

## **“Travels in Recovery, USA” by Wynford Ellis Owen**

### **Winston Churchill Fellowship supports Cardiff-based Drug & Alcohol Recovery project**

I will begin my Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship on Saturday as I fly out to New York. The Fellowship will enable me to visit a number of new recovery community centres in the US. These centres stand out as they have achieved long-term recovery from severe alcohol and other drug related problems.

A network of such centres exist in Vermont, Connecticut, Philadelphia, Washington D.C. and Virginia and visiting these centres will provide me with ideas on how to better build a strong “peer culture” into the services I am establishing as part of The Living Room Cardiff project which hopes to open its doors in 2011.

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust is the national memorial and living tribute to Sir Winston, who died in 1965. The Trust’s objectives are to encourage the advancement and propagation of education in any part of the world for the benefit of British citizens of all walks of life.

The aim is such that this education will make its recipients more effective in their life and work, whilst benefiting themselves and their communities, and ultimately the UK as a whole. Each year approximately 100 Fellowships are awarded for wide range of projects.

The reason I’m visiting this particular part of America is because there have been some extraordinary success stories emanating from these centres and if their successes can be replicated in Wales it would significantly relieve the huge social problems currently being experienced as a consequence of drug and alcohol misuse.

Getting a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship is a fantastic boost for The Living Room project in Cardiff. My itinerary will expose me to a broad spectrum of recovery advocacy activities in the US including many of the faith-based programmes.

I owe a debt of gratitude, incidentally, to William (Bill) L White MA, a world renowned academic and expert in the field of substance misuse, who has mentored me and been a great source of wisdom and support as I’ve planned my itinerary.

The benefits obtained by this Fellowship will enable me to establish a recovery centre in Cardiff by 2011. This will establish sustained recoveries, free from cross-addiction. I will also be filming a video diary which I hope will be a permanent and valued resource to testify to the effectiveness of these innovative approaches.

You can follow my progress over the next two months on this blog and on the Welsh Council on Alcohol and Other Drugs’ website and on the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust website.

### **Sadness, bed bugs and deep foundation drilling**

I felt very sad saying goodbye to Meira my wife and Rwth, my youngest daughter, at Heathrow airport yesterday. It reminded me of the countless times when, as an actor in a previous career, I would stock up on new clothes and toiletries and leave the family home to live in hotels and bed-sits whilst touring and performing in halls and theatres up and down the country. I’d miss out on home comforts and the warm secure feeling of having a loving family around me.

It's so much easier for everyone if we stick to the familiar and stay in our comfort zones, isn't it? However, recovery involves risking; taking life by the horns and learning to confront the burden of being human. And, for me, it involves using the fear I've experienced lately as I prepare for this Winston Churchill Fellowship as a reason to **do** things rather than as an excuse **not** to.

I did allow myself to cry, incidentally, as I kissed Meira and Rwth goodbye. Showing such feelings of vulnerability is the biggest risk of all for me, demolishing that façade of invulnerability that I hid behind for so many years takes courage and is imperative, I believe, if recovery is to flourish.

I have to accept my humanness else I'll always be in hock to some or other mood-altering substance or behaviour. I'll also miss seeing Bethan, my eldest daughter and, in particular, my two darling granddaughters, Begw and Efa. Saying goodbye to them was something else and I best not remind myself of it now or I'll start crying again!

My flight (number V5001) from Heathrow to Newark in New Jersey was faultless. I'd splashed out an extra £50 for a seat by one of the exits so that I could have more leg-room. Well, I am over 6 feet tall after all and, damn it, I'm worth it!

I also had the company of Jide Bada who was sitting next to me, a London-based solicitor who works for one of the leading banks, and was heading for New York for a 9-day break with his wife, who would join him later. We discussed the world-wide financial crisis and how more and more people were suddenly waking up to the awful reality that 'people, places and things' (money in particular, he said) would never satisfy their needs and provide them with that sense of security that they so obviously craved.

A religious man, Jide proffered that only some kind of spiritual interference in these peoples' lives would ultimately satisfy those needs. In the main they craved wholeness, he believed (as did Carl Jung), and it was this sense of separateness – from themselves, from their fellow men, and from God – that accounted for the spiritual bankruptcy and the resulting emotional pain which he said so pervades society these days.

Jide had a dilemma, however: how to get these people to recognise their need of God without them having to suffer too much first. I told him that we in the substance misuse field had much the same problem: how to get people who are dependent on alcohol, drugs (prescribed or illicit), or other dependencies and problematic behaviours to recognise their need of help without them also having to suffer too much first and, in many tragic cases, dying.

It is very hot here in Newark. New England is currently experiencing a heat wave. And what clothes have I brought with me? You've guessed it!

Before retiring for the night at my hotel in Elizabeth, New Jersey, I went for a short walk just to unwind after the long journey. Outside an IHOP Restaurant I met Adam and had a coffee with him. Adam is working in nearby New York as part of a team drilling test bores for a proposed new bridge spanning the Hudson River. He's going to be away from his partner and two children for 4 months and that sense of separateness was beginning to get to him as well. That natural human condition of loneliness.

We talked for a while and both of us felt better for it. Adam was also concerned about bed bugs! There is an infestation of bed bugs in New York hotels apparently and he's been spraying his room and all his bedclothes in an effort to avoid being attacked by the mites.

I checked my bed linen when I returned to my room but couldn't find any evidence of bed bugs. When I got up this morning after a long, restless night, however, I can tell you what I do have – jet lag!

Maybe listening to some music will help. Courtesy of my friend Colin Macdonald, who's a member of the Policy Advisory Group at the Welsh Council on Alcohol and Other Drugs and who leads our 'Love and Forgiveness' retreats (there's another one from 3rd to 5th December at Trefeca in the stunningly-beautiful Brecon National Park, incidentally – so book early, places are limited!), I'm currently listening to music on an iPod he sent me.

And the piece that's massaging all the right emotional spots for me at this moment is the Adagio in G Minor played by the Limar Lapinsch & Latvian Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra. It's exquisite, and it's quickly restoring me to my usual, peaceful state of mind.

Later today (26th) I'll be catching a train from Newark Liberty International Airport, New Jersey to Hartford, Connecticut. And tomorrow I'll be having lunch with Cheryle Pacapelli, Director of Operations at the Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery (CCAR), who has been my contact there. That's when we'll schedule out the first two-week stage of my two months visit to the States.

That's all for now folks. I'm now going out to treat myself to a full American breakfast with four strips of bacon, two eggs (sunny-side up), golden hash browns and two cinnamon-apple compote pancakes with whipped topping!

### **The medicine drop-offs that could save lives**

I caught an earlier than expected Amtrak train from Newark Airport, New Jersey to New Haven Connecticut yesterday (26th) where the first stage of my Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship begins today when I meet up for lunch with Cheryle Pacapelli, Director of Operations to the Connecticut Community of Addiction Recovery (CCAR) and Curtis Kolodney, CCAR Recovery Housing Manager.

Since 1998, CCAR has been organising the recovery community to do two things: to put a face on recovery and to provide recovery support services.

In order to achieve these two goals, CCAR run the following programmes: Telephone Recovery Support; Recovery Housing Project; Volunteer Management; Recovery Orientated Employment; Recovery Community Centres; Recovery Coach Academy; Recovery Training Series and Advocacy.

I hope to look at their Addiction Recovery Housing Project whereby Recovery House owners are invited to participate in the Recovery Housing Coalition of Connecticut which, evidence suggests, elevates recovery outcomes. I'll be fascinated to learn how the Recovery Housing Coalition of Connecticut has 'become a group of very passionate owners who want to ensure the quality of recovery houses in CT'.

I'm also interested in learning how their Recovery Community Centres serve a clubhouse function in terms of recovery fellowship, but also how they offer a much wider spectrum of recovery support services than would be available in a typical AA clubhouse, and how they serve as an organizing place for recovery advocacy activities. But more of these matters on another day and in a future blog.

Whilst travelling yesterday, I read an interesting article in the New York Times, which cost me \$5 and the environment a whole forest-full of trees, I'd say. It described an initiative in Worcester, Massachusetts whereby residents were offered a drug amnesty and invited to empty homes of legal but dangerous drugs that the authorities say are driving addiction and crime around the country.

According to the NY Times reporter, some of the people who showed up did not want to identify themselves or discuss what brought them out, silently dumping their pills into boxes provided by

the Drug Enforcement Administration and hurrying off. Others said they were dropping off drugs that had belonged to relatives who were now dead, or elderly people who had let medicines pile up in their homes for too long

This is an initiative that could so easily be replicated in Wales and throughout the wider U.K. and at little cost. In my book, see *No Room to Live* or <http://www.amazon.co.uk/>, I describe how, when I was younger, I became a friend of the elderly in my village.

This was when I was 12 or 13 years old and already psychologically addicted to my mother's strong sleeping pills. I'd visit these old women late at night and, while they would be out the back preparing tea and biscuits for "the kind minister's son", I'd be frantically rummaging through their cupboards looking for any drugs I could get my hands on.

During this period, I swallowed all kinds of pills – for high blood pressure, low blood pressure, water retention, kidney, bladder, bowel problems, etc – and suffered all kinds of side effects! I don't think many youngsters today begin their journey to oblivion and misery by doing what I did. But I'm sure that some of them at least begin experimenting with drugs by stealing them from their own parents' medicine cabinets.

Providing drop-offs, similar to the ones in Worcester, Massachusetts, could be an effective and long overdue way of clearing out all medicine cabinets in Wales and beyond. And who knows, an initiative of this kind might even end up saving lives.

On the train, I got chatting to a 17 years old New Yorker who was travelling up to Boston where she's a High School pupil at a public school there. She plays for a women's ice hockey team, so her place of education kind of followed her chosen sport. Next year, she hopes to major in Physical Education at one of the many U.K. universities who specialise in her subject.

Her dad, a fire-fighter, was killed in the 9/11 terrorist atrocity, and most of her spare time is taken up with helping others whose lives are or have been affected by terrorism acts. She herself refused all counselling offers of help at the time. She hated that "formal" relationship which sometimes exists between therapist and client. She hated also the language used and the therapist's inability to empathise properly. "Nobody could possibly comprehend what we went through," she said. "So why pretend they could?"

She organises weekend camps for young people affected by terrorism from all over the world. "We encourage them to engage in all kinds of sports activities: water skiing, soccer, playing pool, gymnastics and tennis. We even play Gaelic football!"

"Gaelic football!," I said rather surprisingly.

"Yes, one of the counsellors comes from Ireland and he taught us how to play the game."

"But I thought you said you hated counselling."

"Oh I do," she said. "But his type of counselling is different and it definitely works. You see, we're not even aware that it's going on. It happens naturally whilst we're engaged in other activities. We also surround these kids with people who've had similar experiences to them – with people who can genuinely empathise."

We then talked about drug use in her sport. "The use of performance enhancing drugs definitely does not go on in ice hockey sport!" she retorted.

"What about your friends?" I asked rather gingerly, "Do they take drugs?"

“My friends come from New York where there’s plenty to do – they don’t take drugs. It’s the people who live in places like Billerica, for example, where there’s nothing to do – that’s where drug taking is rife.

“I’ve been lucky” she went on. “I have a very good group of friends: I don’t do drugs; they don’t do drugs. We’re all pretty active kids doing all kinds of other things: sport, going to the movies, eating out – I like Italian food,” and she laughed and pointed to a pack of spaghetti protruding from a bag above our heads on a rack.

“Who’s your favourite actor?” I asked.

“Ryan Reynolds, he was in Proposal and Just Friends?”

“Never heard of him,” I said.

And with that the train pulled into Hartford and our conversation had to end. As I exited the train she shouted after me, “It’s our involvement in sport – that’s been our biggest saving grace from drugs.”

“I’ll tell everyone about it,” I said. And I have.

And what piece of music am I listening to right now? It’s Wild Horses (Susan Boyle Tribute Version) from Emotional Moment. Exquisite!

Thanks Cheryle and Curtis for your wonderful welcome to Hartford today.

Congratulations to the Recovery Marchers of Glasgow. I hear it was a wonderful occasion. Well done. It’ll be our turn in Cardiff next.

And good night to everyone else.

### **A long and tiring day**

I spent the best part of yesterday (28th) and today (29th) speaking with Phil Valentine, the guy behind the Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery (CCAR).

We clicked from the outset and it’s been as if I’ve always known him. We’re both of us at critical stages in our spiritual development and we’re being challenged in differing ways to ‘let go absolutely’ and to trust the process come what may.

I think we’re helping each other in this and being true to the basic precept of the 12 Step programme: i.e. that recovery occurs when two alcoholics sit down and talk to each other.

Before retiring to the On the Border Mexican Grill and Cantina for lunch, we’d long conceded that beneath us both were God’s everlasting arms bearing us up and that all distractions, all temptation, all evil thoughts and desires, all our anxieties and hidden fears would be cast out by his perfect love.

And what did we eat? Phil had a chicken fajita and I ate a steak one. Bliss!

Earlier I’d recorded Cheryle Pacapelli, the Director of Operations at CCAR, who gave me an overview of the services they provide. Cheryle it is, incidentally, who has helped plan my itinerary whilst in Connecticut; she’s also arranged for me to hire a car; provided me with a BlackBerry; treated me to lunch yesterday; has escorted me hither and thither and has generally mothered me! I don’t know where I’d be without Cheryle!

Curtis Kolodney is Recovery Housing Manager at CCAR, and he recorded a piece for me about the Recovery Housing Coalition of Connecticut. At a time when access to affordable, quality recovery options has been significantly diminished, the Recovery House movement is a bright light on the horizon.

Across the state, individuals in recovery have quietly created a number of dignified, safe recovery environments where people in early recovery as well as those who have a history of recovery, are given the time needed to rebuild their lives.

Recovery Houses not only help to develop the tools necessary to embark on a life of recovery, but also positively impact on the quality of that recovery.

Curtis also introduced me to the writings of Steven Levine and, in particular, a piece that had been and still is of great comfort to him following the recent death of his beloved mother. Meetings at the Edge: Dialogue with the Grieving and the Dying, the Healing and the Healed. The piece which Curtis read out to me was a letter written by Lobellia's mother's best friend at the time of Lobellia's mother's death. The letter ends:

"Your mother and my mother can never leave us; the temple of their lives may change, but the theme of their vast love, still throbbing in us, will only be continuing somewhere, and it is my simple, strong faith that we are never, never to lose contact with that love motif.

Somewhere again our hearts are to stand still in ecstasy as we recognise those familiar, lovely notes of our beloveds and find them – a little farther along in their scores than we, perhaps, but intrinsically the same fine symphony."

I then drove to Willimantic to appear in a live TV public service broadcast by CCAR. Before that, however, I met Diane Potvin, Director of the Willimantic Recovery Community Centre (WRCC) and Kathy Wyall, Volunteer Coordinator at WRCC.

They seemed fascinated by my Welsh accent, in particular, Kathy who began imitating me! Suffice to say I had the time of my life with these two wonderful ladies. Two who are totally dedicated to recovery advocacy and are grateful, living examples of what can be achieved.

As Diane concluded "A grateful drunk will never drink again. And I truly believe that. I was homeless; I was unemployable. I came into recovery with black eyes, cracked ribs and I have not had one single day that I have not been grateful. And it's as simple as.... not gagging when I brush my teeth. It's all of these little things... that I still, every day, when I go to brush my teeth, I realise that... I'm not gagging, where before I used to do that all the time."

I was privileged to present Diane and Kathy with a Sir Winston Churchill Commemorative Crown and a tea towel, a gift from Churchill Fellows Wales, in appreciation of the wonderful work they are doing in Willimantic and as a thank you from me to them.

As I finish this blog at the end of a long and tiring day I'm listening to the dulcet tones of Michael Buble singing Cry me a River.

Incidentally, Kathy's boyfriend, has invited me to go fishing with him next week. It can't get any better can it?

Nos dawch pawb, a diolch am ddarllen y blog. Good night everyone and God bless.

## **An early morning appointment with Dr Marcus McKinney, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Mark Twain**

On Thursday morning (30th), I had an appointment with Dr Marcus McKinney, Director of Community Outreach and Pastoral Counselling and Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Centre, Hartford, Connecticut, New England, USA.

Dr McKinney has run for many years a Pastoral Counselling Training Programme that reaches out to virtually anyone that's doing helping work for people who are struggling with emotional issues. Be they recovery or mental health issues.

About 5000 people have gone through his classes to date. Half are people of colour, coming from urban settings where churches and other agencies and people that were providing help, were asking for something that would blend spiritual depth and meaning with psychological understanding.

Sometimes, people in the religious community didn't have that opportunity or sometimes, people in the psychological world or recovery world had not been exposed to spiritual ideas. Based on a kind of depth psychology and a sense of meaning, he has provided training that uses everyday language and he is supported in his work by the state of Connecticut and by lots of people from all walks of life. Who, tonight, and every other night, will be out there trying to help people in their struggle towards recovery.

My meeting with Marcus went on for most of the morning and it was an absolute joy for me as I support the same kind of ideas. Marcus might even make it to the launch of our day-care centre, The Living Room Cardiff, on 22nd June, 2011. And to William (Bill) White's lecture at the Welsh Assembly building in Cardiff Bay on 21st June, 2011.

I was introduced to many of Marcus' staff and will meet his colleague Mary Green, who does faith-based recovery work, next Thursday. We also exchanged books: mine for one he had contributed towards: MOORE. T., (2010), Care of the Soul in Medicine – Healing Guidance for Patients, Families, and the People who care for them. USA: Hay House, Inc. I'll start reading it tonight.

Today, Friday 1st October, I decided to take the day off to do some sightseeing with Laurie Fresher, CCAR Recovery Community Centre Manager, who had kindly offered to show me around. Alas, the weather here was dreadful. Hartford was feeling the effects of a far-off hurricane, apparently! It was even worse here than at the Ryder Cup in Wales which I watched whilst enjoying lunch at the Tisane, a Euro-Asian restaurant on Farmington Avenue.

Before that, we had visited the Connecticut State Capitol and enjoyed a fascinating tour of the centre with some very well-informed German students. Particularly impressive was the restored model of the Genius of Connecticut, which stands majestically on her small gold dome. The original bronze statue, which once crowned the Capitol dome, was cast from this model. Sculptured by Randolph Rogers in 1877, she is the symbolic protector of Connecticut.

We also visited Connecticut's Hall of Fame. Its inductees were Katherine Hepburn, Mark Twain, Igor Sikorsky (aviation pioneer and designer of the first helicopter), Marian Anderson (the first black opera singer to perform with the Metropolitan Opera), Harry J Gray (philanthropist and one of the most outstanding business managers in the United States, the cancer centre at Hartford Hospital is named after Mr Gray and his wife), Jackie Robinson (civil rights advocate and the first black man to play major league baseball), Chief Ralph Sturges (lifetime leader of the Mohegan tribe who helped them gain federal recognition), and Paul Newman.

After that, we toured the home of Harriet Beecher Stowe who wrote Uncle Tom's Cabin, the most controversial book of the 19th-century. Her book changed Americans' views and incited international pressure on the U.S. to abolish slavery. Stowe's life and work shaped the values of a nation and continues to resonate in contemporary society.

Next door is the home of Mark Twain. (You'll never find an oak tree growing alone, but in the company of other oak trees!) We didn't have time today to join the tour of the house as Laurie had to be back at work, but we did visit the museum and watched a 20-minute film about the great man's life. Mark Twain was one who had it all; lost it all; but then regained his self-respect and restored his standing among the American people.

Tomorrow, I've been invited out to lunch by Susan Davies Sit from the Welsh Society here in New England. In fact, I've got two further dates next week with Susan and members of the Welsh Society, and I'm looking forward very much to meeting them all. Susan apparently comes from Colwyn Bay in North Wales and that's not too far away from Llansannan, where I was born.

The music I'm listening to right now as I finish this blog is: 'From Here You Can Almost See the Sea' sung by David Gray (Live from London – EP).

Incidentally, you can see photographs of some of the people I've been writing about in these blogs by visiting the Welsh Council on Alcohol and Other Drugs website. Oh! And I bought new shoes today! Posh!

Nos dawch pawb. Good night everyone.

### **The full and varied life of a Churchill Fellow**

Today, Monday 4th October, I talked with Diana Desnoyers, Recovery Oriented Employment Services Coordinator at CCAR (Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery).

Diana is responsible for developing and implementing the ROES programme, (Recovery Oriented Employment Services) for those in recovery. This programme is designed to combine treatment and case management with employment readiness training and recovery support. It offers new approaches for assisting individuals in recovery to become active, useful, members in their community within a structured setting.

Those who benefit most from this programme are individuals that are dedicated to their recovery and are motivated and ready to re-enter the workforce. In other words, those ready to combine the vocational with their recovery. Diana warned that pushing someone into a job when their recovery isn't strong is likely to cause them to relapse.

This programme, incidentally, which comprises 8 modules ranging from Financial Basics and Time Management to Common Work Challenges and Employment Support Groups, is soon to be rechristened, Recovery Works, and trainer and trainee manuals will be on sale within 2 months. I've already placed my order.

Last Saturday (2nd October), if you remember, I'd been invited out to lunch by a small contingent from the Connecticut Welsh Society (Cymdeithas Gymraeg Connecticut). Susan Davies Sit (originally from Colwyn Bay) collected me from my hotel as promised and I met up with Bob (Illinois) and Nancy Bulgard (nee Johns from North Wales), Shirley Gilmartin (Aberdare), and Sherry Williams (Llanelli) at The Bottomless Express, where I ate a hearty Beef Fajita.

We spent two or more wonderful hours reminiscing about Wales and I was reminded whilst chatting of the last few lines of my father's strict-metre poem, Yr Hen Fro (The Old District):



Heddiw dir yw fy hiraeth Am erwau ffridd, am wŷr ffraeth; Am rin y bobl werinol, Am nef na ddaw mwy yn ôl. (Summed up, it means things will never be the same again. Like a Heaven that'll never return. It also contains the word 'Hiraeth' – a deep longing, which Welsh purists say is untranslatable.)

I spent the rest of the sunny afternoon walking the banks of the Connecticut River with Sherry Williams and being shown around some famous Hartford landmarks. I've got two more meals to enjoy in the company of these lovely people: one, tomorrow night (Tuesday 5th) when I visit Susan's home (and I get to hear what Sherry thinks of my book!), and the second, next Saturday, my penultimate day in Hartford, when I get to meet 25 or so members of Cymdeithas Gymraeg Massachusetts. I won't be able to fit into my clothes by the time I return to Wales, you'll see!

Sunday (3rd October) began very early for me. I drove some 40 miles to Deep River, a town with a population of 5000 in Middlesex County, Connecticut, and to the home of Laurie Fresher (CCAR Recovery Community Centre Manager) and Jimmy (or James) DeLano, her partner.

Laurie had warned me that I was likely to click straight away with Jimmy. And she was right! I spend a relaxing and so, so enjoyable day in both their company. We attended the 8am service in St. Joseph's Church then ate an American breakfast in the local Diner before driving to a nearby meeting of 'likeminded folk' where the theme was 'adversity' – potentially the greatest creative force in nature!

After that, it was onwards to the Mystic Seaport, a museum of America and the Sea situated along the banks of the Mystic River in Mystic, Connecticut. It is notable both for its collection of sailing ships and boats, and for the re-creation of crafts and fabric of an entire 19th century seafaring village. It consists of more than 60 original historic buildings, most of them rare commercial structures moved to the 37-acre site and meticulously restored.

I was particularly impressed by the Amistad, a ship famous because of an onboard revolt by African captives being transported from Havana to Puerto Principe, Cuba. It was a 19th-century two-masted schooner built in the United States, but owned by a Spaniard living in Cuba.

The Africans took control of the ship in July 1839 and were captured off the coast of Long Island by the USS Washington of the United States Revenue Cutter Service. The Amistad became a symbol in the movement to abolish slavery. The ship was taken under control by the United States, resulting in a US Supreme Court case (1841) over the status of the Africans, as importation of slaves into the US had been prohibited since 1808.

Incidentally, Shirley Gilmartin, who I met at the Connecticut Welsh Society Saturday lunch and who works in the Mystic Seaport as an actress and performer, had promised to leave me three free tickets at the visitors' entrance. And true to her word, there they were waiting for us in my name! Thanks Shirley. I'll get to thank you in person for your kindness tomorrow night.

The day ended with a juicy sirloin steak at the Steak Loft in Mystic, Connecticut. The perfect end to a perfect day and a perfect weekend!

Today, Monday 4th, I got to record Phil Valentine, Executive Director of CCAR, as he gave me an overview of the services they provide and how they evolved and were developed. Interestingly, Phil said that he was hesitant, initially, about offering peer recovery support groups as a means of supporting long-term recovery, because he believed people should use existing available resources, such as AA and NA membership. However, he found a need for an "all-recovery group".

Currently, the all-recovery group in Willimantic draws from 30 to 50 people, and the CCAR centre in Hartford draws from 10 to 15 at each meeting. They welcome 12-Step, Christian-based, methadone, medication-assisted, co-occurring, family members, and community members – or, as Phil put it “all non-denominational groups!” But their main purpose is to provide an opportunity for people to come in and to talk about recovery.

Phil described the set-up in a 2007 interview with Bill White as, “such a simple concept, it’s brilliant, and it’s helped a lot of people.” I would also add from what I’ve seen that – it works, it’s practical and it’s comparatively cheap from a legislator’s point of view! [1]

He goes on, “We serve a broad spectrum of people, but I think we have a special mission of serving people who don’t feel fully accepted in mainstream AA or NA. We don’t place judgments on people. We say, “You’re in recovery if you say you are. Is there some way that you think you might be able to improve your recovery, and how can we help you do that?”

And that sums up the underlying philosophy here – that all people in recovery, and people seeking recovery, are treated with dignity and respect.

Tomorrow’s another full and busy day and begins with a staff meeting at CCAR at 9am, another visit to Deep River and an invitation to a Rotary Club meeting where I hope to speak about The Living Room Cardiff project.

Then I’ve got to rearrange my schedule in Vermont next week because Mark Ames has suggested that I attend a 5-day recovery coach academy at Spofford, New Hampshire. I think it’s a brilliant idea because it’ll give me a much better understanding of what being a Recovery Coach is all about. And, of course, there’s the dinner at Susan’s. But all that’s tomorrow!

What music am I listening to now? The Blower’s Daughter, sung by Damien Rice. Not to my taste really!

And that’s that. Cysgwch yn dawel pawb. Sleep tight everyone.

[1] White W.L. (2007) Perspectives on Systems Transformation: How Visionary Leaders are Shifting Addiction Treatment towards a Recovery-Oriented System of Care. Illinois: Great Lakes attc.

### **Pulsing the membership**

In my previous blog, I talked about the “all-recovery group”. It welcomes 12-Step, Christian-based, methadone, medication-assisted, co-occurring, family members, and community members – or, if you like, all non-denominational groups! But its main purpose is to provide an opportunity for people to come in and to talk about recovery.

Well, on Monday 4th October, I joined the group and I wish to thank the following for putting me at my ease and making me feel so welcomed: Linda, Victoria, Primitive, Nykeda, Christine, Diane, Dale, Lyssav, Daryl and Tanya. As one of the members said, having listened to my share, “This illness is real, whether you’re from Wales, Hartford, the Bronx or Timbuktu!”

Tuesday at 9.30am I attended a staff meeting at CCAR (Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery), Hartford. What impressed me most about this meeting was the apparent smooth-running of the whole organisation. Phil has gathered around him a formidable team with each member totally dedicated to the cause of promoting a more ‘person-centred, holistic, family-centred and recovery focused system of care’. Included in this recovery system of care is Recovery Capital.

Recovery Capital is the level of internal and external resources that can be used to begin, and then maintain, recovery from severe alcohol and other drug problems. There are three different types of Recovery Capital: personal, family or social, and community.

I'm going to learn more about these and other things next week in Vermont, incidentally, with Mark Ames and colleagues as I join the Recovery Coach Training Academy for a 5-day course in Camp Spofford.

I then left the meeting early in order to travel down to Deep River and to meet up with my friend, Jimmy DeLano, who took me to the local Rotary Club meeting where I spoke about The Living Room Cardiff project. Thanks for the warm welcome everyone and yes, I might even consider accepting Tim's kind invitation to "preach" at his local church – when I next come calling!

In the evening, I joined Bob and Nancy Bolgard, Tina, Shirley and Danny and Sherry at Susan Davies Sit's beautiful home for my second Welsh Society dinner. I presented the society with a Sir Winston Churchill Commemorative Crown and a tea towel, a gift from Churchill Fellows Wales, in appreciation of the wonderful welcome and hospitality that has been extended to me during my visit to Connecticut. And there's more to come! I'll get to meet a further 25 of my fellow Welshmen and women in a dinner in Massachusetts on Saturday!

Today, Wednesday 6th October, I was meant to travel to Willimantic to meet Diane Potvin, Director of the Willimantic Recovery Community Centre (WRCC) and Kathy Wyall, Volunteer Coordinator at WRCC. However, I called by Phil Valentine's office first thing and there I stayed – talking and putting the world to rights.

The discussion continued over lunch with Normajean, Volunteer and Training Manager, and Dina Repincz, Director of Development at CCAR. Then, after we returned to the CCAR offices, more talking! And, as if that wasn't enough, Phil invited me to his home this evening for dinner and to meet his lovely wife, Sandy, and his children, Joshua (aged 16), Samantha (14), Mathew (8) and little Mary (5).

The end to a perfect day jam-packed with recovery talk and spiritual healing. One of the things we talked about in passing was "Pulsing the membership".

"Pulsing the membership" is a term coined by Don Coyhis, the founder of White Bison, a non-profit charitable organisation whose mission is to assist in bringing 100 Native American communities into healing by 2010. He's a Native American and an elder in his tribe and in the recovery community as well. He talked about communicating with his community by "pulsing" them with a weekly report he'd send out every Friday.

And what intrigued Phil most about that phrase was the association between pulse and heartbeat. Pulsing suggests that we get to hear the heartbeat of the organisation. He went on, "As I was talking to you earlier today, it occurred to me that I had been "pulsing" our organisation" regularly with a 'Hooked on Recovery' article every two weeks – and that I had stopped doing it. So I think I need to get back to doing that. It seems important to me that regular "pulsing" of the community; that regular being in touch; that heartbeat of the organisation, needs to be there and to be heard loud and clear. So I think it's a cool thing for leaders in the Recovery movement to consider how they are keeping in touch. What's the heartbeat of the organisation they lead? What's the rhythm? What's the pulse?"

What music am I listening to tonight? Air on a G String played by Frank Shipway & the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Nos dawch pawb a diolch am ddilyn fy hynt yn America. Good night everyone and thanks for reading my blog. Tomorrow I head for an early-morning meeting with Mary Green and a visit to

CCAR in Bridgeport. Oh, and I get to see a film tomorrow night as well. I'll tell you all about it next time.

### **Saying goodbye and moving on...**

Yesterday, Thursday 7th October, I travelled the 60 or so miles down to Bridgeport, Connecticut. My first appointment, at Dr Marcus McKinney's suggestion, read blog number four An early morning appointment with Mary Green, Executive Director of the Park City Initiative Corp, a faith-based, non-profit community development corporation.

Its initiatives are many and varied: Adopt-a-Block is about revitalising the neighbourhood and engaging the community by organising teams of children and adults to clean blighted areas and transform their living environment.

The Food Pantry provides nearly 6,000 meals to over 1,000 people each month and its mobile unit distributes food to those in need throughout the city. The Park City Metro Kids mobile street outreach unit brings interactive theatrical sessions to over 1,000 children throughout the city, offering life-skills training through songs, games, and lessons in a manner that is accessible to all youth.

I was there, however, to see its Resource Advocacy Programme (RAP) at work. Staff and volunteers work to ensure that people have enough food to eat, a place to live, and assistance managing life's difficult situations, including addiction and unemployment. When an individual is referred to the RAP, Park City Initiative (PCI) case managers work with them, advocating on their behalf and providing critical referrals to community resources. Life coaching, peer counselling and support groups are offered to allow for individual growth. In just three years PCI's Resource Advocacy Programme has served over 350 individuals.

I met Grace Ricks, Tinesha Malachi, Lucy Marrison, Yolanda Hopkins, Lenny Walters and, of course, Mary Green. They all passionately testified to the transformative power of God in their lives, with many of them now case managers themselves and "giving it (recovery) away in order to keep it".

I reminded myself how important it is to try to support everyone in making a commitment to a recovery path that works for them. I must admit that I was moved to tears seeing these committed people at work ministering to the poor and needy in their community. Their sole motivation being to help others out of gratitude for being "saved" themselves.

Over a salad lunch in a nearby diner I read how consumers who want to support breast cancer research can now do so by buying alcohol. Chambord, which markets pink vodka and liqueurs, urges people to "pink their drink", saying that "by adding a splash of Chambord to any cocktail, they're supporting breast cancer awareness year-round". I was relieved to read that at least one breast cancer charity is walking away from alcohol-related gifts. I trust it won't be too long before they all do!

Then it was down to the Bridgeport Recovery Community Centre and to a warm welcome from Michael Askew, the Manager, and Luis Rivera, Volunteer Coordinator. This is the Bridgeport offshoot of CCAR, in Hartford.

The centre offers a variety of programmes ranging from Computer Training Courses; Peer-to-Peer Smoking Cessation Programmes, to a new partnership, ReEntry Works, which helps people succeed in the workplace after imprisonment. The centre also offers training for people wanting to become Recovery Coaches, whereby they serve as personal guides/mentors for people seeking or in recovery from alcohol or other drug addictions and helping to remove barriers and obstacles to recovery.

The centre also hosts “all-recovery groups”, AA and NA meetings, Relapse Prevention programmes, Audio/Visual Recovery tapes, games and other leisure activities (to counter those “what shall I do with myself” moments), and offers CCAR Telephone Recovery Support whereby a peer-to-peer calling network is in operation to check-in, lend an ear, and offer support. There’s also the excellent Recovery Housing Database, which has been accessed by over 4000 people since June of this year.

I talked to DS Jr., who was on the phone trying to set up a job interview, “This place is a godsend,” he said “I don’t know where I’d be without it”. And Fred Richardson, who was manning the reception desk and who’s been in recovery for over 30 years, summed up for me the Centre’s whole approach, “I tends to treat people here much as I would like to be treated myself. I gives to people what I was given: love, respect, compassion and understanding.”

Then it was a mad rush back to Hartford and to Saint Frances Hospital, in time to view the film documentary, *Lost in Woonsocket* (Woonsocket being an Indian word, apparently, for Wonder Mist, which describes the fine spray from a nearby waterfall). This critically acclaimed film is about two alcoholics discovered living together in atrocious and sub-human conditions in the back woods of Woonsocket. A series of profound coincidences lead to a miraculous reunion with their families.

“It hurts me to see him like this,” said Norman’s son who hadn’t seen him in 15 years. “But unless he’s sober I don’t want anything to do with him.” A chance at treatment ensues, with recovery and redemption in the offering. The real challenge, however, is yet to come. What happens when only one of the men is able to remain sober?

This film is a technical feat. How they managed to capture, let alone make sense of the chaotic behaviour of these two drunks, is nothing short of miraculous. And I’m sure that it’ll be a wonderfully effective recovery resource. Indeed, I bought a DVD copy of the film to bring back to Wales.

Less impressive for me, however, was the Q and A session at the end when Norman, one of the “stars” and the one still in recovery after 4 years, was produced like a ‘rabbit out of a hat’ to tumultuous applause from the audience. I couldn’t help feeling for Mark, the drunk who “didn’t quite make it”, and felt uncomfortable that Norman was being built up to be the hero of the piece.

As too often happens with these things, the producers got it wrong. The hero, for me, was Joe, the barber. Joe, in long-term recovery himself from alcoholism, was the man who tidied up both drunks after detox and made them presentable for their treatment in Wilson House, the famous treatment centre. Mark’s father knew the secret of his son’s apparent early recovery: “I think it’s the magic haircut!”

I’m sure that the haircut did play its part. But it was Joe, who administered the haircut, who captivated me. Joe was authentic; he was real and he was true to nature. He was spontaneous; he openly cried on camera so passionate was he to get Mark into recovery. He was angry at his later relapse and he was fun to be around as he felt every imaginable feeling whilst never once taking himself too seriously. Add to this his attractive humility and his verve for life and you have, for me, the essence of Recovery.

Without a doubt, the producers should invite Joe to the after-show Q and A session next time. He’s the real “star” – and, as yet, he’s undiscovered.

Today, Friday 8th October, was my last day at CCAR. I had a long chat with Normajean Cefarelli, CCAR Volunteer and Training Manager, about her work and responsibilities. We discussed recovery too at length, with both of us concluding that vulnerability (risk-taking by

lowering the mask and showing people who we really are) and toughening-up (accepting that we are survivors, not victims) were necessary bedfellows if recovery was to flourish.

I then collected my clothes from the launderette, and packed two boxes (with Cheryle's help) with the books, T-shirts, DVDs, etc I've received as gifts since I've been in Connecticut and posted them back home. It's the only way, else I'd be weighed down with all the stuff!

Then I returned my hired car before enjoying lunch with Phil Valentine. My treat this time! We discussed leadership and some of the problems we've both had to deal with recently. His quote of the day: "It's the captain of the ship who has to decide who remains ashore!"

And so, a fortnight has gone by and the first stage of my US visit is over. Later, I phoned Mark Ames and arrangements are in place for him to collect me from the rail station in Brattleboro, Vermont, at 5.10pm on Sunday, to begin the 2nd stage of my US visit.

Before that, however, I've got the Welsh Society lunch in Massachusetts tomorrow (where I'll hopefully sell some of my books!) and a final few hours spent with the Valentine family on Sunday morning when I'll get to attend young Mary's christening ceremony.

What music am I listening to? Nothing tonight, I'm afraid. I'm writing this piece in the hotel lobby as the tables and chairs here are lower and more comfortable than the ones in my room.

Thanks to all the staff at CCAR – for your kindnesses and for making me feel so welcomed. I trust fate will play her part and ensure that we meet up again soon. I believe that the growth of the Recovery Movement world-wide will dictate that we do. Cysgwch yn dawel pawb. Good night everyone.

### **A meeting in the woods by firelight**

Thanks to all who attended the Welsh Society dinner in Massachusetts last Saturday, 9th December and to Bob and Nancy who collected me from my hotel and drove me there through the beautiful rolling vistas while informing me of further treats to come when I get to Boston in two weeks time.

Thanks also to Susan Davies Sit for her inspired presentation on the subject of copper mining in North Wales. It was both thought-provoking and informative. Llongyfarchiadau Sue!

Good news! I got to sell 20 copies of my book, No Room to Live, at the dinner – which was a godsend. I didn't fancy carting them all the way to Brattleboro, Vermont, today (Sunday 10th) by Amtrak. I'm heavy-laden as it is and can hardly lift my suitcase! When things get rough at sea the captain and crew sometimes have to jettison the cargo. Well, I'm beginning to think that I'll have to do something similar with the contents of my case!

Last night was spent packing that case – after a last supper at the Chowder Pot, nearby. I don't ordinarily eat this late (9pm), but it was well worth it this time, the Reef and Beef, an 8oz choice top sirloin, accompanied with stuffed Maine lobster tail was superb.

A joke for you that was told to me by a new-found friend at a meeting: This guy was stumbling drunkenly on the seashore when he tripped over an old bottle that was partially buried in the sand. Suddenly, a genie appeared and told him, "You have two wishes, master. What is your first wish?"

The drunk didn't hesitate. "I'd like to have a perpetual pint of Guinness, please?"

"Your wish is my command", said the genie. And with that, a frothy-topped, pitch-black pint of Guinness appeared from nowhere. The drunk couldn't believe his luck and started drinking it

with a passion. And the more he drank the more the pint glass filled up with the black nectar.

The genie then addressed him a second time. "O master, what is your second wish?" Without a second thought, the drunk replied, "I'll have another one of these, please!"

I just about managed to pack my case in time to be collected from my hotel at 9am the following day (Sunday) by Phil Valentine, CCAR (Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery) Executive Director. I was to accompany Phil and his family to a service at their local church, Trinity Covenant Church in Manchester, CT, where little Mary, Phil and Sandy's youngest, was being christened.

Prior to the service proper, however, I was privileged to attend a men-only Sunday school class. The topic under discussion was the 6th Commandment: Thou shall not kill. Interesting for me was the fact that several men shared at depth about difficulties they were encountering in their lives.

I've only ever seen this happen in Fellowship meetings. I was taken aback by this level of self-disclosure. Members of this class obviously had complete trust in their fellow members and felt that it was a safe environment for them to be vulnerable. I was later told that this level of self-disclosure and vulnerability was first modelled to them by AA members who attend the same church. An example of AA having a positive effect on religion!

The highlight of the morning undoubtedly was little Mary's christening. When asked by the pastor why she had decided she wanted to be christened, Mary replied, "To have all my sins removed." Phil and I reflected on this as we travelled towards a restaurant for a pre-travel meal and wondered what the heck she's been up to in her 6 short years! Incidentally, Mary looked beautiful. She made us all cry and I felt privileged to have witnessed her strong (and unprompted) testament of faith.

"So, what have you learnt from your visit to CCAR?" That was Phil Valentine's question to me over lunch. This was my reply: "That the secret of CCAR's success, I believe, is good management – especially in organising the recovery community's ability to care and bridge the gap between treatment and build productive lives. Good training is also a hallmark – especially your highly acclaimed Recovery Training series.

Add to this your innovative Telephone Recovery Support service and your Recovery Housing Database and the simplicity of your philosophy: 'You're in recovery if you say you are' and you have a formidable and highly efficient and effective organisation.

However, underpinning everything is your success in putting a face on Recovery. By speaking publicly about the reality of recovery, CCAR members put a face on recovery. CCAR members put a public face on recovery by testifying before the legislature and state commissions, as well as through well-attended public events like Recovery Walks. Employing Alpha Female staff members also helps!"

And shortly after that I was on the Amtrak train heading towards Brattleboro, Vermont. I felt sad saying goodbye to Phil. Phil and I clicked from the outset. I hope it won't be long before we meet again. I get a strong sense that we are somehow destined to meet again soon. Indeed, I think we'll even get to work together.

The views en route to Vermont, which I filmed, were impressive and all they had been built up to be. The autumn colours were nothing short of spectacular.

Mark Ames, Vermont Recovery Network Coordinator, was at the station to greet me. And, after a Fellowship meeting and a Chinese meal, we drove towards Camp Spofford and the Vermont

Recovery Coach Academy. This week I'm going to be trained to be a Recovery Coach. But more on this and how I get on during the coming week.

In the meantime, I have a quote for you from Jo Romano, one of the facilitators: "There really needs to be a vision in Recovery coaching. Without helping people see what their vision is – which includes what they're really interested in, what their values are, what their passion is – they'll never get to achieve it. When you become mindful and focused – you manifest it, whether it's good or bad."

And what of the meeting in the woods by firelight? That happened this evening (11th) at the end of a perfect day. Several of my new friends from the state of Vermont (well. It was Ken actually) decided to build a fire in the forest and hold an "all-recovery group" meeting out in the open air. Only alcoholics could arrange such a thing at such short notice! But it was fun; it was sincere and it was emotional. And the theme of the meeting? Well, it couldn't be anything other than 'gratitude', could it?

And your music I'm listening to at this moment: Alive and Kicking by Simple Minds: Once Upon a Time. Nos dawch pawb. Cysgwch yn dawel. Goodnight everyone.

### **Sore hands and assumptions**

Well, I've seen a skunk, albeit a dead skunk, but a skunk nonetheless. And it still stank!

I also experienced one of the most magical nights of my life so far. About 20 PIRs (People In Recovery) sitting around a bonfire on Spofford Lake beach under a starlit sky and holding a Fellowship meeting on the theme of 'spirituality'. The experience will remain with me for as long as I live. It felt as if the Universe had poured its cleansing stream of living water all over us – refreshing us, renewing us.

Incidentally, do you like the term, PIRs (sounds like 'peers')? A group of us in class today (13th) disliked 'recoverees' as a word to describe people in recovery. So we've come up with the acronym, PIRS. What do you think? Will it catch on? Surely it can't be any worse than that other most impersonal of terms, service users!

Tonight, after a long day at the Vermont Recovery Coach Academy, we returned to the same Spofford Beach and met with Lon Jackman who helped us set up a drum circle. Before the rhythmic percussion-playing began, however, Lon introduced us to the traditional yoga's seven mantras associated with each chakra.

1. LAM (Laum) – Earth chakra colour Red  
2. VAM (Vaum) – Water chakra colour Orange  
3. RAM (Raum) – Heart chakra colour Yellow  
4. YAM (Yaum) – Heart chakra colour Green/Pink  
5. HAM (Haum) – Throat chakra colour Blue  
6. AUM (Aum) – Third Eye chakra colour Purple  
7. R(Silence) – Crown chakra colour White

It was another night to remember. However, my hands hurt and feel as if they're raw after all the drumming. Maybe I should have chosen a smaller drum. Or at least one I could have beaten with a drum stick instead of the palms of my hands!

*So how's the Recovery Coach training going?* Here's how James Henzel, Programme Director, RISE Programmes, and a tutor on the course, summed things up on day 3.

"In the Recovery Coach Academy we've focused on the roles and responsibility of the Recovery Coach – to see how the approaches can be utilised to work with PIRs and to identify with what level they are at in terms of responsibility to themselves. We want to inform them and to be a resource for them.



On the Recovery Coach side we're also trying to develop the resource network. We're taking about it amongst ourselves in terms of our regions. We're separated by two states here, Vermont and New Hampshire, so we're looking at how we can best work together to effect change within the recovery field.

We've looked at motivational interviewing. How do we engage the recovery? How do we motivate them to communicate with us? How do we effect change with them and help make the decisions theirs? We've also looked at Pathways to Recovery and The Stages of Change model developed by Prochaska and DiClemente'.

We're aiming to see PIRs through their first stage of recovery. Typically, it's an hour a week through the course of a year – that's the first stage. And that'll really ground them and enable Recovery Coaches to build a relationship with them; to be honest with them; to engage them in wellness planning; to validate their experiences and to negotiate an approach that they're really a part of.

And I think that's where we are today, our third day. We're at that negotiation stage. We've bought up a lot of skills sets and different modalities of change that we implant them with the recovery, and we'll further those discussions tomorrow.

Tomorrow we're also going to look at power. Those positions of power and non-power and how recoveries fit into one of those."

*What have I learnt so far?* The value of being respectful, I think. And of being authentic; being human. That's going to be my biggest asset in helping others recover.

And what's the music tonight? The late, great Eva Cassidy singing, 'Over the Rainbow'. Sublime!

I'm also reading a book that was gifted to me yesterday: The Four Agreements by Don Miguel Ruiz. In fact, I read an excerpt from the chapter headed 'Don't make Assumptions' during this morning's meditation. Our whole dream of hell is based on making assumptions, apparently, and taking things personally. So there! Don't do it! Don't assume and make an ass of you and me!

Cysgwch yn dawel a nos dawch pawb. Good night everyone.

### **Recovery Coach Certificate of Completion**

Yesterday, along with some 30 other participants in the Vermont Recovery Coach Academy held at Camp Spofford, New Hampshire, I received my Certificate of Completion. I am now a trained recovery coach!

Josephine Romano, one of the facilitators summed up what being a recovery coach is all about:

"We raise up the individual's strengths, talents, passions and interests – because, quite often, we forget them. Then we co-create a vision for the future of what matters for that individual, what their mission is. We then set a goal plan with baby steps along the way on how to get there. And, as a recovery coach, I support you in getting there. I also support you in keeping you accountable to the steps.

But along the way there are universal habits and patterns of thinking that can prevent you moving on: like procrastination, limited thinking, and feeling like a victim – "That's good for them – but not for me!" – or simply fear. Fear is a big block.

We take these blocks that come up and coach right through them. We look at how we can think differently about this or that, or what actions we can take to coach through the fear (or whatever the block is) and keep taking the steps to reach the vision.

Recovery coaching is always about today. It happens in the “now”. We start there and move forward with what’s working well. We don’t go back to try to figure anything out. We co-create as we go along.

Coaching is all about choice. And it’s all about co-creating a life that works for you – a life that you’ll love.”

I wish to thank Jo and her other two course facilitators, James Henzel and Robin Baldinelli, for all their hard work throughout the 5 days. Thanks also for accepting me onto the course at the very last minute and for making me feel so welcomed. Mark Ames’ hunch that I would benefit from observing this aspect of peer-based recovery at close hand was dead right.

My least comfortable time during the 5 days at Camp Spofford happened when we looked at the section on Power and Prestige under Cultural Diversity. That’s when Rosita, a Puerto Rican, and I, a Welshman, found ourselves at the other end of the room and separated from the rest of the group.

The exercise involved the group of 30 of us standing together in silence at one end of the room and crossing over to the other side when James, the facilitator, called out non-shared ‘values, norms, traditions, customs, art history, folklore and institutions of [us] group of people’. (Orlandi, Weston, & Epstein, 1992)

My sense of separateness was at its most acute when those who had a first language other than English were asked to cross over to the other side of the room. In that moment, with just two of us isolated out of the entire group, all the frustrations, the sense of injustice and oppression of belonging to a minority culture came rushing to the fore. In that moment, I identified with the single mothers, the ones suffering from mental illnesses, those from poor backgrounds, the disabled, etc.

If it felt uncomfortable for me, however, think how it must have felt for Elmer. He was the only black man standing in silence at the other end of the room.

The point had been made though and the lesson learnt. Cultural proficiency is the goal whereby cultural competence is incorporated into every policy, practice and attitude.

I wish to thank Cass for the lift up yesterday from Spofford, New Hampshire to White River Junction, Vermont. It rained cats and dogs the whole way but Cass and I talked about all manner of things and the journey went very quickly.

I had a bit of a panic though when Cass drove off with my laptop still in her boot and I had no means of contacting her. Thanks to Dennis DeLine, pastor at the Winchester Assembly of God church, who was also on the course and whose telephone number I had, I was able to eventually phone Cass and an hour later I was reunited with my computer. Thanks for going those several extra miles, Cass.

My thanks and best wishes also go to Jim MacFarlane and Ken Dattilio, my two room-mates at Camp Spofford. I got to know both and we became firm friends. Isn’t it amazing how quickly friendships are formed when we share with each other at depth and accept our humanness? It was a privilege meeting these two men. And, yes, three grown men were in tears when we said our goodbyes.

My best wishes go to all the other members of the group as well. They'll make excellent recovery coaches. Thanks for your friendships and kindnesses over the past 5 days. And thanks particularly to Ken for sorting out the security of my laptop.

Today (Saturday 16th October), Mark Ames came over to my hotel to take me out for a meal. We went to Hanover in New Hampshire as I fancied going to watch a game of American Football, between Dartmouth and Holy Cross colleges. I'd never seen the game played live before and wanted to try and make sense of a made-for-television sport that baffled me.

Before that, however, we had to sort out my itinerary for next week and it became obvious that I would have to hire a car for my final three days. I had meetings all over the state and Mark was not going to be around because of out-of-state business.

I am also intent on going to a meeting in the Wilson House, Bill Wilson's old home, on my last Friday in Vermont. I had no option really but to hire a car. Unfortunately, the Enterprise garage was closed so I'll have to get up extra early on Monday to arrange the car-hire from Wednesday onwards.

The meal with Mark was lovely and we talked through most of the first half of the football game! In particular we discussed the opposition that has been in some quarters to the idea of peer based recovery systems.

As Mark explained, "The reason that some providers feel it's a threat is that they haven't understood that we do different territory. They provide an acute care response to addiction as a disease. We provide a life-time recovery support. Treatment is an event. Recovery lasts a lifetime. That's why providers need to work together with the recovery services."

Then as Mark drove off to finish writing a paper for Monday's Vermont Recovery Network meeting in St Johnsbury, I went to watch the 2nd half of the American Football game. Two college teams vying for supremacy in what looked like a chaotic, nonsensical mêlée of a game with more bodies on and off the field than I've ever seen in any other sport. I'd swear there were at least a hundred players on both sides!

Thankfully, I was seated next to John Kettere and his partner, Delilah Sourley. John, a retired doctor and keen fox-hunter, understood the game and tried to explain it to me. He was in a difficult position this afternoon though – as an ex Holy Cross scholar and having worked for over 25 years as a gynaecologist and obstetrician at the local 350 bed Dartmouth-Hitchcock medical Centre in Hanover, his loyalties were split.

I think deep down though that he favoured Holy Cross. And it was Holy Cross alas that lost. The final score was Dartmouth 26 Holy Cross 19. And do I now understand the game? Well, what do you think! After the match, John and Delilah went out of their way to take me back to my hotel. I'm taken aback by the ongoing kindnesses extended to me on this trip.

The music I'm listening to tonight is: Have a Nice Day (Decade in the Sun Version) by the Stereophonics.

And you have a nice evening as well. Good night everyone. Nos dawch. Cysgwch yn dawel.

### **The only requirement for membership is an interest in recovery...**

It's been a good few days. I got to speak on Skype with David Clark on Sunday morning. (Yes, our David! You didn't know I moved in such illustrious circles, did you!) I was also privileged to chat to Linda, David's partner, and Ben, his son, for the very first time. Trouble was, David and I spoke for so long I missed the morning service at the local church here in White River Junction, Vermont.

Instead, I ended up joining a Sunday school class where members were discussing how the Catholic Church had fallen out of favour with the developing world from around the 10th century onwards. Members blamed outside influences for this. But I piped up and suggested that the most damage was probably done from within (as it always is!).

I remember reading a brown-covered, bland-looking volume about the life and doctrines of Meister Eckhart (c1260-1327), a Dominican friar and German philosopher, a spiritual psychologist, who was renowned for his preaching to lay people about his vision of the relationship between man and God. His central theme was ‘the presence of God in the individual soul, and the dignity of the soul of the just man’.

What attracted me to that particular book I do not know! But as soon as I started reading it, I was fascinated. I was excited, even before I sensed he had a message for me, personally! And indeed, he did. By reading that book I learnt so many things about God – things that were to become the very foundation of my view of life.

In essence, I learnt that I could have a direct relationship with God, one to one, and also that he was available where and when I needed him. I didn’t have to take the scenic route to God. I could even catch him in his kitchen if I wanted to.

This was the kind of relationship I needed with my ‘higher power’, because I didn’t know when or where I’d next be tempted to drink. Whenever that might be, I’d need instant access to his help. From then on it became my main objective in life to improve my understanding of God and to deepen my relationship with Him. That, and maintaining my sobriety – because, in effect, they mean the same thing.

Now that was fine and dandy for me. Not so, however, for the Catholic Church. Not taking the scenic route (religion) to God was tantamount to committing heresy in Eckhart’s days. Indeed, Meister Eckhart was put on trial for heresy after his death, and found guilty. I, on the other hand, through his teachings and his philosophy, found a new life.

I heard on the news programmes on Sunday night that Joycelyn Elders, the former U.S. Surgeon General, had called for cannabis (skunk) smoking to be de-criminalised. Whilst agreeing with her that I don’t want to see the lives of our young people blighted by the stain of a criminal record, I’m not too sure, either, that I want to make it legal for them to shuffle aimlessly through their lives in a de-motivated, semi-conscious, zombie-like state.

On Monday morning (18th October), I attended the Vermont Recovery Network quarterly meeting held at the Kingdom Recovery Center in Saint Johnsbury, Vermont.

This building will have special significance for many – it’s the historical birthplace of “Dr. Bob,” co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous. If I’m lucky, and if my meeting on Friday with Barbara Cimaglio, Deputy Commissioner Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programmes at the Vermont Department of Health, ends on time, I might even get to chair a meeting in the Wilson House, “Bill W’s” old home in East Dorset, Vermont. Now, that will be something to write home about!

There were several items on the agenda that interested me very much. The discussion on Programme Standards and Staff Supervision Protocols and a review of Recovery Coaching Tools and Participant Understanding, for example.

“We’re moving forward by the skin of our pants!” as one contributor said. This is new territory indeed! Up to now, no supervision has been in place for Recovery Coaches.

Instantly, I was transported back to Bill Wilson and Dr Bob's early challenge when developing the AA 12-Step programme: "How not to screw this up!" And that's what was uppermost in these peoples' minds also – as they struggled with introducing structure and outcome measurements into Recovery Coaching, which, by its very nature, is the antithesis of these things.

"At the Vermont's Network of Recovery Centres, we work to engage those who are new to recovery; those who struggle to feel welcomed in traditional settings, youth, disabled people, senior citizens, and people whose recovery includes the use of medications and therapy."

"We're the people who help the people who don't make it in AA," was one further comment I heard.

And then I got to hear this definition from Mark Ames, Vermont Recovery Network Coordinator, "The only requirement for membership (of AA) is a desire to stop drinking. The only requirement for membership of a Recovery Centre is an interest in recovery."

Prior to these discussions, however, we had attended a workshop presented by Yvette Stevens, an experienced substance abuse clinician who is currently working for the company that distributes suboxone. Her presentation covered the rationale for and process of medication assisted recovery. Yvette also discussed the recovery needs of this population and the need for further public education in establishing a recovery oriented systems of care, sensitive to the needs of this population.

Tuesday (19th October), I travelled down to meet Ed Battles, Director of the Turning Point Recovery Centre in Springfield. Ed showed me around this wonderful setting and took me next door to show me around their brand new Modular 8 bed roomed home, which will become a transitional home for released prisoners.

This beautiful house was gifted to the centre by Matt Foley and Susan Sundstrom from Woodstock, Vermont. They wanted to donate it to a non-profit organisation. And how much did they have to pay for this wonderful new resource? Well, \$1.

"And they wouldn't even accept that!" added Ed respectfully.

"What's the one single biggest attribute needed to run a place like this, Ed," I asked.

"Passion for recovery," he replied without a moment's hesitation.

I also got to speak to Wendi Lashua Germain, Director of Springfield's Restorative Justice Centre. "Our mission is to empower local organizations, individuals and schools committed to peacefully resolving conflict addressing crime and building a safe and healthy community. We adhere to a non-violent and empowering vision where differences are respected. Conflicts are addressed through open and respectful communication guided by trained community members."

And what had brought Wendi into this field?

"I was a victim of crime and I did not feel I had a voice in the system. And Restorative Justice really looks at those that are harmed. When I was harmed, nobody asked me what I wanted, nobody cared. The person who harmed me went to jail and it was over. And that didn't work for me. And when I heard about Restorative Justice I volunteered to work here and that's how I started..."

I then travelled with Mark Ames up to White River Junction and spotted wild turkeys and deer on the way – turning back on ourselves once, so that I could see the deer properly. We lunched at Tiptopcafe, the original site of the Second Wind Foundation, Vermont's first ever Recovery

centre. They were a victim of their own success apparently. So many visitors' cars clogged the car parking facilities that the landlord asked them to move on.

My discussion with Mark Helijas (who started it all and who had the vision for the Vermont Recovery Network) and Mark Ames was truly inspirational. I can't do it justice here, so I won't try. Suffice to print for you Mark Helijas' vision:

"Everyone, everywhere has access to vast and varied recovery support services, that no one feels the ongoing desolation of this disease, that those who have suffered no longer live behind a veil of stigma, but rather they feel society's admiration and appreciation for the struggle and courage it takes for them to live a life reclaimed from darkness; viewed as people who have taken hold of an extended hand and worked mightily to reclaim the spark of divine inspiration and live a life in the right for everyone to see." Mark Helijas

The music I'm listening to tonight is Feeling Good sung by Michael Bubl And I'm reading, "The Books Early AAs Read for Spiritual Growth". 7th Ed., by Dick B.

And that's all for tonight folks. Sleep tight everyone. Good night. Nos dawch pawb. Cysgwch yn dawel.

### **A love fest at the Capitol Plaza Hotel**

On October 20th I attended a meeting of representatives from Region 1 agencies in Montpelier. During this meeting discussion focused on services already available in the communities, identifying barriers to services as well as gaps in them and developing objectives for the rest of the year. Included with the agenda were descriptions of the services provided by agencies that had been identified by the group.

Fascinating for me was to see how the state of Vermont has had the courage to change from an Acute System of Care to the Recovery Oriented System of Care. I asked Jackie Corbile, Chief of Treatment at the state, what had precipitated this change. "It came about because we felt we had lost focus on what recovery was about."

I then visited "Mickey" Stuart Wiles, Director of Turning Point Centre of Chittenden County in Burlington. Mickey's centre is part of the Vermont Network of Recovery Centres. But the funding level prohibits his ability to maintain staffing 100% of the time.

The centre, during many hours, is left in the hands of volunteers. The centre's ability to offer consistent and adequate recovery support services is only possible with full staffing. Volunteers are great but they need adequate supervision and the ability to refer individuals they cannot assist to a qualified staff person.

State funding is \$50K per year, while an adequate operating budget is \$200K. The gap is too significant to close it with private donations and fund raising, especially with limited staff.

Cuts and money being removed from budgets, and how it affected the disadvantaged most, also dominated the discussion in the workshop that I attended yesterday, October 21st. This was a Vermont Association for Mental Health (VAMH) workshop on the Challenge of "Challenge for Change" held at the Capitol, Plaza hotel in Montpelier as part of their 72nd Annual Educational Conference.

This initiative, an outgrowth of an intense debate in the legislature, seemingly focused on the need to reduce state services with a new focus on outcome measures, new efficiencies, and the re-design of priorities (sic).

Given the breadth and size of the Agency of Human Services, much of the focus of this proposal related to the Department of Mental Health and many aspects of Vermont's Community Mental Health System which, of course, includes the substance misuse budget.

Does this ring a bell with what's happening back in the U.K.? All the attendees yesterday were certainly only too aware of one thing: they had to prepare themselves for some very tough times ahead. If I heard the phrase "We've got to think outside the box" once, I heard it a hundred times. What it means in essence is, "We're in a right old mess here, folks. And we haven't got the slightest idea on how to sort it out. You wouldn't by any chance have any suggestions or ideas, would you?"

Much of yesterday's event, however, centred on the retirement of Ken Libertoff, outgoing Director of VAMH, and was a celebration of the life and work of this most inspired and extraordinary of leaders. Apparently, he had transformed attitudes in Vermont towards mental health issues and had established a department that was the envy of other states. Deservedly, therefore, yesterday's get-together was a love fest!

This was his final comment to his host of admirers, "For much of the past thirty years, I didn't know what I didn't know. More recently, I discovered some of what I didn't know. What I learned is, it is not about me... but about all of you!" Maybe that's what Jackie Corbile meant when she said that providers had lost focus on what recovery was!

If Californian voters approve a ballot initiative that would legalise recreational marijuana use in the state, then the Federal government will take action to overturn the proposition. Proposition 19, a state constitutional amendment, would allow adults at least 21 years old to possess up to 1 ounce of marijuana and grow 25-square-foot pot gardens.

Obama's drug tsar and nine former Drug Enforcement Agency chiefs vehemently oppose this proposal. The drug war continues!

And scientists are still looking for the easier, softer option! A gene that has a "big, big effect" on how people respond to alcohol has been identified. About 10% to 20% of the population carries a version of the gene (which carries the blueprint for an enzyme called CYP2E1) that makes their brains especially sensitive to alcohol, claims Kirk Wilhelmsen, senior author of a paper by the journal, *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*.

"While the finding doesn't yet have any treatment application," he says, "my expectation is this is actually going to lead somewhere."

This afternoon I travel to Burlington again to see Barbara Cimaglio, Director of Vermont state's Addiction Agency. I then drive down south to East Dorset to chair a meeting in the Wilson House, Bill W's old home. And tomorrow, I leave for Boston where I'll meet up with Meira, my wife, Bethan, my eldest daughter and my two granddaughters, Begw Non and Efa Grug. Next week, therefore, will be a break for me and an opportunity to recharge my batteries.

Then I will continue with my Churchill Scholarship by visiting Philadelphia, where I will look at the provision and quality of service elements: 1) life-skill education; 2) recovery coaching; 3) recovery plan development; 4) educational/employment coaching; 5) family support and relationship enhancement; 6) parenting training; 7) special interest support groups; 8) sober leisure; and 9) community service projects.

There are some extraordinary service outcomes in Philadelphia. 100% reporting no crime or involvement with the criminal justice system within the past 30 days; at 6-month follow ups there was a 41.7% increase in employment and/or school attendance; and those reporting stable living environments increased from 23.1% at intake to 46.2% (reporting a permanent place to

live) at 6-month follow up. (Source: monograph on “Peer-based Addiction Recovery Support”, William L. White). After Philadelphia, it’ll be on to Washington D.C. and then to Virginia.

But all that’s to come. Today, I need to thank Mark Ames for his extraordinary kindness towards me. He has been my guide throughout my stay in Vermont and he had provided me with the widest possible scope of experiences. I didn’t get to thank him properly yesterday as he left the ‘love fest’ early to fly off for an out-of-state appointment.

So, thanks Mark for all you’ve given me and for allowing me to experience how a consummate ‘mover and shaker’ and politically-astute network co-ordinator operates. I’m full of admiration!

And finally, a poem from a book of poetry, Sentence or Pardon, by Mark Helijas, who I met the other day at the Turning Point Centre in White River Junction. Here’s a taster:

### Get Out of the Way

let attack pass by unhindered  
offer no resistance  
nullify its force

offer no self to defend  
and sparring will  
have no partner

offer no self to engage  
and venom pools  
harmlessly on the ground

offer only love  
and rage finds  
no life support

offer only peace  
and you are peaceful

M. A. Helijas

The music I’m listening to at the moment is, Debussy: Claire de Lune (for all you out there contemplating marriage!)

“I’m done!” as they say in the States. I hope you all have an enjoyable time next week. And remember, no matter how dark, how bleak, how hopeless a situation is, there is always something positive lurking somewhere underneath. So look for that positive and when you’ve found it (and you **always** will), then you’ll be living in the solution.

God bless you and thank you for reading my blog. Diolch am ddarllen fy sylwadau. Cysgwch yn dawel.