

# *Stay Humble, Stay Teachable*

*--by Michael Randazzo*



*“When I was finally able to admit that I had a problem and accept the fact that I didn’t have the answers, I was able to become teachable.”*

---

**Community college attended:** Manchester Community College

**Location:** Manchester, Connecticut

**Date success story was submitted:** 14 January 2019

**Community college sponsor/mentor and college affiliation:** Patrick Sullivan,  
English Department, Manchester Community College

**Key search terms:** Drug and alcohol recovery, returning adult student

**Academic major:** Communication

I stand in the auditorium at Manchester Community College, about to be inducted into the honor society, Phi Theta Kappa. An overwhelming sense of joy and gratitude cascades over me like a rushing waterfall. A quick survey of the spacious hall grants me a view of my close friends, men I am proud to call my brothers. They are arrayed in the back seats like an army, assembled in full force to show their support. They smile, nod and cheer me on. Their camaraderie and exuberant enthusiasm touches my heart.

The line of inductees proceeds towards the stage, and I get closer and closer. Another tentative glance at the crowd rewards me with the sight of my mother, sitting in the front row with my grandparents and aunt. I have not seen my mother in over six years. Tears well up in my eyes. Long, spectral-like tentacles of a turbulent past brush up against my spirit. Yet I am not perturbed. I am reminded of how far I have come. Seeing my mother again, after so many years of self-induced estrangement fills me with a bizarre cocktail of mixed emotions. Bittersweet, but warming to the heart and incredibly cathartic. I am so grateful that she is here to witness my accomplishments.

Finally, my name is called and I step upon the stage. I add my name to the list of inductees with a heavy hand. Then I am handed a white rose. Although made of fabric, the rose feels alive in my hands, pulsating with a vigorous energy. The rose seems to blossom before my eyes, mirroring the growth I have experienced in my body, heart and mind. I look up at the crowd, and I remember.

I remember a childhood of emotional distress and avid self-seeking. I had always felt like an outsider, unable to fit in, and unable to relate to my peers. I had been dogged by depression and self-esteem issues for as far back as I can remember. Those early days come back in a hazy

whirlwind, a long odyssey of hospitalizations and the pursuit of love and acceptance in all the wrong places.

I remember discovering the seemingly limitless joys of alcohol. The liquor had washed over me like a social lubricant, a magic salve that promised to take away my social anxiety and solve all my problems. Yet for me, the party never stopped. What started out as a seemingly effective coping mechanism, became an obsession. A nightmare. Slowly but surely, the booze took hold, eating through what little self-respect I had left like acid. Relations with my family eroded. Dreams faded away. Fear, self-obsession, and an inflated ego ruled supreme.

I caused a lot of damage while caught in the throes of alcoholism. I lied. I hurt people. Most of all I hurt myself. Eventually, the alcohol wasn't enough anymore and I started smoking crack. After that first hit, I spiraled even further downward at a dizzying speed. It didn't take long for me to discover the true meaning of hopelessness.

I was kicked out of my house because of my actions. What proceeded was a long misadventure of homelessness and couch surfing. I spent some time sleeping under a bush in the cemetery. When the opportunity arose, I would manipulate someone into letting me spend the night. Yet my options grew thinner, as more and more bridges were razed to ashes by my fiery, self-destructive actions. I found myself doing things I thought I would never do.

After some time, I was introduced to a man who planted the seeds of recovery. He introduced me to alcoholics anonymous. I attended a couple of meetings here and there, but my heart was not fully invested at the time. There was a part of me, that stubborn insanity which told me I was fine. I still wanted to drink and get high. Yet this early foray into AA planted a seed in my mind. Perhaps there was still hope? Perhaps there was an answer? But did I want it? For a long while still, the answer was no. I continued to live the way I was living, and my situation continued to worsen.

Then finally, bedridden, vomiting blood and wiping myself with dirty socks, I prayed to a god I had never believed in before, asking for help. In a moment of time that seems so blurry now, like a mirage, I reached out to that individual from before and he helped get me into treatment. That was three years ago, and I have not had a drink or a drug since.

When I was finally able to admit that I had a problem and accept the fact that I didn't have the answers, I was able to become teachable. I had to humble myself and allow other men to show me how to live. I learned a lot in these last few years about my disease, realizing that my addiction was just a symptom of a much larger issue. That issue was me. The way I viewed the world was askew. My insecurities and character defects were the purveyors of my disease, driving me to seek peace outside myself. I had a hole inside, and I was trying to fill it with external pleasures. I was selfish, and I was deathly afraid of life.

## **The AA Serenity Prayer**

**“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”**

The change that has occurred in my perception of the world and the way I conduct myself today is unfathomable. Today, I do my best to remain teachable. I listen to others. My self-seeking has been replaced with an increased concern over the welfare of others. Today, I conduct myself with honesty and integrity, and I endeavor to be of service wherever I can. This is not to say I am perfect. I still have much room to grow, and there are many areas of my life I can improve upon. Life continues to throw curveballs at me, yet today, I have the tools and the support at my disposal to overcome them.

The quality of my relationships has transformed as well. I have been blessed with some wonderful friends who genuinely care and support me. Today, I am able to reciprocate that affection. I was also able to make some amends to people I have harmed, and to reconnect with estranged family members.

The emotional growth I have had in these last three years coincides with my academic growth. Early in my recovery, I made a decision to go back to college. This was something that had always been in the back of my mind, but while in the grips of my disease, I would not dare to dream. Thankfully, that dream has reawakened. I enrolled at MCC in the spring of 2017 and started off by taking one class. Each semester after that, I increased my number of classes. I've been picking away at my associate's degree ever since, and I am very proud to say that, so far, I've been able to maintain a 4.0 GPA, and I was inducted into the honor society. This is an accomplishment I never dreamed would be possible. Yet because I was able to surrender, because I allowed people to guide me, and because I put forth my best effort, that dream came true.

I'm incredibly grateful to Manchester Community College for the opportunity. I was able to put myself into unfamiliar situations while being asked to do things I wasn't comfortable with at first. Yet I am better for it. The challenges at school in tandem with the challenges I face in my recovery has made me a stronger, confident, and productive person. School has offered me a new way to view the world, while introducing me to some remarkable people. I am truly grateful for all my experiences, and everything I have learned along the way. No matter how much we go through, or how far we fall, there is always hope. Today I look off to that glowing island on the distant horizon with nothing but optimism and gratitude in my heart. We will get there! One day at a time!

<b>Attempt Hours</b>	<b>Passed Hours</b>	<b>Earned Hours</b>	<b>GPA Hours</b>	<b>Quality Points</b>	<b>GPA</b>
39.000	24.000	24.000	24.000	96.00	4.00
0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.00	0.00
39.000	24.000	24.000	24.000	96.00	4.00

---

A screen shot of my 4.0 GPA! (January 2019)