

Wyoming Tribune Eagle of December 29, 2016: "Recover WYO. keeps belief in hope alive"

Years ago, in a course of creative-nonfiction writing, Lynn Carlson and I became writerly friends. Since then I have cherished the occasional Carlson story, usually based on personal experience, that comes my way. Recently I was in for a singular treat: my friend had edited the just-published "Watch My Rising: A Recovery Anthology," which highlights the work of Recover Wyoming (RW) in Cheyenne and beyond.

Lynn Carlson is also the author of one of its stories, "With All Due Respect," which traces her relationship with sister Laura, and the sister's descent, many years earlier, into alcohol addiction. Laura had returned to University of Wyoming, "two kids in tow." She graduated and became the director of the university's Adult Student Center. Her backsliding caused chaos and pain in the family. Back in class Lynn had confided that, to cope with her sense of loss, she composed a eulogy for her sister; in the just-published story, she observes glumly that Laura couldn't hang on to the university position. In those days, when the sister was trying to preserve the image of a recovering alcoholic, she drank "at home, alone."

"With all due respect, Laura, alcohol isn't doing you any favors," Lynn retorts as her sister leaves unacknowledged her own addiction:

"Meth is a huge problem in Wyoming," says Laura. "I'm just so grateful I never got hooked on meth."

Is this the same Laura Griffith who initiated Recover Wyoming, who has led the organization these five years, who even today serves as its executive director? Indeed, it is. Laura has been sober for thirteen years, which Lynn considers one of her family's great blessing.

"My journey into sustained recovery happened only when despair became so large that it nearly overwhelmed me," comments Laura in the anthology's Foreword. It began when something caused her to cry out, "this time, this time, I am willing to do anything to survive."

These days someone seeking recovery arrives at RW daily. A friendly greeting awaits, coupled with acceptance and heartfelt support. As is well-known to the staff and family members who run RW—Lynn Carlson is one of its volunteer coaches—recovery is a struggle where backsliding must be taken in stride. Wherever the individual finds herself or himself on the recovery road, he or she is met with an encouraging smile. A staff member willing and able to "walk alongside them as they take the next step" is always on call, refraining from judgment.

RW is part of The New Recovery Advocacy Movement, which estimates that 24 million Americans are currently in recovery. The affliction, which some professionals tag as disease, is often stigmatized, which harms the stricken individual's efforts to change. Hence this anthology is like a breath of fresh air: writers share the difficulty, and the exhilaration, of freeing themselves of a demon. Some poems and stories highlight different paths that individuals have taken, from the traditional, faith-based 12-step program to secular ones.

Often the focus is on an individual's hard-won victory. One writer awakens each morning "to bless my sleep the night before, my drugless, boozeless sleep." Another writer sketches "a dark, depressed, and gray face [that] stares hopelessly back at me" in the mirror, then determines to make the call that marks the first step. A poet recalls how he "heard my own voice escape / into the rush of wind and water / calling for help."

Another writer, asked to attend a "rehab family weekend" thinks of it as nonsense yet, for the sake of her brother, sojourns to Florida, where the siblings' parents have flown in from Wyoming. That weekend the sister learns there is "more to addiction than just one individual. We all played

a part.”

“Go home and find an Al-Anon sponsor,” the family is advised, go home and learn to take care of yourselves. A tall order for a sister “so anxious . . . I could barely function.” Eventually she finds a group where no one offers criticism or unhelpful advice. “We could just *be*, something I had never done in my entire life.”

In another story a husband and wife devote themselves to helping others after it takes their barely-teen daughter three years to recover from meth addiction. The wife establishes a support group for female inmates, many of whom are incarcerated for drug- or alcohol-related offenses; the husband, a former legislator, prevails on the governor to assign him to “write the blue-print for the State of Wyoming, one that would guide all state-funded substance-abuse programs.” Twenty years have passed, during which their daughter has been addiction-free.

My sense is, the material in the anthology was carefully selected. The stories and poems are powerful and well written; several moved me to tears. And so, I urge you to contact RW and purchase this book. If you add a little extra (\$20 total) your copy is matched with another copy sent to a prison or rehab facility. Through such small but thoughtful gestures, someone else may learn to believe in hope.