

The Magnificence of Ordinariness

By Jim Smith



My name is Jim Smith and I am a musician, social worker and voice-over artist living in Beckenham, England. I am 40 years in recovery, and still enjoying the journey.

I was brought up in South London by loving parents, but never felt comfortable in my own skin. After discovering that I was adopted, I found solace in music, teaching myself the guitar. At 15 I took my first drink. As my alcohol addiction took hold, my life began to spiral. I was prescribed tranquilizers and barbiturates. With these new found 'friends,' I finally felt complete.

During the following two years, I met a professional guitarist who became a mentor and friend. He arranged two auditions for me with well-known artists; however, as became the pattern, my addiction overtook and stood in the way of such opportunities. I went on to spend several months busking in Paris where I had many adventures. One memorable experience was meeting Memphis Slim, an American blues pianist, singer and composer, and playing the blues for him. Upon returning to England, my life continued to deteriorate. I

became unemployable, was placed on probation, and spent time in prison.

I reached the point where I was drinking surgical spirit (also known as rubbing alcohol), and knew I was heading for rock bottom. I eventually found the strength to attend my first Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in 1969. I was then hospitalized on and off over a six-year period. By the end, I had lost the will to live.

What followed was a profound spiritual experience which changed my life forever. I came-to, in hospital on October 27, 1976. I haven't had a drink or drug since that day. I attended Pinel House, the first rehab outside of America (founded by Dr. Max Glatt in 1952), and spent 15 months in a sober living house.

It's been an amazing journey. I married and had three daughters and now have five grandchildren. In 1995 I qualified as a social worker and have worked in the addiction and recovery field ever since. I owe everything to the Fellowship and to the people who helped and supported me along the way.



After 20 years of marriage, I divorced. Although a testing time, it led me to new beginnings. My good friend, Sean, used to say it was 'the magnificence of ordinariness'. Finding happiness in the everyday, the here and now.

I went to Barcelona and ran 'Recovery Holidays'. It was there I wrote Gaudi's Castle, my first musical composition. One evening, I was invited to sing at a friend's rehab program. I found myself telling stories, as well as playing songs. This inspired the client group and helped them open up and access their emotions. Most importantly, they enjoyed it. From that evening, I have continued to use my stories and music as a way to reach people.

In 2011, I was awarded a Winston Churchill Travel Fellowship. The trust offers opportunities to men and women who are leaders in their field, to effect positive change in society through research and travel. I was given the opportunity to travel to the USA for two months. I initially stayed at Veritas Villas near Woodstock in Kerhonkson, New York, and later spent time at the Betty Ford Clinic in Palm Desert, California. A particularly memorable experience was playing at Cumberland Heights, an alcohol and drug rehab center just outside of Nashville, Tennessee. Wherever I went, music presented itself as a guiding light, a dynamic force that gave purpose and meaning to those who needed it.

I went on to present a recovery show on local radio. It was humbling to hear people in recovery share personal stories from their lives and the music that was important to them. I have since become a voice-over artist and am enjoying this new path.

Over the years, I have had my share of pain, loss and emotional difficulty. At such times, I rely on my faith and my friends in the Fellowship. I continue to be amazed at the power and wisdom of the Twelve Step program. There is always more work to do; the idea is progress, not perfection. Thank you to everyone in recovery for inspiring me and showing me the way.



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