



HOW DO YOU SEE THE FAMILY SERVICES PROGRAM GROWING AT THE EXTENSION IN THE FUTURE?

At The Extension's Family Program, we currently offer addiction and recovery education for our clients and their families, as well as weekly family dynamics groups, quarterly family connection events, and monthly virtual support groups. Starting in August 2024, we plan to introduce monthly family workshops aimed at bringing more families together for educational sessions on topics related to the recovery process. Each monthly workshop will also feature support groups specifically designed for current clients and their families and alumni families transitioning from the program. Additionally, we are exploring the possibility of providing a support group for older children and teens during these monthly workshop events.





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