



November 2020

As of the writing of this letter, the Bay Area, and in fact most of the world, is continuing to go through a difficult time as we work to keep the most vulnerable among us safe and healthy. We understand that many of you are going through serious challenges right now, but want to share the uplifting story of Annabel. **Her story may be just what you need to hear right now**, and for some of you, continuing to support the women we serve may still be important and doable for you – and we are grateful if that is the case. But if you are struggling right now or everything just feels very uncertain, please know that we empathize, and you are in our daily thoughts and prayers.

Annabel's story is one of tenacity and courage – **an inspiring reminder that by being open to help and motivated for change, we can get through difficult times on a path to a better future.**

Annabel was born in New Mexico. She grew up with her brother, her mom who was a nurse, and her dad who was a doctor. From 6-14 years old she and her family lived overseas in Saudi Arabia.

“Through our travels, I saw a lot, I had a great education,” says Annabel. “But I remember, even at 6 years old, seeing how important alcohol was to my mom. She was an addict too. I was 6 when I had my first drink and when my mom taught me how to smoke cigarettes.

I went to high school in Arizona. I was drinking, smoking pot, and experimenting with meth and my grades were falling. But I still graduated. I got into college at the University of Arizona because I paid someone to take my SAT and ACT. I did college on my own though. I was on the straight and narrow after all those years of seeing my mom and how she would change every time she used something. But then when I was 22, my dad was diagnosed with colon cancer, stage 4, and he died the same year.



After my dad passed away, I picked up the alcohol again, and I started doing cocaine and benzodiazepine. From then on alcohol was in my life. When I was 28, I went into treatment for the first time.

I was working in marketing for a large real estate company in Arizona, but my life was a mess and I needed to start new somewhere. I ended up going to an extended treatment center in the Bay Area.

I achieved a period of long-term sobriety and got married. I moved to San Francisco and had a good job in tech. I later moved to Marin County, and I relapsed with alcohol. I started using meth again, and opioids, and I went downhill. ***I lost my Fortune 500 career, I became homeless, I couldn't stay clean for five minutes...I got a misdemeanor for meth and spent time in jail, I had a DUI and spent more time in jail, and was on probation for years.*** I failed, I absolutely failed. I was so deeply into my addiction. My mom passed away during this time, and my brother stopped talking to me.

I decided to move back to SF where I had a good history of being clean. I went into treatment at Ohlhoff Recovery Program and spent \$120,000 there for six months of treatment. I had a horrible exit plan. I moved into a seedy motel and ***I relapsed. I was scared, I was tired.*** I felt like a total failure after coming out of 6 months of treatment.

A woman in AA, Cheyanne, recommended that I reach out to Good Shepherd Gracenter. When I was introduced to Gracenter and sat down for an interview, ***I was not used to normal human kindness. They didn't want anything from me, and I didn't know what that was.*** All Sandra and Sr. Marguerite wanted was to help me come in and get on my feet and stay clean.



The first thing I had to do at Gracenter was just to stabilize. I was in such a bad place and starting from scratch again. I took baby steps. I went to AA, got a sponsor--Cheyanne, who had introduced me to Gracenter. I met the other women in the house and got to know them. I started working at Trader Joe's.

Sandra and Sr. Marguerite created a plan for me. They know just what to do. They gave me suggestions and helped me do things that were hanging over my head and making me fearful. Knowing that I had Sandra and Sr. Marguerite, and being able to trust people again was the biggest thing for me.

On most days at Gracenter, I would wake up at 4am, be at work at 6am, then after work go the gym, and be back at Gracenter for a 6:30pm dinner where we would all come together like family. I didn't miss dinner once. I would hang out with staff; I played with the dog.

I worked on the mental piece, the spiritual piece, the economic piece. Things started to come together. ***With the support of Gracenter, I got my taxes done, which I hadn't done since 2010, and I went to DUI school. My credit was terrible. Gracenter connected me to Consumer Counseling Credit Services, and I've improved my credit.***

From Marin County, I had outstanding court fees, they helped me budget and pay off a little each month. I owed \$4,000 and got it down to \$0 by the time I left Gracenter. When I first came to



Gracenter I wasn't working and they didn't have me pay. Once I started at Trader Joe's, they charged me based on my income, and **Gracenter had me start a savings account with money that wasn't going to rent, so I had first and last month's rent to move to permanent housing.** They set you up for success.

And spiritually, I understand now what they mean when they say there is a God that will take care of me, and shows up in so many ways in my life. I am under His care. That was new for me. When I started at Gracenter, I hated God. I was angry. I gave AA a chance, and all that that changed. With my upbringing, I had a lot of trauma and PTSD and was always waiting for the next shoe to drop. **It was through AA, my time at Gracenter, and long walks in the**

park by myself, that my world became safe and peaceful. I realized there are good people out there, and not everyone wants something from me. My life has changed.

I achieved the goals that I had put together with Sandra, and I graduated from Gracenter. I moved into a studio apartment at City Hope, a place Sandra recommended for me. I pay rent. I still have a case manager, but I have more independence. I go to work, pay bills, volunteer, go to AA and the gym. There are a lot of women from Gracenter who live here and it's nice to have them here too.

My brother and I are talking again. This spring I am going on a family vacation with them. It's a big deal for me; I haven't done that in years.

I will continue to live at City Hope a long time if I can. I volunteer through here like I did through Gracenter. We feed homeless people in the Tenderloin and do grocery delivery. **I have been taught how to not be selfish. I've learned how to show up and keep commitments, and I've learned how to get my priorities straight. I have been doing really well.**

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At Gracenter, we are determined to continue providing women like Annabel with the opportunity to achieve long-term recovery from addiction, even as we face funding challenges as a result of COVID-19. If you are able to, **please consider a donation**, which is **100% tax-deductible**, to provide the support needed for women like Annabel to turn their lives around. Your support make this program possible.

- A gift of \$1,000 sponsors one woman for a month and includes **housing, three meals each day, one-to-one recovery mentoring, job and school application support, and connections to community volunteerism.**
- A gift of \$500 **provides job-readiness mentoring sessions for 13 women as they pursue their goals, including resume support and referrals to job training.**
- A gift of \$100 provides **40 nutritious home-cooked meals that support each woman's health and foster community among the women.**
- A gift of \$50 provides **basic toiletries like toothbrushes and soap for women arriving at Gracenter.**

Gifts of any size will make a difference in the lives of the women we serve at Gracenter. Thank you for considering a donation.

With gratitude,



Sr. Marguerite Bartling, RGS
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Executive Director, Good Shepherd Gracenter

P.S. Does your company offer matching gifts? If so, please email me and I will help make sure your gift is doubled.