

# THERAPIST



## MARY COOK

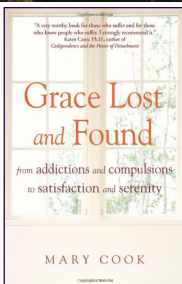
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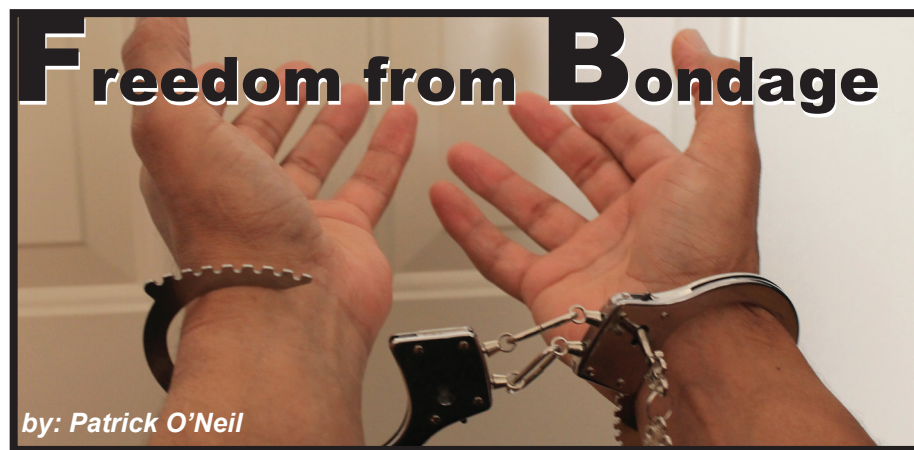
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## PARDON ME

Wednesday was like any other day, that is if your day consisted of running late to work, scrambling for a parking place, five back to back meetings with difficult clients, and a horribly contrived staff meeting that went on for entirely too long. By four o'clock I'd just about had it, and if I wasn't in recovery I too would have been traipsing out with the rest of humanity, and hitting a bar for happy hour for that "over the hump" day celebratory cocktail, or twenty.

However these days I'm not only in recovery but I work part time in a rehab, so I don't even have "normie" co-workers to tempt me (not that I'm easily tempted, but you know what I mean). Instead I just packed up my meager belongings and set out to walk the three blocks to retrieve my car. When I got to where I was sure I had parked, there was another car in that spot. Unfortunately where I work is located in a highly populated neighborhood in Los Angeles, and finding parking can be somewhat of an ordeal, even when I'm not running late. There have been a few times that I've left work not quite sure where my car was, and had to search the surrounding area until I remembered.

Yet this time I was positive that this was not the case, and after a few strolls around several adjacent blocks. I came to the conclusion that my car had either been stolen, or towed. The latter being the more probable as my car is not new, or even that desirable. But even with this knowledge, what was I to do? It's not like I'm versed in either situation, and after a few minutes of stress bordering on a panic attack, I pulled out my phone and called the number listed on the numerous and confusing city parking signs posted throughout the neighborhood.

"West Hollywood sheriff's department..."

"Yes, I'm wondering if my car's been towed?"

The helpful, yet somewhat surly peace officer that had answered the phone gave me a number for the "parking enforcement" department. Next I called them, where an equally surly voice said yes they had towed my car, although this person wasn't sure exactly why, but that I needed to call the tow yard. Which I did.

"Why did you tow my car?" I demanded.

"It was in a tow away zone."

Standing on the block where my car had been parked I looked down a long row of parked cars that obviously hadn't been towed, and then glanced up at the parking sign. There was nothing on there about this being a tow away zone, and then it started to rain.

"You coming in to get your car?"

An overwhelming rage erupted in my soul and I wished for days gone by where I could slam the phone down for that satisfyingly abrupt disconnect, instead I mumbled "Yes," and stumbled toward a busy intersection while fumbling with my Uber app. It was now rush hour, and raining, which in L.A. is close to Armageddon, and traffic was at a standstill—plus the Uber app told me it was now into "surge fare" at three times the normal rate, making Uber no cheaper than a regular taxi—this day was just getting better and better.

Somewhat defeated I stood at the bus stop, and waited. When the bus finally arrived I boarded and made my way to the back where there was only one of those uncomfortable aisle seats available. Soaking wet I sat there feeling overwhelmed and depressed. I really didn't have the money for whatever the tow and traffic ticket was going to cost, which caused me to mentally calculate how close I was to being destitute, and all my fears around financial matters rose to the surface, and then my phone rang.

The area code indicated that it was a Sacramento, California number, and I don't really know anyone in Sacramento, but what the hell, my day couldn't get that much worse, and so I answered it a bit abruptly, "What?"

"Hi, is this Patrick O'Neil?"

"Yes?"

"This is the Office of Governor Jerry Brown, we're calling to let you know you've been pardoned."

Suddenly an overwhelming warmth erupted in my soul and I felt incredibly calm. For once I was at a loss for words as my eyes misted over and a tear ran down my cheek. Looking up I notice a tough as hell cholo staring at me from across the aisle, when our gazes intersected he diverted his eyes. Crying on the bus was probably not acceptable behavior in his world nor was it in my former world either.

Twenty years ago I made the bad life changing decision to commit numerous armed bank robberies to support my heroin habit. At the time I was about as mentally low as I could go: strung-out, desperate, in fear, self centered, and deranged. I saw no way out from where my addiction had taken me, and decided that my life was over and whatever I did, didn't matter as life just wasn't worth living.

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Surprise! Surprise! When I stopped drinking rum and coke, I started winning tournaments. I also attended AA meetings with a full commitment, and worked on addiction issues in my personal therapy and supervision. My sobriety date is July 19, 1978.

I also had severe bronchial asthma as a child, and the doctors told my parents that I probably would not live beyond 9 years of age. Today, I am 67 years young.

To be honest, I really don't like change. I want my roots to be firmly grounded. I also know that I have to be open to change in others, and myself for life to be exciting and meaningful.

In Rehab, many professional therapists become defensive when clients ask, "Doctor, what substance or behavior did you suffer with?" The real therapists are able to identify and share their addiction whether it is sex, substances, shopping, or alcohol.

Most important with the stages of change is making the assessment of whether you are ready to take action, and not just contemplate the addiction.

Here is an example of the stages of giving up cigarettes:

**PRE-CONTEMPLATION.** I enjoy every cigarette, others want me to stop. I don't.

**CONTEMPLATION.** "I'm thinking about maybe cutting down, but I'm not ready to cut down.

**PREPARATION.** I'm researching patches, medication, and therapy to stop smoking.

**ACTION.** I'm using the right medication patch, and I am actively working on this with my sponsor and my therapist. I am cutting down with the goal of stopping.

**MAINTENANCE.** I attend a group with members who have stopped smoking. I like to count the number of days I have not smoked. My general health feels much better.

Being a Type-2 Diabetic, I daily monitor my blood sugar and take my medication. I basically have a diet with no sugar and no salt. If my therapist sees a coke in my hand, he will physically knock it out of my hand.

My biggest problem was trying to change too much too fast. It is important to honor all changes. I also received the support of my family and started a rigorous exercise program.

I also had to identify my discouraging and negative thoughts:

1. "This will never work."
2. "Doing something different is too hard and anxiety provoking."
3. "This will be too stressful"
4. "What I'm doing is not that bad."
5. 'I've tried and failed before.'
6. 'This is my ninth rodeo. Nothing works.'
7. 'I am not an agent of change or change expert; I'm stuck.'

**Recommended Reading:** "13 Things Mentally Strong People Don't Do, by Amy Morin

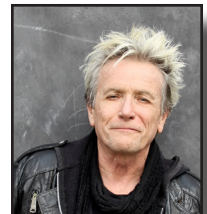
Dr. Weyand studied Community Clinical Psychology at the baccalaureate, and graduate level at CSUN where he graduated Magna Cum Laude. He then studied Counseling Psychology at the Doctorate level at USC. He is also a graduate of the Addiction Studies program at Pierce College. Dr. Weyand has 30+ years of experience working in recovery and behavioral healthcare. He began his career at Woodview Calabasas Psychiatric Hospital as the Asst. Administrator, and Director of Community Services. He was Director of the Adult Unit at Van Nuys Psychiatric Hospital for over 10 years, where he worked with troubled adolescents and adults. For Appt. or Consultations, call him at (818) 341-0283 or (818) 800-4814. Website: doctorclint.net

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Needless to say, I was eventually arrested, convicted, and sentenced to prison. Then one day, on the yard of San Quentin, I realized that unless I made some drastic changes, this would be my life, from now on. Upon my release I entered rehab, and started attending NA meetings. When I graduated from treatment I became a drug and alcohol counselor. Then I went back to school and got my Masters degree in creative writing. I wrote and published a memoir, began teaching college, and continued my involvement with my fellowship.

Without really thinking about it the days turned into months, the months into years, and my life continued to evolve into the most wonderful existence beyond anything that I could've dreamed of—except for the fact that my criminal record kept following me. A ton of teaching gigs and appointments to full professorship eluded me. I would apply for positions and the application always had that dreaded, "have you ever been arrested" box that needed checking—and when I did, I never heard back. I've also been denied other employment opportunities, apartments, volunteer positions, and bank loans.

Two years ago an amazingly generous pro-bono lawyer took on my case. After a mountain of paperwork, six months of waiting, and a court appearance I was granted a Certification of Rehabilitation by the State of California. Which automatically made me eligible to apply for a Governor's Pardon. "Automatically" meaning another mountain of paperwork and another year of nervously waiting—and then here I am on the one day in my life when I'm not feeling grateful for everything that has been so graciously given to me. Yet all of that changed with this phone call and none of my immediate problems seemed that important.

"Mister O'Neil?"

Jolted out my memories I preceded to tell the woman on the phone about what a bad day I'd been having, and how I was on a bus to get my car from the tow yard. She told me how sorry she was to hear that.

"You just made my day," I said.

"Is there anything else I can help you with?"

"I know this sounds cheesy, but would you give my best to Governor Brown?"

"Of course."

Since my first day in recovery I have never regretted making the commitment to change my life. I am eternally grateful for all that has been given to me, and in return I try to be of service to others, carry the message to addicts and alcoholics, and practice these principles in all my affairs. It has been a long journey, but worth it, and this pardon is another gift in a long line of gifts that confirms I am doing the right thing.

Patrick O'Neil is the author of the memoir \*Gun, Needle, Spoon\*. For the past 17 years he has lived and worked in the recovery community as a recovering addict/alcoholic, a drug and alcohol counselor, and a college instructor. He is currently a group facilitator and narrative therapist for the Cast Centers in West Hollywood, and lives in Downtown, Los Angeles with his wife Jennifer and two giant cats. For more information, please visit: [www.patrick-oneil.com](http://www.patrick-oneil.com).



Begin giving yourself what you seek from others. Notice when you feel unhappy or stressed, and ask yourself what you need, and when possible provide it for yourself. Watch for success and praise yourself while growing within recovery.

5. Accept mistakes and shortcomings as part of your learning process, and forgive yourself, then every day, look in the mirror and say, "This is the me from my life with addiction and all. But now I am in recovery, and I am amazing."

As you move along, practice relating less to your human self and more to your Higher Self, the part that transcends human pain and knows the truth of who you are deep in your heart. Take back your dominion over how you feel, and let that higher Self-shine with love, peace, and serenity in your heart. You are "worthy" and will it help you "QUIT To Win" from gambling addiction!

Catherine is a former columnist for InRecovery Magazine, the author of her debut memoir, "Addicted To Dimes," a gambling recovery coach, and ghostwriter. She runs "Lyon Media Services" helping authors market their books throughout social media. Catherine advocates about gambling addiction and has shared her story on Addictionland.com, Facing Addiction.org and Heroes in Recovery.com. She is currently co-writing a memoir with former NFL pro-Vance Johnson, former Denver Bronco due out late Fall 2018. She resides in Arizona and So. Oregon.