

Sobriety Sentinel

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Renewed Beginnings:

Recovery author Karen Casey inspires, nurtures others' creativity

by BRENDA F galaforce@msn.com

Karen Casey continues to amaze me. Not only has she achieved more than 45 years of sobriety, she's also authored 29 books! Karen's first book, *Each Day a New Beginning*, was published anonymously in 1982 and has sold three million copies in the four decades since.

My copy of *Each Day* dates back to around 1992, when I was first coming in and out of the rooms of AA. This daily meditation book was geared toward women, and I found it very comforting and personal to read daily.

For several years here in Missouri, I'd heard about a workshop for writers and non-writers in 12-step recovery at FRESH Renewal Center. Situated on 92 acres just north of Augusta, FRESH was an oasis of serenity with a pond, a labyrinth and storybook Swiss-style chalet. Karen was involved in the workshop for 25 years, traveling to the quaint rural location from her homes in Minnesota and Florida.

I had the opportunity to attend two of Karen's workshops, in 2018 and 2019. Karen teaches and encourages journal writing for spiritual growth. She says, "God speaks to me through my writing."

I had often considered myself a writer but never made time for it, and I certainly didn't see it as part of my Eleventh Step spiritual practice. Often writing for professional reasons, for publication, or for marketing reasons, I never "allowed" myself the pleasure of writing for the pure joy of it. I never realized that writing can provide healing to past hurts, help a sober person understand their life stories better, and also lead to forgiveness of someone on my Fourth Step list.

Karen will often provide thought-provoking prompts to encourage first reflection and then writing. Her prompts are

For more, please see RENEWED, Page 2



Serving Sober Nightlife

We interviewed **Group 164's Victoria A** about downtown St. Charles's premiere alcohol-free nightlife spot, **The Mocktail Lounge**, as well as Victoria's sobriety and her professional background in service-industry culture:

Thanks, Victoria, for talking with us for this article. Why don't you start by telling us about your role with the Mocktail Lounge and what we could expect to find there?

I started with the Mocktail Lounge in 2021 as a waitress then became a manager there, which simply meant making sure we had inventory stocked and entertainment booked.

The entertainment ranges from solo guitar players performing classic rock or country, chess game nights, dance lessons, even speed dating.

They do sober karaoke every second Friday of the month. Soberoke (laughs).

Do you know, what was the genesis of the decision to open a spot like this?

We just noticed there was very much a lack of places to go for sober people to have a nightlife - hang out, have something to do and have some good-quality drinks that are not just soda.

So the owner, Brandy, decided to open this place in downtown St. Charles. Prior to launch, Brandy and a friend experimented at home with various drink recipes until they were satisfied with their mocktail menu.

A bunch of us went into the building and re-did the whole thing - it used to be this awful dive bar that had holes in the wall and a broken bathroom. It was rough.

It looked like our drinking days just up on a wall, that we had to repair. Just like recovery, it took a second, but now it looks a lot prettier.

Do you think this simulation of a bar setting could be detrimental to folks who are newly sober?

Well, word of warning - there are nonalcoholic beers and wines served here.

I can see how a newcomer coming in, in that kind of atmosphere, could be triggered. I do recommend that if you're raw in your recovery, just a short time in, you may not necessarily want to come here right away.

But this setting is adult-friendly,

kid-friendly, pet-friendly. We'll give you puppucinos for your dog. We have changing tables in the bathrooms, board games, family games and not-so-family games like Cards Against Humanity.

We offer free bottomless coffee too, so it is still a place to come hang out and not have to worry about the pressures of having drunk people all around you.

I think it's a better place than you *could* be, because anyone who works there, manages it, owns it, is in AA and in recovery. There's a lot of good sobriety there. But I can understand where there could be controversies.

For more, please see **MOCK, Page 2**

Success leads to stress, booze, despair, AA

by GREG M Group 484

The youngest of eight children, I grew up in a home filled with chaos but also much love. My dad worked for himself as a mechanic in a three-bay repair shop he bought for himself in 1974. My mom remained in the home, raising the kids.

Alcohol was not typically found in our home when I was younger. I did not have my first drink until the age of 13 or 14. During high school and college, alcohol was a

friend but not a close one. I could take it or leave it for most of my adult life until my early 40s, when my social drinking progressed into full-blown alcoholism.

I graduated college with a degree in accounting, intending on seeking a career in that field. However, as life often does, it had other plans for me. During my studies, I worked part-time with my dad and both brothers, who had joined him as well by that time, working in the shop.

I remained on after I graduated because working there was fun,

but it also afforded me the opportunity to accomplish what I really wanted to do, run a business.

It wasn't long before I had convinced my brothers and my dad to move forward with the first of many expansions of the business. Each time we expanded, we reaped the financial benefits. What we did not see coming was all the headaches that come with running a growing business. This is where the trouble started for me.

Upon opening our second location, I was not prepared for the stress of essentially going it on my

own. The reality did not match my dreams. I quickly found myself drinking beer every evening in order to relax. Beer turned to wine, and wine turned to vodka.

Within two years, I was drinking every single evening and all day on the weekends. In my mind, I told myself, *I'm in control. This is what successful people do.*

Meanwhile, I was miserable inside. I had lost my happiness. It all came to a head one morning when I pulled onto the lot of our second location. The lot was filled with broken vehicles, like it generally

had begun to be. Business was good.

I slowly got out of my truck, steadying myself from the snort of vodka I downed before work. But I just could not go inside. The thought of dealing with another stressful day was too much.

I called my family and told them the truth about how I was barely getting by. That day was my first attempt at getting sober by myself. I had some success in not drinking but had no success in regaining my happiness.

It was not until I walked through

the doors of AA that I began to get that back. Don't get me wrong, we all know recovery is not instantaneous, and I had setbacks. But I had heard enough stories by that time - 90 meetings in 90 days - to believe that, if I stuck with the program of AA, I might just wind up happy again.

Now here I am, at age 53, experiencing the life I've always dreamt of.

My wife and kids love me, my brothers trust me, and my Higher Power carries me when I can no longer walk.

ATTENTION, YOU! YEAH, YOU!

District 14 needs Committee Chair positions filled for Accessibilities, Grapevine and Bridging the Gap.

Additional District 14 positions, including officer positions, will be available for 2023.

Please call John A at 314-583-7074 or George T at 314-852-9404 for more information about these exciting service opportunities!

BIRTHDAYS

Mary Anne S	4/24	39 years	GROUP 164		
Mark R	5/14	42 years	Jamie C	5/23	1 year
Nancy S	5/25	35 years	Donnie W	6/11	33 years
			GROUP 77		
			Nick B	4/25	13 years
			Jennifer S	4/23	9 years
			Jim S	5/29	4 years
			GROUP 5		
			Harold McC	5/20	32 years
			GROUP 4094		
			Bill C	June	31 years

RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible.

No more journeys to the bottom

I believe that my journey to bottom started with the first drink of Mad Dog at age 13 and spread through the next 31 years. Even though I don't have a desire to drink anymore, I keep going to AA so I don't start another journey to the bottom. I can't see how the second trip would be any more fun than the first. The first trip wasn't fun, anyway.

Even during dry periods before AA, I was still on a downward journey. It may have been slowed, but I couldn't stop it. Until I came to

AA, the direction didn't change.

I've been a proud member of AA for more than 16 years. Hearing stories of how people stopped going to meetings, doing service work, meeting with their sponsor and trusting their Higher Power - then went back out and drank, only to find out that it is many times faster to the bottom - keeps me coming back.

If I don't take that first drink, I will never have to start that journey again.

-Lary B, Group 77

People can live normal lives with only one kidney. As long as the living donor is evaluated thoroughly and cleared for donation, the donor can lead a normal life after the surgery.

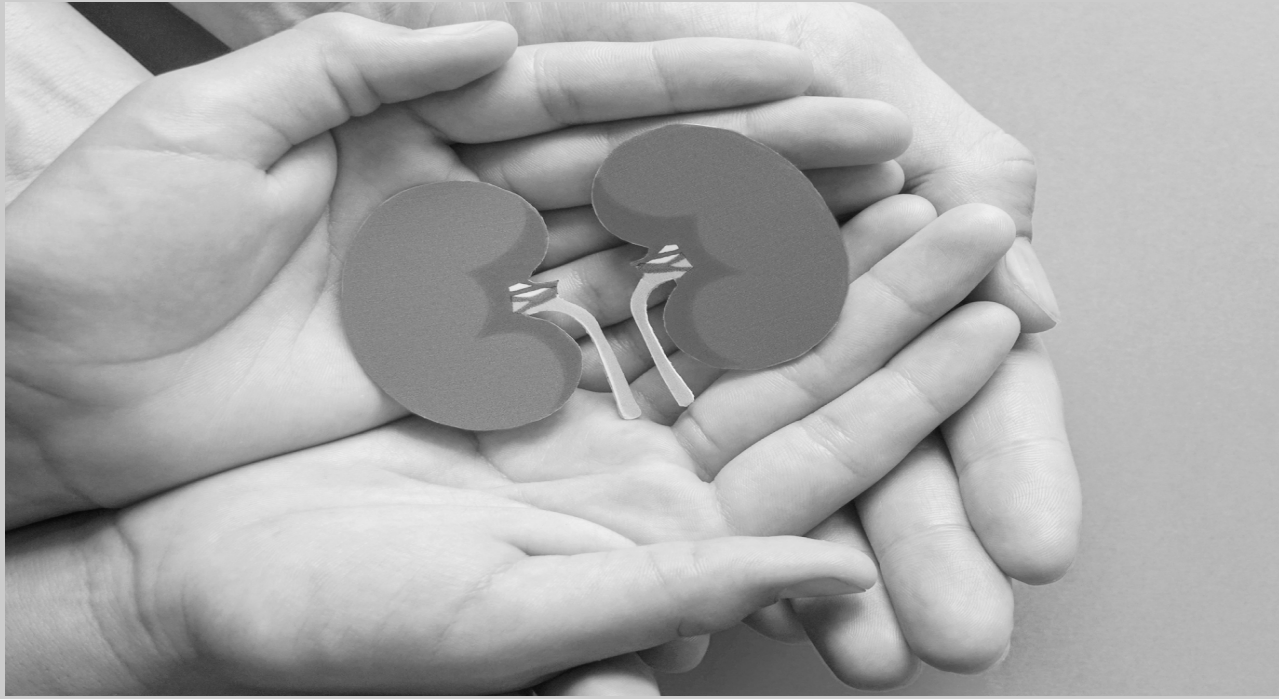
More than 100,000 people are on the national waitlist for a life saving organ.

You don't have to be related to someone to donate a kidney to them. In fact, one in four living organ donors is not biologically related to the recipient (the person who receives a donated organ). Spouses, in-laws, close friends, church members, and even members of the same community can all be living donors.

In non-directed donation, the donor does not name the specific person to get the transplant. The match is arranged based on medical compatibility with a patient in need.

The best way to find out how you can help someone in need of a kidney is by asking them how you can help.

-Courtesy of care coordinator Cody



Freely Give: AA member donates kidney, receives joy

by JEFF C Group 77

I used to love to donate blood, but in the '90s - after gallons of donations - I was told I couldn't donate anymore due to a false positive test result for HIV. I still can't donate blood, but last month, I donated one of my kidneys.

It started with a letter I got in January. An old roommate wrote and told me her favorite niece - who I'd often heard her gush over - needed a kidney. *No problem, I thought. I'm in. She can have one of mine.*

Weirdly, though, I found out very shortly after that the favorite niece didn't need a kidney after all. But now I knew I would be willing to donate one.

Same month same year, this lady I thought was crazy joined my meeting at Campus Office with a story about having to take her daughter great distances to dialysis every second day. I asked what I could do to help.

Crazy Lady then proceeded to look at me as if I was stupid. She said, "Jessica needs a kidney."

How interesting. I knew exactly what I could do to help. I told her a bit of my "favorite niece" story and asked for information on how to volunteer.

I filled out a four-page questionnaire then was contacted by Cody, who became my living donor care coordinator. In March, I started what seemed to be a

hundred different tests. Dozens of blood draws. Chest X-ray. EKG. Chest-contrast scan. Multiple-choice 200-question psych exam.

The psych exam was due to the fact that somewhere along the way, Jessica's BFF volunteered to donate her kidney, a half-century newer than mine.

To recap: the favorite niece didn't need my kidney anymore, and neither did Jessica, but I still wanted to give up my kidney. They had to make sure I was of sound decision-making mind.

All the testing and visits were done at SSM Health Saint Louis University Hospital, the most beautiful facility of its type. I was invited down to meet nurses, surgeons and surgeon leaders, all on a red carpet.

On May 25, I underwent laparoscopic donor nephrectomy surgery with Chintalapati Varma. He was the person I was most impressed with, until I met his boss, Stanford graduate Krista Lentine.

Afterward, care coordinator Cody asked if I'd like to meet the recipient. I hesitated. I didn't want anyone to think that I was any better or less than others.

My daughter changed my mind. She had waited all day for my surgery to get done, and she told me about meeting the kidney recipient's sister in the waiting area, and how the smile of the recipient's sister lit the room when she found out that the donor was the father of the person she'd just been talking to.

The recipient's sister proceeded to tell my daughter how she had waited on her brother for years through all his treatments, adding that she had never given up hope that a donor would eventually materialize.

All is well with me. My stay in hospital lasted two more days. My friend John A - who shuttled me to and fro several times during this process - met me and Cody at the hospital valet station, and I went home with minimal pain and scripts to solve when needed.

On June 22, I'll make another pilgrimage to my now-favorite hospital to coax the fear out of my new friend Jessica and her donor friend Krista. I'll go up to the seventh floor with donuts for the nurses, Jeanette and Ella, who were always there with a smile to entertain whatever little BS complaint I had.

Meanwhile, I'll be in my garage this afternoon, seeing if I can swing a club. I forgot to ask my doctor his thoughts on that. Also on my to-do list - work with Cody the care coordinator to get my name taken off the blood donor blacklist all these years later.

This has been a six-month journey. The purpose, the satisfaction, the joy of these last six months of my life all equate to that of first six months I spent in AA and then some.

I never thought I'd be able to give back what I had so freely taken - I'll not stop now!

Mock: some bring friends

From Page 1

Do you have background working in the more traditional bar or restaurant atmosphere?

I do. I worked at a bar and grill in Wentzville for about seven years, so I did all that stuff, in sobriety even. For me, it was *This is my job*. It was too busy for me to think about drinking. But I also kept close with my sobriety sisters, with my sponsor, my meetings, all the things I do to keep sober, so I never had an inkling to worry about it.

My first serving job, though, at Red Robin, it was so hard: 1) not to get mad at people for not finishing their drink - because, really, who *does* that?! - and, 2) not to just slam it real quick before I go off to the dish-washing tub.

I didn't last long there as a waitress.

The Mocktail Lounge has to be a more fulfilling gig for you.

Definitely. For me, I was able to help people who were in AA - newcomers who would come in and say, "I'm really glad this place exists, because I was gonna go to the bar across the street."

I'd have some really good conversations with newcomers and people who just don't drink. They would bring their relatives, friends, whoever, who do have a problem and say, "Hey, look, there is a place you can go and have fun and not have to worry about breaking out in handcuffs."

Wait, you said "was." Do you not work there anymore?

I actually left the Mocktail Lounge after I had my baby. I needed something a little more 9-5, so now I'm working for a roofing company, and they are all sober. All of us that work here are sober and in the program.

No matter where I go, I'm surrounded by sober people (laughs).

-Andrew H Group 484

Renewed: Writing brings therapy, purpose

From Page 1

very poignant, to the point, and are questions that you may never have considered writing about. Her suggestion to write a letter of forgiveness to someone in your family - even if you never send the letter, even if the person is no longer living - was an exercise that became extremely important and healing for me personally.

I had a sister who was "that sister," the one who was a bully to me as a child, who forced me to clean the house and cook dinner, who made me kneel in the corner because I "needed punishing," according to her. With an absent mother at work, my older sister was sad, abandoned and needing to control another. She became the person I was most afraid of.

The letter I chose to write in Karen's class was to my older sister. I could not have predicted at the time that the letter, written in the fall, would become part of my eulogy to my sister at her funeral in the spring. She

committed suicide and left my family in shock that someone so independent and strong-willed would leave us.

Karen Casey has books that will challenge you, comfort you and teach you about areas of your life that may need healing. (See the sidebar on the right for some of my favorites.) Karen hosts a couple of AA Zoom meetings each week and speaks on webinars for almost any group or district that asks her. She gives constantly from a well of endless love. Her Twelfth Step work is admirable, but she serves with humility.

During the start of the Covid pandemic in 2020, Karen could not travel to Missouri to lead a workshop. I asked her to lead a discussion on Zoom for some of us who had been to a previous retreat. She gladly agreed, and it has turned into a monthly group with sober people - and a few Al-Anons for balance - from all over the country. Contact me through this newsletter if you are interested in attending this free session with Karen.

Just like any other meeting in recovery, it's a safe place to check in, share some journal writings and provide love and support to each other. I have grown as a writer, become more active in service - writing for this newsletter, for example - and I have developed deeper friendships with sober people.

Karen was able to travel to Augusta one more time, early in June of this year. She hosted a picnic, reading and book-signing, back in that special Augusta location. We sat under the sacred white oak tree in a circle. We shared our pain and loss from the last two years, talked about lost family members and friends, but also shared our joys and our dreams. With Karen, it's always a positive and uplifting experience. There's always something to look forward to in our lives. Joy can co-exist with pain.

She is a long-term student of the spiritual teaching known as *A Course in Miracles*, and she liberally shares quotes from her studies. These quotes mash up nicely with

AA readings and steps.

I continue to learn fun stories about Karen, like the fact she owned a Harley and attended Sturgis with her second husband, who also had a motorcycle. He was a pilot, built his own plane, and was an adventurous sort of guy. They have traveled the world, lived in Naples, Fla., and had a log cabin at one time in Indiana, her birthplace.

Karen shows us by example that we can achieve anything we put our minds to, with our Higher Power's help and guidance. She writes a lot about gratitude and shares ways to help stay in the present moment and find gratitude daily as our medicine.

Knowing Karen and other sober followers of her writings and teachings, I am a better person. I have found my voice. I don't have to hold the pain inside any longer. God can heal me through my journal writings. I surrender when I write. I give it up and detach from harmful thoughts.

Her latest book *Each Day a Renewed Beginning* is available on Amazon.

PERSONAL FAVORITES:

- *Fearless Relationships* is a great read for anyone in a sober relationship trying to navigate the many changes that happen as one person grows in sobriety.
- *Let Go Now: Embracing Detachment* is another one that has helped me with my Al-Anon program and learning about detachment.
- *Change Your Mind and Your Life Will Follow*, a finalist for the MS Society Books for a Better Life Awards, is another title I have on my reading table in a special spot where I can easily pick it up. There's also a companion workbook called *Getting Unstuck*.

All opinions expressed are those of individuals and do not necessarily reflect the views of AA as a whole. To give feedback or report Tri-County AA news or events, please email sentinel@tricityaa.org

PRODUCED FOR ST. CHARLES COUNTY, LINCOLN COUNTY AND WARREN COUNTY IN EASTERN MISSOURI