



# Serene Scene

Transitional Sober Living Magazine

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## NOTHING IS MORE WORTHWHILE

C.J. Good

## CHANGING HOW PAIN MEDICATIONS ARE FORMULATED

Richard I. Gracer, M.D.

## POINT OF RETURN MONTHLY STORY

Finding A Life I Never Knew I Wanted,  
By David S.

## THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, ACTIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

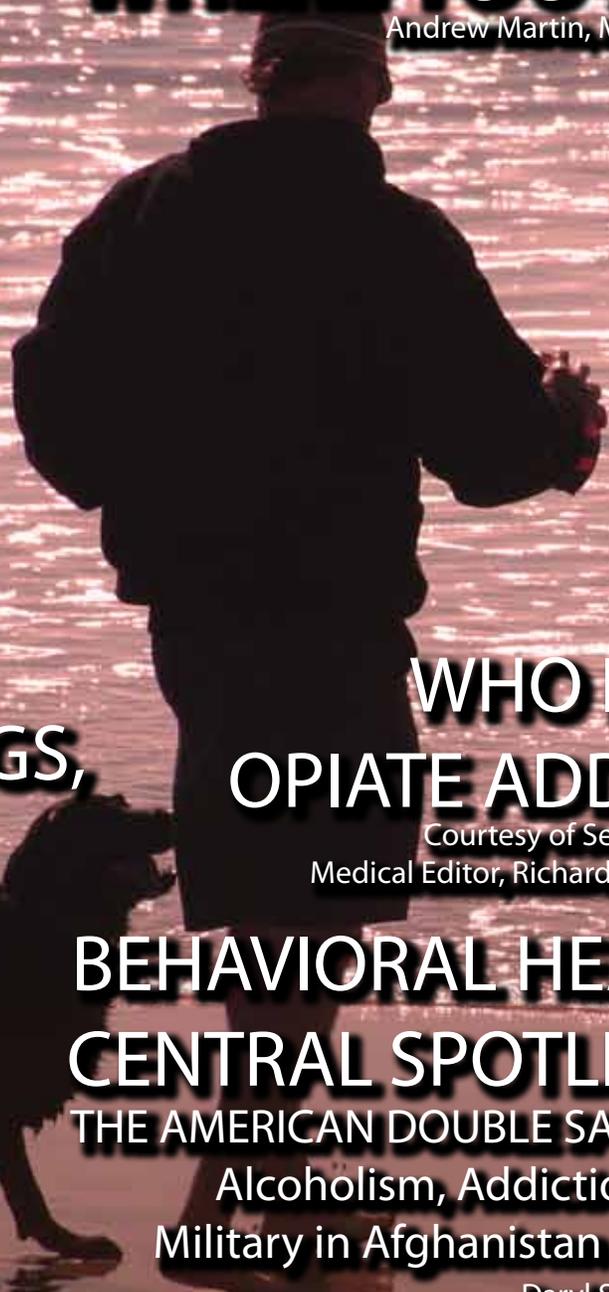
Captain Larry Smith,  
Author of The Daily Life Plan Journal

## 12 STEP TREK

Step #2: Came to Believe...  
12 Step Worksheet Series  
Courtesy of Serene Center Long Beach

## STARTING WITH WHERE YOU ARE

Andrew Martin, MBA, CADC II



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## STARTING WITH WHERE YOU ARE

*Andrew Martin, MBA, CADCI*

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# Starting With Where You Are...

One of the most common phrases heard in the world of early recovery must be, "start with where you are." Taken literally, the phrase is a transparent observation of what every person is forced to do on a moment-by-moment basis. However, the intent behind the phrase in the context of working toward a more healthy lifestyle is quite different. This article examines the subtleties, power and meaning behind this simple phrase.

At the core of 'starting with where you are at' is a concept termed presence. To be present is really a process of allowing one's self to be devoid of all distractions of mind and body. While this may sound a bit ethereal, it is something that everyone naturally experiences from time to time. For example, when I walk through a forest of trees with a ground cover of green grass and ferns, I find myself totally engaged with my surroundings. I feel somehow removed from the day-to-day stresses of life and I do not pay attention to the stiffness in my knee joint: I am connected to my surroundings on a spiritual basis.

Presence may sound like a state of being, and it is, but it is also a process. Anyone can achieve presence with a little bit of effort. In fact, many people live life in an almost continual lifestyle of presence. To achieve presence is as simple as paying close attention to simply being in the moment; ignoring the many unrelated thoughts that continually bombard our over stimulated mind. To borrow a phrase from 12-Step programs "be a human being, not a human doing." Presence begins with a willingness to be engaged in life on life's terms, not on our own terms. If we can stop reacting, and start engaging, we will find presence.

So often people are preoccupied with looking back, thinking that past behaviors magically predict future behaviors: this is a distorted view of choice. While it is absolutely true that we have done things in their past that are mistakes, that cause harm to others, that have resulted in great loss; it is also true that we have psychological mechanisms for dealing with that shame and guilt of the past. When we stay focused on past



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events, we are stay stuck in a method of thinking that does not allow us to enjoy the gifts of today. Staying stuck in the past taints every part of our lives, robbing us of the ability to be present due in part to resentments from past behaviors and unfortunate happenings that nobody has the power to change.



Being human includes the ability to forgive ourselves for our past mistakes. However, mistakes made can often be embraced as resentments rather than mistakes. Resentments are merely holding onto unreasonable expectations that have gone unfulfilled. This definition of resentments implies that we are responsible for the resentments we hold, and this is absolutely true. Nobody is responsible for our resentments except ourselves. If we can let go of the unreasonable expectations, the resentments will lose their power on us. Without the power of the resentment, we will then be free to transform our shame for not fulfilling our own expectations into guilt for simply making a mistake.

Our psychology processes shame in a different way than guilt. Shame manifests itself as an identity, as what we are, as what we shall always be. However, guilt is simply a behavior we once had that resulted in a negative consequence, and we are able to learn from that behavior and change it in the future. Letting go of resentments means freeing ourselves to experience the guilt of making an error, learning from that error, forgiving ourselves and moving on. Holding onto resentments keeps us locked into a cycle of shamefulness and distorted identity. We must actively choose to recognize our part in our past, understand our unhealthy behaviors as mistakes that we made because we did not have the ability at that moment to do anything differently. We must adjust our expectations of ourselves by understanding we could not have performed at a higher level in that moment. We must forgive ourselves, and we must understand that mistakes of the past do not define our choices today. Finally, we must make amends for the resentments, shamefulness and unreasonable expectations of our past. We must take action on these things in order to improve our quality of life starting with today.

Some people perceive life as constantly looking forward at a preferred future, or get caught up in developing all types of alternative futures. This type of thinking process is rooted in a deep seeded desire to control one's surroundings. The illusion of control can be detrimental to many of us that are skilled at creating high expectations of ourselves and then trying to accomplish those expectations. Unfortunately, our universe encompasses so many other factors beyond our control, such that there is no possibility of controlling any future for ourselves. While we do have a significant influence on our future, we do not have control. Worrying about the future is more accurately described as a desperate attempt to control a future we cannot control. Goal and objective setting is absolutely healthy as long as the objectives are realistically obtainable, and the goals are flexible to allow unforeseen influences to happen. There is a difference be-



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tween constantly looking to the future to provide happiness, and attempting to influence behaviors in the present in order to create a better future.

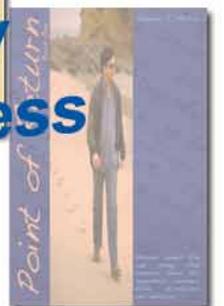
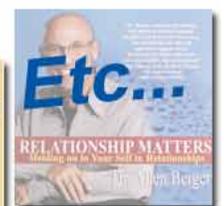
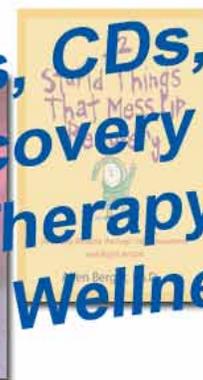
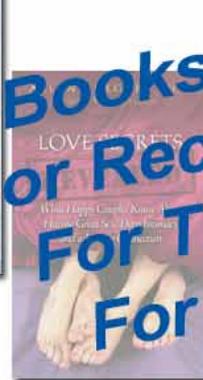
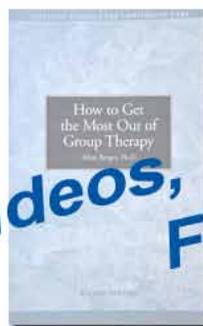
Many spiritual and psychological leaders have created volumes of books describing how to live in a state of being. It is hard work for those of us who have busy minds: and it is those of us who have busy minds that benefit most from simply being. The work required is philosophically straightforward, however the effort can be unforgiving at times. Nevertheless, the benefits are infinitely rewarding when living a lifestyle that integrates our minds, our surroundings, our intention, our spirit, our attention, our emotion, our body, and our willingness. When we are able to shed agendas from the past and pay close attention to the now, we are able to be our true selves. Unburdened, we can contemplate who we are today, and what choices we wish to make today, using prudence and healthy thought process. Free from our unhealthy selves, we are able interpret our universe in an open manner and find new perspective. Often we will find miracles setting right before us, they have been there our whole life, but heretofore we have not acknowledged them.



Starting with where you are, for many, is as simple as changing a few habitual thought perspectives. For these lucky people it is a relatively simple choice to improve the quality of their lives immediately. For the rest of us, starting with where you are becomes a challenge that requires self-awareness and the practice of new choices in our lives. With continued effort, the process of modifying our thinking will become automatic. It does take time to master this approach, so be prepared for many mistakes, and forgive yourself before trying again. We are not perfect, but we are able to make more healthy choices as we become more educated. So start with where you are at and make more healthy choices starting today. **SS**



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