



# WWEN Connection

## Wisconsin Women's Education Network

on Addiction, Recovery & Prevention

Winter 2004



“Winter is the time for comfort--it is the time for home. “

--Edith Sitwell

## A Beacon To Light My Path

by Mary Unmuth

“*A voice called me from my oblivion. ‘Fitzwilliam. Fitzwilliam.’ I was surrounded by light, and could feel someone was beside me. I felt no fear, though I could see nothing familiar; in fact, I could see nothing but radiance.*”

That quote, from Alyson L’s *A Beacon To Light My Path*, is the beginning of a superb story describing an orphan boy of some station requesting guidance and purpose from a radiant source of light. The young man, while on his knees and in prayer, alternately calls to God, his departed father, and anyone else to give him a beacon to light his path and to make sense of what lay ahead of him and what he should try to accomplish.

There are few of us who don’t understand what this young man is crying out for. His plea for a beacon to light his way is a common theme for most of us. In order to deal with existential questions such as God, death, life, purpose and love, we look for guidance from one with more vision than ourselves. As the story unfolds, we find that the guiding power is within the young man himself. The radiance is a part of him. They are meant to be together. His job is to make a choice about what is to be.

This story mirrors the journey of recovery. Although at first we seek a higher power outside of ourselves to begin the journey, later on we discover that the power, the radiance, is also our own.

Reading through the *WWEN Connection*, you’ll notice that Beacon House is the featured treatment center this quarter. In Ms. Gerlach’s interview, we find out just how much Beacon House is truly a lighted path for women in recovery (see pgs 2 & 3). Our *Pathways in Recovery* article features Collette Stewart and her experience with teaching Pilates and what it means to her to see women move toward change and enlightenment on all levels (see page 7). Jamie Meyer, in the *Putting a Face to Recovery* article, becomes radiant as she tells her story of moving beyond addiction with its challenges and the choices she makes to sustain her recovery (see page 5).

Alyson L writes, “*Just before the light grew entirely too bright to see, her face came into sharp focus for a single instant.*” That was the moment, for just a second, when everything must have become crystal clear to Fitzwilliam. May we all have moments such as that when we kneel and pray, fall to sleep, and wake up to a sense of peace and purpose.

(To check out Alyson L’s story on the web, *A Beacon To Light My Path*, please go to [www.austen.com/derby/alysonl6.htm](http://www.austen.com/derby/alysonl6.htm)).



WWEN Home Page:

[www.dcs.wisc.edu/  
pda/wwen](http://www.dcs.wisc.edu/pda/wwen)



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Mary Gerlach is the Executive Director of Beacon House, Friends of Women in Recovery, Inc. She was interviewed by Mary Unmuth, editor of the **WWEN Connection** newsletter.

# About Beacon House



**Mary Gerlach**

**WWEN:**

Total abstinence is a first and foremost goal at Beacon House. Do you believe this goal discourages some women who want to become sober but fear such a lofty aspiration?

**Ms. Gerlach:**

No, I do not. I think women in a lesser level of care environment that are looking at abuse issues rather than dependence may be discouraged. But Beacon offers a higher level of care for dependency on alcohol or drugs. Once a woman has reached this level, she most likely has suffered such great consequences that there is no room to argue that total abstinence is necessary. If a woman suffers a relapse, we do not necessarily look at it as failure; often a person can gain insight and recognize that sobriety is attainable, recovery is possible, and there are resources out there to help. After experiencing 90 days of sober living and a change of lifestyle, women tend to seek out help. Beacon gives them the tools to use for sobriety and they take those tools with them.

**WWEN:**

Beacon House has an annual auction. Checking over your latest April 2004 auction on-line, the quality and number of the auction items were rather impressive. Who can one contact to donate an auction item? What is the money from the auction used for?

**Ms. Gerlach:**

To donate an auction item or cash, please contact any Beacon House staff member at (920)923-3999. Our list on our website for 2005 will start being updated after January first. The money from the auction is used to keep our daily rates as low as possible for our clients. With this money, we are able to pay for the unexpected maintenance and expenses of running a large home. As any homeowner knows, things break down when you least expect, or the heating bill increases 25% when you anticipated less. Beacon House is a 100-year-old Victorian home, which makes the setting so special for someone in treatment; it's a homelike atmosphere, rather than an institutional setting.

**WWEN:**

What do you feel is the most important ingredient in making Beacon House work?

**Ms. Gerlach:**

It is definitely the team effort; this is a small, extremely loyal group of employees that keep the system running smoothly. We know that it is a big step to go into treatment and we work very hard at making a woman feel comfortable, finding her way around and knowing what is expected of her. This is an excellent support system for a woman combating her addiction. Beacon offers a safe homelike environment for women to



begin to rebuild their lives emotionally, spiritually and behaviorally to ensure long-term recovery. We treat each woman without “judging” her. We can be compassionate and understanding while still holding them accountable for their actions.

**WWEN:**

How does Beacon House keep the community aware of the needs of women recovering from alcohol or other chemical dependency?

**Ms. Gerlach:**

Beacon often receives requests for speakers to address service clubs and organizations. One of our founding board members such as Mary Ann Steffes or I will speak about our services and the disease of addiction. Our yearly auction draws community awareness to Beacon as a local non-profit agency. Personally, I belong to community organizations and business groups which allow me to network with area leaders and act as ambassador for Beacon in the community. We are very blessed in that there is excellent collaboration among agencies in Fond du Lac and we have great support from the community.

**WWEN:**

The design of the Beacon House web site is quite nice with an absolutely wonderful graphic of a young girl with outstretched arms, an alluring light, and a caption that reads, “Remember feeling like this?” What do you think your web site says to a woman looking for a treatment center?

**Ms. Gerlach:**

That freedom from the chains of addiction can be yours. I think that the picture of the little girl is saying that it is possible to have that carefree life again with the help of their higher power, Beacon Staff, and their peers. Life may not always be “perfect” but, with guidance in the right direction, hopefully it can be enjoyable again.

**WWEN:**

Please share a story of “Lighting a Path to Recovery” from Beacon House.

**Ms. Gerlach:**

At our annual Christmas alumni party, we ask volunteers to share a memory of Beacon if they wish. Here is one that is very memorable.

*Without Beacon, I would not be here today to celebrate. I am sure I would not be here at all . . . all my “road trips” were headed towards oblivion in Lake Michigan! I found people who understood me, who welcomed me and my disease, and taught me how to live with it instead of dying from it. I found lifelong friends and others I treasure. I would do anything for Beacon. It saved my life.*

The success stories make what we do here worthwhile. It brings all of the staff such joy when we hear from someone who is doing well. We even hear from those who maybe are not doing so well but that brings joy to us, too, because those past clients realize that we are a lifeline to sobriety and they are seeking help.

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“ . . . freedom from the chains of addiction can be yours.”  
--Mary Gerlach



**Beacon House**

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## Report: TV Alcohol Ads Up 97 Percent in Two Years

10/20/2004

A study by the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Georgetown University finds that television ads for alcohol increased 97 percent from 2001 to 2003, KETV-7 in Omaha, reported Oct. 12.

In Omaha, Nebraska, the report said, more than 124,000 alcohol commercials were aired on television in 2003, with 26 percent of the ads reaching viewers under the age of 21.

Furthermore, the study said that the most popular advertising times for alcohol advertisers were during the top 15 teen programs.

“Whether it’s by choice or by accident, certainly over a quarter of those ads were aimed at or were more likely to be seen by audiences primarily of youth,” said Loel Schettler of Project Extra Mile, an anti-drinking group in Omaha.

Budweiser of Omaha contends that it targets its advertising to an older age group. “Our target demographic is a little heavier male in the 25 to 49 demo,” said Mary Wajada, Budweiser’s public-relations director. “We have never been--nor will we ever be--trying to promote underage drinking.”

## Study Sees Less Drinking at Colleges with Prevention Policies

9/21/2004

A new study finds that colleges with multiple alcohol-prevention policies on and off campus have a lower drinking rate and reduced alcohol-related problems, according to the American Medical Association (AMA).

The study by the Harvard School of Public Health evaluated A Matter of Degree (AMOD), a program from the AMA that is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The program features interventions that colleges and universities can implement for students and surrounding communities to reduce the environmental factors that lead to high-risk drinking.

Among the interventions are alcohol advertising and promotion controls; keg registration; mandatory training for responsible beverage service; stronger, more consistent campus-university enforcement and police collaboration; restrictions on selling alcohol without a license; and alcohol-free activities in residence halls.

The report showed that institutions incorporating the majority of AMOD policies experienced a decline in drinking rates.

In addition, the report found that college students at schools participating in AMOD were less likely to skip class, be assaulted by a drunk student, or hurt themselves after drinking.

“AMOD policies and programs work because they go beyond the traditional prevention efforts that focus solely on the individual drinker,” said AMA President-elect J. Edward Hill, M.D. “Today’s college students face powerful social and commercial influences to drink. If we are to reduce the dangerous levels of campus drinking and its consequences, colleges and surrounding communities must cooperate to reduce the numerous environmental factors that contribute to alcohol abuse.”

The study’s findings are published in the October 2004 issue of the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

[www.jointogether.org/home/](http://www.jointogether.org/home/)

# Putting a Face to Recovery . . .

In High School the only way I could ease the pain of being an outcast was to drink. I failed college, headed for secretarial school, and got a job at a large company. For the first three years I did okay, drinking only after work and on weekends.

My first three treatments began in 1997. No one believed I was an alcoholic; I wasn't even sure myself. While running away to Santa Fe, my brain felt as if it was vibrating. It was at that point that I realized that I was physically addicted to alcohol.

I knew that a normal life was out of the question. I drank 24/7 just to feel normal. My parents planned my funeral. They would get calls from hospitals, jails, good samaritans, telling them where I was. In 1990, I had five seizures from withdrawal. During my travels I racked up \$50,000 in medical bills.

On one of my drunks, I ended up in a town on the Mississippi River. After another binge, I was homeless and met an older gentleman who offered me a room at his place. It was October 1992. On Christmas Eve he asked me to marry him. The first person I called was my grandfather. He was so relieved. He died the very next month, finally knowing that I would be okay. My parents and I drove to Cincinnati for his funeral. I was sober.

That spring I prayed for a baby. I drank again and was committed by my fiance and my father. The withdrawals weren't as bad as usual, because I had only been drinking for a few days. At the committal hearing, the doctor told everyone that this time I was going to make it because I was pregnant! That was April 22, 1993, and I haven't had a drink since.

My son is so beautiful. He saved my life. I finished college with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration and bought a little house. I've been teaching computer classes at the local community college since 2001. It doesn't pay a lot of money, but I love my job. My little one-person business offers private, in-home, computer lessons. Often, I can still become depressed, but I don't drink. Instead, I marvel at the beauty of everyday things and take nothing for granted.

Every chapter of a sober life brings new miracles, challenges, changes and surprises.



*Jamie* lives in Dubuque, Iowa. Her son Luke will be eleven in December. She teaches computer classes at a local community college. She is currently re-teaching herself math because she never did well in it and really wants to learn more about it. She also enjoys fixing up her little home.

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# WWEN Project Update



**A**cross the country, people are mobilizing on behalf of recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs. We are the recovery community-- people in recovery from alcohol and other drug addiction and their family members, friends and allies. Many of us belong to local recovery community organizations and know that there are many paths to recovery--self-help, professional treatment and medical interventions--and that all of these paths have proven to work.

For too long those most affected by the disease of addiction have been absent from the public policy debate. That's why **FACES & VOICES OF RECOVERY** was formed in 2001. We're a national campaign of individuals and organizations joining together with a united voice to advocate for public action to deliver the power, possibility and proof of recovery. **FACES & VOICES** supports local recovery advocacy by increasing access to research, policy, organizing and technical support.

We are joining with health care professionals, treatment providers and local elected officials to educate members of Congress. They need to know that millions of Americans are in recovery from addiction and about the barriers that need to come down to make it possible for people to get help when they need it. One way to do that is through the Congressional Caucus on Addiction, Treatment and Recovery. Representatives Jim Ramstad (R-MN), in recovery from alcoholism and Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) have been joined by over 50 members of the US House of Representatives in this important effort to raise the profile of addiction issues.

Times have changed. The recovery community is unifying to gain needed resources and to end discrimination against people in or seeking recovery. We are working to eliminate barriers to recovery for every American, every family and to help today's children and future generations who often are the biggest winners in the process of recovery.

Join the growing numbers of recovering people and their allies who are speaking out about how recovery leads to full and productive lives. Sign up to receive our bi-monthly eNews-letter by going online to [www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org](http://www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org) to find out about how recovery is happening all over America and what you can do to make it a reality for others.



**Pat Taylor, Campaign Coordinator**  
**FACES & VOICES OF RECOVERY**

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# Pathways In RECOVERY

\* Reality \* Exercise \* Centering \* Oneness \* Vitality \* Energy \* Relationships \* Yes I Can

## Evolutions

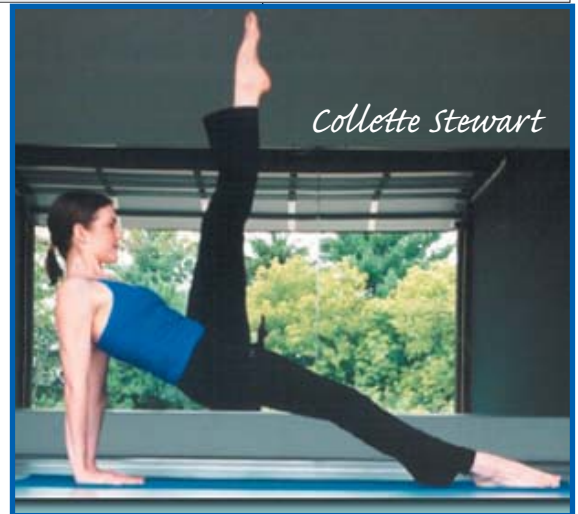
**P**ilates is a method of body conditioning that improves alignment and core strength. I first began doing Pilates as a dancer in college. At the time, I knew only a bit of the mat work, but adding those exercises into my warm-up gave me a sense of being centered and stable. Grounding, physically and emotionally, has always been a key obstacle in my life. I've always had a great sense of artistic and creative energy, but I've had to learn ways to structure those ideas. On a physical level, doing Pilates provided a clear and repetitive structure for strengthening and aligning my body that was very appealing and helpful for me.

After graduating college, I began to further study Pilates as a means of healing. I have had scoliosis (curvature of the spine) since I was very young and had put off having back surgery for the problem. Dance is a very important part of my life and the suggested surgery for correcting scoliosis leaves very little flexibility in the spine. Thus, those two paths seemed to be in conflict. So, I left the idea of surgery behind and began looking for ways to realign from the inside. Pilates has been a huge part of that process. The exercises focus on a uniform development of the body; on opening up awareness in parts of the body that are weak and/or stiff so that the body can bring itself into balance.

Teaching and practicing Pilates has opened up my awareness in many ways. I am constantly reminded how the physical body reflects the mental and spiritual self. Most people come to me with chronic neck, shoulder, and / or lower back pain (sometimes, they are so used to it that they hardly notice it). People tell me how they've always struggled with flat feet or that they have the "tightest hamstrings you have ever seen." And, at the outset, they are pretty unsure about how things *should* feel in their body.

We can't imagine what it would be like to live without those general aches and pains. But, every time, I observe as people change those patterns; I learn so much from the changes that occur. And, as people began to physically allow their shoulders and chest to open, they learn to let go of some anxiety that has been haunting them. As people release their tailbone so that it is no longer tucked under, they stand more solidly on their feet with more confidence. In general, I see people start to become more in touch with their own body awareness and they begin to feel and see the changes in their posture, strength, and ease of daily living. The result is always empowering for both of us.

As I continue to teach Pilates, my work has definitely evolved. I incorporate exercises and images from Pilates, yoga, dance and anything else I may have picked up along the way. I am a firm believer that the obstacles that challenge us on a mental and spiritual level also manifest on a physical level. As we open our awareness on one plane, we are presented with opportunities to change on all levels. The body is meant to move freely and easily, and as we achieve that flow in the body, we see that flow all around us. Movement teaches us that things always change and our job is nothing too serious . . . just to watch and grow.



**Collette Stewart** has a BFA in Modern Dance, is certified through The Pilates Center in Boulder, CO, and has been teaching for ten years. Collette has a holistic approach to the body and teaches in a way that promotes proper alignment, alleviates pain and injury, and improves overall fitness. Currently, Collette teaches group Pilates and yoga classes at **Capital Fitness** downtown Madison (302 E. Washington Ave., 251-1245) and at **Body in Balance** on the west side (6333 Odana Rd., 270-5212). Collette also teaches one-on-one sessions at **Capital Fitness**.



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# WWEN Connection

## Wisconsin Women's Education Network

on Addiction, Recovery & Prevention

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*We are now on the Web . . . Check us out at*  
[www.dcs.wisc.edu/pda/wwen](http://www.dcs.wisc.edu/pda/wwen)



## Many Voices One Journey

The WWEN Project's Video

*Many Voices One Journey* is the WWEN Project's video. In this video, seven women tell their recovery stories and explore issues surrounding women in treatment and recovery. The video has been segmented into topics for easier viewing and structuring of discussion groups with clients or workshop participants. The video was produced in September of 2001 and is 52 minutes long.

To view a clip of the video, *Many Voices One Journey*, click on the URL below.

[www.dcs.wisc.edu/pda/wwen/video.htm](http://www.dcs.wisc.edu/pda/wwen/video.htm)

If you do not have access to the web and would like to order a video, please contact Chris Dunleavy at 608-265-4267 or [cdunleavy@dcs.wisc.edu](mailto:cdunleavy@dcs.wisc.edu).

Our thanks go to the Wisconsin Bureau of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services for supporting this effort.

## Wisconsin's Compulsive Gambling Awareness Campaign

The Department of Health & Family Services

[www.dhfs.state.wi.us/substabase](http://www.dhfs.state.wi.us/substabase) has entered into a contract with the Wisconsin Council on Problem Gambling (WCPG) [www.wi-problemgamblers.org](http://www.wi-problemgamblers.org)



to develop a statewide awareness campaign addressing the issue of compulsive gambling. The WCPG is one of 33 state affiliate councils of the National Council on Problem Gambling

[www.ncpgambling.org](http://www.ncpgambling.org). Their primary mission is to educate and promote public understanding of problem gambling and the disorder of compulsive gambling. Among the initiatives planned for the campaign are the expanded visibility of

the Council's 24-hour help line which provides referral services for callers, a public relations/media campaign, piloting of a high school gambling prevention curriculum, training for human service professionals, and the development and implementation of a statewide information and networking conference. The WCPG is located in Green Bay. Toll-free help line for gamblers or family members is 1-800-426-2535.

