

Recovery and Discovery

by [Dr. Michael Obsatz](#)

As a retired professor, therapist, and author, my life has been described by others as being very productive and meaningful over all. Many don't know that there were times when I wondered if I would have the strength and courage to carry on.

Growing up on a poultry farm in New Jersey, I lived my early years working and helping out my family. I lacked social skills, friends, and time to be a child. It sometimes feels overwhelmingly sad when I look back on it. There have been many times in my life when I experienced huge amounts of suffering. I have been bullied, shamed, abused, humiliated, abandoned, rejected, betrayed, and neglected -- like many people. I have suffered losses of property and relationships. I have been economically poor, overtired, and overworked.

I had to recover from my lost childhood. I had to recover from seven years of severe bullying. I had to recover from feelings of shame, loneliness and despair. This process continues to take many years and much work. I had to realize that what I experienced in the early part of my life wasn't my fault. I had to learn that I could make particular choices which could change my life for the better. In order to recover, I had to discover myself, what is really possible, and that I did deserve to have the best life imaginable.

How did that happen?

There were angels in my life who cared about me. My high school English teacher believed in my writing ability, and my intelligence. Other teachers helped me to learn to read, write, and communicate. Friends taught me social skills. My uncle gave me some money to go the college when my parents couldn't. Some college administrators pointed me toward fellowships for graduate school. Some friends said they believed in me.

I don't know if I could have discovered what I could really be without the help of others.

When we think about recovery, we frequently think about recovery from addiction. However, it seems to me that most of us have recovered from something. None of us has had the perfect life, always making the right choices, always being treated with kindness and respect. And even if most of our choices seemed right, there are still complex circumstances and difficulties that we all have had to face.

Recovery involves discovery of what was always there, but sometimes hidden. What we find is that we are simply human beings, and we have been doing the best we can with what we have. Being stuck in some type of morass (depression, addiction, violence cycle, poverty) can result in feelings of being lost. We can become lost when life gets difficult and complicated, when we hang around with other lost people, when we are the targets of other people's shame and pain.

The song, "Amazing Grace," is about being lost and then being found.

Probably most of us have experienced the feeling of being lost. What is it like to be lost? We can lose our sense of purpose. We can lose relationships. We can lose the sense of who we are, of what is really possible.

What is it like to be found? It is about discovery possibilities, and perhaps discovering one's true self for the first time.

In my work in treatment centers and my mentoring young people who are addicted, I have watched many people recover and discover themselves. They have come to realize that they are more than they ever thought, and can accomplish more than they ever thought possible.

So, recovery is about being found, finding oneself, developing new life, and seeing new possibilities.

We are remarkably resilient creatures. I marvel at the resilience of some of the young people I know. I have worked with many who have lived lives involving repeated and consistent drug use, and have seen numerous people stop using. Many of them have become more able to cope with life without resorting to addictive substances. Many of these people have developed a new sense of responsibility, accountability and compassion.

I know that recovery takes work. But I also know that there are angels in the world that can help that process happen.