**Robin Evanson**

**Narrator**

**Sara Ludewig**

**Sam Aamot**

**Interviewers**

**May 18, 2017**

**Duluth, Minnesota**

Robin Evanson -**RE**

Sara Ludewig -**SL**

Sam Aamot -**SA**

**SA**: We'll begin by having you state your name and having you say you give us permission to record this.

**RE**: Okay, my name is Roberta Evanson, I go by Robin, and you have permission to record this.

**SA**: Thanks.

**SL**: It's May 18th, and we're in Duluth.

**SA**: Do you want to start about telling us a little about your childhood, family, and growing up?

**RE**: Okay, well I was born in 1956. I'm sixty-one today. I was born as the last child--I have five siblings--my father was married before my mother and had one daughter, and then met my mother and had four of us. Then when I was fourteen my mother took in a foster child who I consider a sister. We lived in southern California. My mother was from Superior, Wisconsin and my father's from Ottumwa, Iowa. My mom was born in 1919 and my dad was born in 1911, so I was kind of a late child, bit of a late child, compared to my brother's and sisters. Being the youngest my next oldest sister was eight years older than I am. I had a niece who was seven years younger. My half-sister was twenty-two years older than me and she passed a few years ago. None of them have addiction issues. Compulsive overeating, but not any kind of substance abuse issues. My father was what I think of as a periodic drunk. Whether he's an alcoholic or not would have been his decision to make, but he was very unpredictable. He had long periods of not drinking followed by short periods of heavy drinking. When he drank he was really violent. Was very physical with my mother in front of us kids--on purpose in front of us kids. He'd get us up in the morning and the middle of the night and drag us into the living room and call her names and berate her. Made sure we knew what he thought of her and that kind of thing.

When I was five my mom had saved enough money to move out. My oldest sister Barbara had come to live with us for a while and then had gone back to live with my dad's sister, her aunt, in Virginia. And then she had moved on and gotten married. In fact she was married the year I was born. Then my next sister Marlene had already moved out. She had gotten married.

My brother Tom was still at home. He was in his senior year of high school, and my sister Kathy was still of course at home. I was in kindergarten. I think I had just--had I left? No, I was just getting ready to start kindergarten and my brother decided to stay with my dad, which was really hard on my mom. It was because he wanted to graduate high school from the school he was in. He was on the football team and so forth. As soon as graduation he enlisted and moved out right away. It wasn't much longer.

My mom and I and my sister Kathy moved to Redondo Beach. My mom worked two jobs, so my sister had to take care of me. My sister kind of picked up where my dad left off. She resolved all her emotional issues through violence. Again, it was a periodic kind of thing. It wasn't an everyday kind of thing, but when it occurred it was pretty severe. It didn't really stop until one time she really, really went a little too far and I had climbed out my bedroom window and was hiding in the garden of my neighbor. She found me--the mother--and she had me call my mom. Of course, back then, you know, you didn't call your mom at work because she could lose her job. I had to call mom at work and she had to come home. I have no idea what she said to my sister because that was behind closed doors, but what she told me was she needed me not to make my sister so angry. She had to work and if she was going to support us she couldn't lose her job and she had to depend on Kathy to keep an eye on me. She needed to depend on me not to make my sister angry. So, I learned at a really young age how to be responsible because I was going to make sure my mom could depend on me. I really loved my mom.

Kathy and I kind of found our way. I think the difficulty for me with Kathy was that she was one person behind closed doors and another person out in public. It was kind of like that Beatles song, Eleanor Rigby: Keep a face in a jar by the door. That's pretty much how it was. But I had a very loving relationship with my mom and with my sister, it just was mixed with this unpredictable kind of thing. I think I learned also at a really young age not to trust what you saw. You know, you just didn't know--especially with my father--you never knew what you were going to get. I never knew if I was going to get this loving, caring father or if I was going to get this violent, alcoholic stranger that I had to be afraid of? My trust issues ran pretty deep pretty young.

Being from that era--being born in '56 and starting to be raised in the sixties--not a lot of kids had divorced parents. That kind of made me odd man out a bit. And their mothers--most of them were at home. Not only was I from a divorced family, but my mom was working all the time. I wanted to be where I was comfortable, so I sought other kids who were like me. Although I was raised very strictly--I mean it was like call the cops, just don't tell my mom--you know, kind of a thing. Not all these other kids were--they were a little bit more...the parents weren't paying that much attention to their kids. Those were the kids that I gravitated towards. They were the ones I felt the most comfortable with. I did a lot of the standard stuff. I was in Camp Fire Girls, and I played violin all the way through high school, and I was a good student. I spent my years in high school just waiting to get out. I had no real ability to plan or see into tomorrow. It wasn't--I think a lot of teens are like that, but I just didn't know, "Oh I'm going to go to college," or, "I'm going to do this." Nobody in my family had gone to college. None of my brothers and sisters had gone to college. So it really wasn't something that was very--it just wasn't talked about much. It ws assumed that I would go because that's the next thing you're supposed to do.

I had been working since I was fourteen. I babysat the kids next door. Their parents were hippies, and they came home after an evening with a group of friends. I was going to leave and they said, "Oh, no, you can stay." They were smoking black tar opium in a big water pipe and offered me to partake. I thought, well, heck yeah. I want to be a part of this. It had nothing to do--it's not like I got high and said, "Oh, this is it! It's the answer to all my problems!" But it made me feel a part of. Right? Especially when you're fourteen and you want to be thought of as older and, you know, accepted and all of that. And it was okay. It was just fine. It wasn't like the ridiculous movies they were showing us at school about reefer maddness. I think, too, it also made me not believe what I was told about drugs and them being dangerous in any way. I was pretty clueless about that. I didn't know any addicts. That wasn't a term we used back then. We certainly never talked about Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. It just wasn't a thing. I think they were more focused on kids not getting pregnant. That was probably the deal. I wasn't really premiscuous--a little too self conscious for that and a little less trusting than maybe others. That was growing up.

**SA**: So that was about eighth grade?

**RE**: Yeah. Seventh grade was a great year. We drank a little bit if somebody got a beer or something, but it wasn't something--we were doing baseball and hide and go seek and running around the neighborhood. Had to be home when the street lights were out. Stuff like that. I lived in a pretty lower to middle class--but back then even though we were at the beach it still wasn't--people with money lived up on the hill. They didn't live in our neighborhood. It was about--I went to school with about thirty to forty percent Mexican American population, too. It was a pretty diverse neighborhood.

**SL**: Can you tell us a little bit about your high school years?

**RE**: High school. Well, again, it was a real tough thing for me because I was bright. In eighth grade I had taken classes up at high school already. I was a very good student. I had no problem with learning. My mother read to me as a kid and, you know, you went to bed at eight o'clock and read for half an hour and then it was lights out. I learned to explore through literature. Book learning came easy for me. I did really well in my studies, but I wasn't this straight-laced kid who had the 2.3 kids at home and dad working and mom--that group of kids that tended to be in the honors classes and those kinds of things tended to be the ones whose parents were paying attention to them. My mom paid attention to me, but it was a different environment so I felt odd man out there. Then I wasn't a sports person by any stretch of imagination--basketball, but that was about it--and so I didn't fit in there. I didn't feel real girly, so I never felt like I knew how to accessorize or whatever. Probably because my sister was really good at it! [laughs] It was just easier to not make that important because I didn't feel good at it. I probably felt the most at ease in my orchestra class because that was kind of a mix of kids, but didn't socialize outside of class. By the time I was a freshman I started making friends outside of school. Older kids.

**SA**: Were these people you worked with?

**RE**: Some. Yes, by the time I was a junior in high school--yes. When you use drugs *everybody*uses drugs. That's what you think. That's my whole social connection was through smoking weed. My best friends Maria and Shelly from eighth grade on--and Shelly and I were friends from second grade. Her parents divorced, her dad was quite the hippie. He was an accomplished artist and grew his own weed. I would buy like a quarter pound of weed from him and then sell three [lits] and then get mine for free--needless to say I became an accountant. [laughs] That worked really well for me. That was something I did on a daily basis. Pot was a lot different than it is today. It wasn't as potent. It was just--nobody knew I was high. My mother never thought something was going on. And then I started finding--benzodrine. We used to get little white crosses. Loved those. Didn't care too much for downers like reds [Seconal] and that kind of thing because I felt a little out of control. I didn't like alcohol for the same reason. I didn't like that feeling of behaving in a way that I couldn't stop myself from behaving. It didn't remove inhibitions. It removed everything who I am. Pot didn't feel like that, and neither did uppers. I did some LSD and some mushrooms and stuff like that, but again it wasn't my thing.

**SA**: How would you say the opium made you feel?

**RE**: I did not start using heroin, opioids, until I was twenty-five.

**SA**: I was just referring to the time when you were babysitting.

**RE**: Oh, that was kind of a one time thing. I mean who could afford black tar opium? That was not a repeat thing. And it wasn't readily available. At least at our age.

**SA**: So, you started experimenting with marijuana. How did that lead you through high school and past high school?

**RE**: Well, again, everybody I knew was smoking weed, and at that day and age we used to smoke it in the open. We'd go to concerts and people were passing joints around. It was just a different kind of thing. It's kind of odd to me how it went from being so casual to being so restricted to know everybody wants it to be legal! I can't quite figure out what the whole moral dilemma is. At that point in time it was just a really casual drug. I can remember at some point in my early adult--my oldest sister Marlene coming to me and asking me if I could get her and her boyfriend some weed. She was the one who wouldn't let me swear in front of her, you know? It was a different time. I was still working, I was still going to school, I was still getting good grades. It wasn't interfering with my life.

**SA**: Did you sell for a long time?

**RE**: All through high school. But not--I wasn't a dealer, I just scored for people. It was more like that.

**SA**: And that kind of got you friends? Or not as much?

**RE**: They were already my friends. It was something that I was not ignorant about people going to jail for. It wasn't something I was interested in--I didn't need the money. It's not like I was trying to be a drug dealer. That wasn't the idea. And I didn't really know 'drug dealers' or what I thought of as dealers--I would eventually know dealers, yes. I had a connection at school because--that kind of thing. I wasn't known as somebody you'd go get something from. I had a very tight inner circle of friends that that portion of it was for.

**SA**: What happened after you graduated high school?

**RE**: By then, my senior year in high school like I said I had gotten in with a group of a bit older--maybe four years older than I was--and they left Hermosa Beach and went to Florida. A couple of them were going to go to school there. I went on to the junior high and I was there for about a month and I couldn't stand it. It just did not work for me. Junior high in California is fifteen thousand students. It was a big school. I just didn't know what I was doing there and I wasn't comfortable there. I was having trouble with my mom at home because my mom had become very successful. She became an entrepreneur and very successful. She worked all the time. When I was a senior--she was able to hire people and do all that, and so she was home and around a lot. My oldest sister--my sister that had lived with me--had moved out when I was ten. From ten until I was eighteen I was making my own decisions pretty much. I had restrictions and all of that, but it wasn't like I had someone saying, "Well this is what you should wear. This is what you should pack for lunch. It's time to take a bath. Time to wash your hair." Whatever. I mean it wasn't like that. Suddenly at eighteen my mom is in the picture and she wants to play that role. I'm looking at her like, "Who are you? I don't think so." It began this strife between us. There was always a little bit of that because I was pretty independent at fourteen, and I could get pretty mouthy, but everybody in my family is mouthy. It's just kind of how we are. Again, I love my mom and we got along. We would do things together, and I was her plus one in a lot of cases. She was a member of the Business and Professional Women's clubs and would bring me in and I would sing and play guitar and do their entertainment for them, and I got to know all these women. I learned to really love women and the friendships they showed one another. It was a Women Helping Women orgainzation, so that was very strong in my upbringing.

So, as a senior in high school and then after graduating I was not prepared to have my mom telling me what I could and could not do on a decision--like I was home sick one day. I had a cold. It was a Saturday. I just kind of layed around in my pajamas and watched TV. I thought, "I've got to get out of here." I called Kenny and Eileen and I said, "What are you guys doing?" I mean we didn't--we weren't out getting in trouble. It was, oh, we're playing spades and Kenny played flute and I played guitar and we would all get together and jam and smoke weed. That's just kind of the way it was. My mom said, "You're not going anywhere." I'm like, "Excuse me?" "You've been sick all day, you're not leaving." I said, "I'm just going over to Kenny and Eileen's. I'm just going to be inside their house. What's the problem?" It turned into this enormous battle of will. I finally gave in because it came to the point where were about to be violent with each other and it scared me that I could go there.

On Monday morning Mom went to work and I went to her bedroom and got out the pass book that had my college funds in it. It was a joint account, and it had at that time $11,200 in it. I remember like it was yesterday. I went to the bank and I took out $1,200, which I thought was a nice round nubmer and I left her ten grand. I called my friends in Florida and I said, "I'm coming out there." I bought a ticket and had my friend Maria bring me to the airport. I left a note on the kitchen table that said: Have gone to Florida. Will call. That was my big 'f' you to my mom. We'll see whose in charge of my life. That's how I left high school.

**SA**: What was life like in Florida?

**RE**: It was pretty cool. I roomed with four people. I rode a bus to get around. They had really good public transportation unlike southern California. I got a job at the court house in the tax assessor's office, which was only a few blocks from where I lived. I went to the clubs at night because you had to be eighteen to drink there. I dind't drink much but I went dancing a lot. I met a boy. He was five years older than me, John, and I thought I was in love. I'm sure for who I was at the time I was about as in love as a person could be, I suppose. I had this unfinished responsibility at home and it didn't feel right. After about--not long--maybe five or six months I went back. Made things right with my mom. I did a tecnical school for medical office stuff, or whatever. I don't even remember. John courted me long-distance and he wanted me to come back. I told mom, I said, "I think I want to go back." I was waiting for her to scream, and she just said, "What is it I can help you do to pack?"

So, I went to Florida. Lived down in the Keys. Poor as poor could be because you can't make much money there back in those days anyway. We smoked a lot of weed. That's about all we did was smoke a lot of week. I worked as a waitress and he worked as a heavy equipment operator at the dump. After a year we decided to get married. We got married. Then moved around different places in Florida, and then I just needed to come home. I needed to come back to be with my family.

I drug this poor Florida country boy back to Los Angeles, and he did not do well there. I did. I got a job at a company--my sister helped me get a job--and I ended up just [makes blowing wind noise] up the scale because the business was growing by leaps and bounds in the telecommunication industry. I was really good at business processes. I set up stuff and I did really well. And then I found cocaine. My girlfriend introduced it to me, my friend Maria. She was single and I was still with John. Pretty soon I didn't want to be with John anymore. I had lost a lot--the quick cocaine weight loss program, you know, so I was looking pretty good and was getting a lot of male attention. I was a different person by the time I was twenty-four than I was when I met him at eighteen. And he was already twenty-five so now he's going on thirty and he's pretty much the same guy he's always been. God, he was such a nice guy. Could have sold him to anybody; I mean it. Get him up on the auction block and--anybody, they'd fight over him. He was just a really great guy. But I didn't understand any of that at the time and I just wanted to move on. I believe, I guess, in serial monogomy. I'm not a player, but I couldn't move on and do something behind his back. That didn't match my morals. So, we split. He went to live with my mother, which was another bone of contention because she just knew I was 'going through a phase' and it would all be okay, and he was a hell of a nice guy, like I said. But I started doing a lot of cocaine. I had a lot of money, and there was a lot of cocaine, and so was everybody else doing a lot of cocaine. It was a very popular, popular drug at the time.

**SL**: This was in the late seventies?

**RE**: Let's see--when was that? I graduated in '74, so we're talking '79, '80? Almost the eighties. Drinking margaritas, smoking weed, and doing coke. It was the perfect world. It really was. I was doing really well at work and feeling like everything that defined me was work oriented. I wasn't playing my guitar anymore. I wasn't playing piano. I wasn't doing any of that. I hadn't touched my violin since I left high school. The other interests--I got this real big ego, you know? I was young, and the administrative manager of a major telecommunications corporation. I was traveling all over the United States, opening offices, hiring and training people--at twenty-five. It was a big deal. So, I didn't have a problem. I was still working. In fact, this was golden.

**SA**: Until it wasn't.

**RE**: Then I met Tim. I didn't do alone very well. I met Tim, and he was very different from John. He was much more cynical. He was very well-read. John was borderline illiterate. Not intellectually, but his skills were not there. Tim read the *LA Times*cover to cover everyday. He was interesting. He became a longshoreman. He was making some good money. We moved in together and were living together for a year, and I wasn't telling him about the cocaine. That was my business. He started coming home and he would pass out on the couch. I thought, you know, this is not my beautiful life. What's going on here? He needs to stop drinking so much. He did, he drank a lot. An Irish guy, definitely the stereotype.

I thought, you know, the problem is that we're not doing the same drug. [laughs] If he would just do coke with me then everything would be okay. So, one day he came home. We were together five years--we lived together for a yera and I think we were married for three. It was proabably in our second year. I kind of lose track. It's been a while. [laughs] I am sixty-one. I don't know the timeline well, but the storyline was that I decided to say, "Hey, guess what I brought home?" I brought out a little bindle, little gram of coke, and I said, "Do you want to snort some coke?" I've been doing this for a long time. He said, "Hell no. I don't want to snort that shit." That's exactly what he said. I thought, "My secret's out." It was my secret. I knew at that time that I was probably spending more money and energy in using this drug than was probably socially acceptable. Again, nobody talked about addiction back then. They didn't tell you they could cure you on TV like they do today. I looked at him and I remember being just devastated. I thought, "I'm going to lose this relationship." He said, "But I'll fix it." I said, "What's that?" at that point in time I don't think I could have gotten high anymore much because I had been using so long through snorting that this was not working so much anymore. He says, "Hang on a minute." He had a rig, he had a tookit. Well, it wasn't the drinking that was making him pass out. He was using heroin. He was chipping heroin.

**SA**: And you didn't know.

**RE**: I had no idea. Right. We were very functional. There wasn't that stereotypical idea that you gain from poorly done newsreels and shows on addiction--or not addiction, because they didn't do shows on addiction--but the heroin addict or the alcoholic was always somone on skid row. It was never the bank president. I was up for it. I was like, man, this is a new way I can get high. And I did. I started getting high again. It had just gotten to the point that I was using because I had to use. I wasn't getting high. Well, that--for about a year that worked for me. Then I was just crazy. I had to have more drugs, I had to have more, I had to have more. He's like, "You need to chill out. Try some of this. So, what ended up happening was I would use coke to get high and heroin to come down. Then go to work and function and do all of that. It became this back and forth thing.

I started embezzeling from work. Not paying my taxes. We were renting a house from my mother and wasn't paying her any rent, we weren't paying our bills, we weren't doing--and then Tim wasn't going to work. It was becoming quite a problem. Then it got to be that I was using coke to get high and heroin to get well because I was strung out on heroin and I would get sick if I didn't use more. And I got pregnant. I'm like, "He needs to do something about his problem." Again, I was in such denial of my own--I mean, I go to work everyday. He's not going to work! This is not okay. How I judged how well I was was I'm about my job. I was almost four months pregnant before I even realized because I was so out of tune with my body. I did go to see a gynecologist. I did tell him that I was using because that scared me. He said, "I can never repeat this, but I'm going to tell you--" he had me come back. He did some research and then I came back, and he says, "Look, I've been in touch with the people from Haight-Ashbury area in San Fransisco, and we don't want you to go on methadone because that's really hard on the fetus. We don't want you to kick because we don't want the baby to go through withdrawal. What we want you to do is start to cut yourself down."

I turned my addiction over to the care of my husband. He did. He started weening me off. He got on methadone maintenance, but by the time--again I'm not sure the storyline. He did go into treatment. I did try--I sabotaged that as soon as he got out. I was like, "No, no, no, no." You like hugging people I don't even know? This is not okay. This was my first exposure to treatment. My mom was going to the family group stuff. She kept going while we didn't. My daughter was born hooked. That was 1985.

**SA**: How much had you weened off by this point?

**RE**: I was almost not using. I mean I was using, but there wasn't much there. They put her on phenobarbital as a detox for about three, four days. She was pretty--her health was good. She was small, but she was okay. Well, we knew what was going to happen when we got into the hospital because they screen parents. It's considered child abuse. They put a hold on the baby--Tim's mom took her temporarily for custody and then at thirty days we had a hearing. We met before the court in east L.A., which was really quite a joke because we were probably the only white couple in the courtroom with a white judge, and all these cases were being called and parents not showing up, parents not showing up, parents not showing up. Kids in foster care and stuff. And then we're there, right, in our business suits and grandma and great grandma and everybody's all prim and proper. The social worker said we do not recommend you give custody, and the judge was like, "Are you kidding me?" These are *white*people. They can't have a problem. So, they let us have her back full-time with monitoring. Well, monitoring in L.A. is kind of a joke because they are so overloaded with cases, so I think we saw her once in a year's time.

I stayed clean for four months. Went to a program, an outpatient program. Tim stayed clean and then one day he came home and his eyes were pinned and I looked at him and said, "You better have brought me some." And we were off to the races again. So, that was 1985. I lost my job. Well, I went in and quit my job before they could find out I was embezzling money from them. I didn't exactly lose my job, I gave my job away. That was really bad. That was really bad. My mother was dying. She had cancer. She was at my sister's house, and I would go into her house and take things and hawk them. I mean it got really ugly really fast. It was probably worse getting clean and then going back than it was before I got clean. I think the demoralization was really overpowering. My mother-in-law was really a life saver. She helped my daughter. Was watching my daughter more than I was certainly. Tim took better care of her than I did.

I guess she was fifteen months old, and I just couldn't do it anymore. I called my brother and told my brother I needed help. My sister tells me that I called her off and on all night long and my brother off and on all night long, and they were just ignoring me. My brother says finally after twenty-four hours of calling me off and on he goes, "I figured you might be serious." I packed up Kaitlyn's stuff and handed her to Tim. I said, "You go stay at your mom's. My brother's going to be here. He will kill you if he sees you." Because *my*problem was because of Tim. Everything was because of Tim. And that was convenient for me. That was fine with me. They could think that. I went into inpatient treatment. On my fourth day my mom died. So that was pretty rough. I was lucky that I was in treatment because I probably wouldn't have even known. They were able to come and get me and I was able to see her. I asked her if she could ever forgive me and she says, "I have nothing to forgive you for, Robin. But you're really sick so you need to stay. Finish." I couldn't get out of there fast enough. I was like,  "Take me back!"

So they kept me a little extra long, and then they had--they started--that program was really intense. They had--it was the Raider Program out of St. Peter Peninsula Hospital. You started in inpatient, and you started outpatient at the same time. Their outpatient program was Monday, Wednesday, Friday. Mondays and Wednesdays it was three hours, and Friday it was two hours. You spent the first hour in--the family members were in their group, and the family went through this whole thing at the same time for as much as you did. The families were in their family groups and the addicts were in their groups, addicts and alcoholics, and then they'd have an hour where you'd come together and they'd do an education kind of thing. A presentation, lecture, movie, whatever. Of course the counselors were all talking about you and your respective family members. Then you would come together in mixed groups. It was pretty--there was a number of people. There were probably fifteen of us in treatment and then all the people who were still going to the aftercare and stuff.

My family came. Of course Tim was not--he was still using, so there was no way he was coming. It was okay because we did inpatient all day long, then you went to aftercare for three hours--and I mean there was no phone. No magazines. No TV. We smoked and drank coffee and went for walks under armed guard just about. I tried to leave once. That didn't work out too well.

**SL**: Was it a thirty-day program?

**RE**: It was a thirty-day program. They kept me a little longer. Because Tim was a union guy they gave a five thousand dollar--it cost five grand. Pretty cheap back then, but it was probably a ten or twelve thousand dollar program at the time, which would be probably thirty thousand today. There were so many treatment people coming in through the welfare office at the union that they gave them a volume discount I guess! [laughs] I don't know. It was a really good program. That was November, 1986 and I've been clean ever since.

**SA**: Your family knew about your addiction but they didn't help you get into treatment?

**SL**: But your brother helped you get into treatment.

**RE**: My brother came with my father actually to come pick me up. I was furious, *furious*, that he brought my dad. My brother--today I have a completely different relationship with my brother. He's become a different human being in his own right. At the time he was very prejudiced, very angry, had no tolerance, patience, or understanding whatsoever in anything I was doing. I was despicable, and he treated me that way from the time he picked me up until the time he left the hospital. I tried to leave, you know, and I turned around and my dad, actually, fronted that five grand. He was retired by then. I turned around to bolt. When it started out it was a good idea. By the time I'm starting to kick and they're having trouble getting me in and it took four hours and I'm getting sick, I--this is not such a good idea. I turned around to leave and I ran smack into him. He--I'm fighting him and he's holding me and he was not going to let me go. He whispers in my ear, and he says, "Robin, it's not that you're a bad person. You're not a bad person, but you really need help." That's probably the only time my father ever said anything to me--and he ended up saving my life because I'd have left.

**SA**: How did you maintain sobriety after that?

**RE**: Well, I am a social person. I do like people and like being with people. The fellowship was very appealing to me. I had been a member of that business women's club that my mother helped charter, and I learned a lot of leadership skills there, which fed into my success in business and so forth. I liked doing that. I liked going to conferences and being with the gals and all of that. The fellowship provided that for me. That had been missing in my life. It was--I was a part of the cool crowd in recovery, you know? That kind of thing.

At the time, in '86, at that point in time people were very serious about their recovery. I mean, yeah, you showed up on a nudge from the judge, or your parents were going to kick you out, or your family was going to disown you so you show up, but they stayed for different reasons.

**SA**: Have you seen that change? How?

**RE**: Yeah. Sometimes a meeting can feel like when you were in high school and they sent you to detention. That's the attitude. That happens everywhere, not just here. But we're smaller fellowship here in Duluth. Now, when I got clean it still was a small fellowship. Plus, there weren't hardly any females. One of the principles we have is called attraction rather than promotion. That worked for me because I was very attracted to being with the men, and not having to deal with women on an equal basis. That was really attractive to me. But, still, I can remember the Anderson meeting was at the Anderson men's halfway house. Oh, and I went to a halfway house for four months when I got out.

**SA**: In Duluth?

**RE**: No, when I was still in California. I used to come back here for summers when I was a little kid and visit my cousins and stay for six weeks and be down in Wayzata. But California. So, I'm at the Anderson's house meeting and we had it in the living room. There were fifteen, twenty people. That Anderson meeting is like two hundred people come now. It's in a big hall and you have to go talk on the microphone. It's a whole different ball of wax than it once was. I was a little stunned to go back. I was asked to go back and tell my story and I shared my story at a meeting there. And people were getting up and they were walking around. It was just this kind of disrespect that I think is just a microcosm of our society. You find that everywhere today that you wouldn't have found in the eighties. In the seventies, you called people's parents by their 'mister' and 'misses' Johanson, I mean you didn't call them by their first names. It was just a different kind of respect that was expected as a social norm. Yes, I don't--you have to really...

Then I came here. So I was clean four years. I got another job very similar to the one I had. I was gone from six in the morning to six in the evening. My daughter was in preschool all the time and I thought, "She's being raised like I was raised." You know? I don't want it to be like this. My mother had left me quite a bit of money when she passed, and I made a decision to use that money to go to school. I had never gone to college. I figured then I could be home with Kaitlyn while I'm going to school for four years. Then I'll come back--and then I decided to come back here to do it in Superior because A) I have a support system. I couldn't afford to do it in Duluth without working too. And it was a gentler, kinder society to raise my daughter. My intent was to leave--you know, come back then and be the CFO. I had no intention of staying here. My sponsor at the time said, "Don't you fall in love because you'll never come back." And she was right. [laughs]

So, when I came here though the fellowship was so immature. Very cliqued, almost incestuous. People were all dating each other.

**SA**: Exclusive?

**RE**: It was exclusive. I don't think they understood that they were. I don't think that they were intentionally that way. But just because they had all--it was really tough. I hid out in AA for a while, and I put my toe back into NA every now and again. When I was in L.A., see, you got raised by people who said, "Work the steps or die." You know? If you were outside of the meeting filrting with some guy some female that you don't even know would come up and grab you by the shirtsleeve and say, "Recovery happens *inside* the meetings." And would drag you into the meeting and sit you down next to her. And then she'd put her arm around you and say, "Hi, my name's so-and-so, here's my phone number." And would adopt you. It's like, "I don't know you. Who are you?" But she'd adopt you.

I can remember my sponsor getting a sponsor and her saying, "We're all going to coffee. Come with us." And I said, "Okay, I'll meet you there." She said, "No. No, come with us." I said, "I have a car. I'll meet you there." She said, "If you get in your car by yourself you will not come." She said, "We'll bring you back to your car. It will be okay." It was different. It was different in the sense that people adopted you. You just became--and then you were expected to adopt others. You called each other out on your bullship so to speak. Our basic text says we are each other's eyes and ears. If we're not going to be that why do we need a fellowship? If we could do this on our own...

But here--I move out here and you're all so 'Minnesota nice.' It's like what do you mean you're not going to say anything? You mean you're going to Minnesota nice these people into their grave. I'd hear people relapse and somebody would say, "Oh, I saw it coming." It's like, "Really? What did you say? What did you do? How did you address that?" That did not exist in the fellowship here when I got here. Very minimally. I kept coming, kept coming back. Finally, I was sponsoring a gal in AA who was--she was a professional, and she worked in an oral surgeon's office and was sneaking drugs from the oral surgeon's office and replacing it with saline. Poor people they were issuing it to. She couldn't stay clean. She couldn't stay clean. I said, "You're never going to stay clean talking about alcohol. You have to go and be where you can relate with other people. As pretty as you are and as sophisticated as you are, you're a hope to die dope fiend. You are in denial of that." I brought her to a meeting. It was a brand new meeting and had been started by some young folks, I mean seventeen or eighteen year olds. They were so excited that we were there, so welcoming and all of that. I thought, you know, this is what I remember NA being like. So, I started coming back more regularly. Just decided to be the change, you know. I would go to AA to get fed, and I would go to NA to give what I had. Until NA here became strong enough that I could do both in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous. It has become that.

I had a really lovely compliment. I have a number of sponsees and I said, "Okay, I have too many of you to do all this. We have to do a group." We started a group to work through all the steps. This was about a year and a half ago and we are just finishing step twelve. We are in this little group and there's just--it started out about nine of us and there's just about six or seven of us still. I said something about something and the comment back to me was, "But you've left a legacy here." And I said, "A legacy?" "Yeah. You've taught us and we've taught our sponsees." She said, "I mean I know that it isn't just you alone that created this legacy here, but you're a big part of it of a very small handful of people." And that is the sad story that at thirty years clean where are my peers? They've gotten well? I don't know. They've died? I've buried a lot of people. Clean and miserable? I still go to meetings. I still can still service. I sponsor. I have a sponsor who has a sponsor who has a sponsor. I believe in this. I believe that--you know our message is hope and our promise is freedom. Freedom from active addiction. That is my story. NA gave me hope when I thought there was no hope. They loved me when I didn't know what it was to be loved. I certainly didn't know how to give love. I've learned that it's not about what kind of a friend I am. Expectations. Why do I have expectations? Why can't I just accept things to be the way they are? Well, that's a character defect that I have, so if I want that to stay in it's minimal status I have to go to meetings to remind me that that's who I am, and that my thinking gets skewed. So I'm not so disappointed.

That relationship with my brother at, I don't know how long ago it was, must have been fifteen years ago, maybe longer. He called me and said, "I need your help." Who is this? He says Matthew, his son. Wanted by the police. "If I don't get him out of here he's going to go to jail. He's got an addiction problem." He sent his son to be with me for a while. Matthew has some mental health issues and he's not so much an addict as he is mentally not sound, and he's been able to accept that and seek the treatment he needs for that. It's really broken my brothers' heart. My brother called me, and his son went through some treatment and my brother went to family group and called me, and he says, "Is this Robin?" Again, he didn't call! And I said, "Yeah?" He says, "Look, I need to tell you something." I said, "What's that?" He says, "I need to tell you I'm sorry I wasn't there for you when you went through treatment. I didn't understand. I should have been there for you. I said, "Okay." He says, "Alright." "Is that all?" He goes, "That's why I called." "Okay. Bye." "Bye." [laughs] And he hung up! I balled like a baby. My husband came running up the stairs. He thought somebody had died. I said, "You don't understand. My brother gets it. He gets it that I'm not a bad person." That was really phenomenal.

My expectations of my brother was that I would call him and expect him to be an asshole. True to form he'd always be an asshole. My [unclear] said to me one time, "Have you ever thought about just calling your brother and saying he's probably going to be an asshole. I wonder what kind he's going to be this time." And just make it kind of a game. What started happening was I stopped reacting when he would be an asshole because I'd go, oh, yeah, there he goes. Instead of, "He doesn't love me! What's wrong with me that he's doing this!" It was just like oh, there he goes. What happened from that was that he didn't have to change. I changed. I changed how I saw him. He had to defend us. He had to knock my dad out at fourteen years old to keep him from beating my mother. He is who he is. What's funny is that he has changed in regard to how he relates with me now. He didn't want to be an asshole. He couldn't understand why whenever we'd get off the phone I'd be crying. So who wants to talk to me when all I'm going to do is cry and he didn't understand how he was hurting my feelings or any of that. When that stopped he was able to not put his foot in his mouth so much. So those things changed. Those are lessons I would have never gotten if I hadn't opened my mind to it's all about me. It may not be much, but I'm all I think about, you know, kind of a deal.

**SA**: That goes along with sponsoring people, too.

**RE**: Yeah. I'm a do-it-yourself sponsor. I will not put more into your recovery than you're willing to. I learned that one the hard way. I've had sponsees, new people come to me, say, "I want you to sponsor me. I need somebody who's really tough like you." If I sit next to one of my sponsees they'll laugh. Like, "She is *so*not tough. She's not tough. She's not going to kick your ass. She's not going to do any of that. She's just going to be there for you when you need her. I can't get it to you. That whole you can't lead a horse to water. You can lead a horse to water but you can't make them drink kind of thing. I'm not even going to lead it to water. Here it is. You're all grown up. You want what I have to offer you've got to be willing to do what I did to get it. Otherwise you'll never have it because I'm not doing anything different than my predecessors.

I met my husband here. He's in recovery. He's got two years more than I do. He had left and been down in Minneapolis and moved back at the same time I moved here. He got a--was volunteering, was running an aftercare at Miller-Dwan when they still had their program. He was in school for his master's in social work and was an in-take counselor--or a, not an in-take counselor. What do they call it? Anyway, he was a trauma counselor for veterans with PTSD. He is a veteran with PTSD. Combat vet. We met because I volunteered there to do the same thing. New each other for a year. Dated for a year. Lived together for a year, and we've been married since 1993. My daughter came to me when she was seven and she said, "What am I going to call Rob?" I said, "What do you mean?" She says, "Well, you're getting married." "Yeah." Because he proposed to her and me. She said, "You're getting married so he won't just be Rob anymore. What am I going to call him?" I said, "Kaitlyn, you've got to figure that out for yourself." She came back in a little while and she goes, "I can't call him dad because that would really hurt my dad's feelings. I'm going to call him 'pa'." She still calls him pa. Her friends call him pa.

When I went to move to leave California I had fifty-fifty legal and fiscal custody so I really wasn't supposed to take her out of state. I couldn't find Tim. He was out there using. My mother-in-law had died. It sent him over the edge. When she was three--he got full fiscal custody because I was in treatment and he had no legal record that he was an addict. Then, I had visitation when she was fifteen months old. Then when he was three he decided to go into treatment so I got her full-time and he had visitation. He had relapsed, and then his mother died. He felt so guilty that he just went off the deep-end. I didn't even know where he was. About a week, maybe ten days or so before I was--I mean I was packed. I was ready to go. I got a knock on my door and it was him. He says, "I need help." He was septic. He had blood poisoning all through his system. His arms were like Popeye arms. They were all swollen. I kept him well. Gave him money and kept him well until we could get him in some place. He got in. He came to my going away party. Signed the papers to let me take her. I forced him to sign the papers. [laughs] And he's been clean ever since. I think I have four years on him, and I always let him remember that. [laughs] We're very good friends. We made a decision at that point in time that we were both from broken homes, we're both from being made the rope in a tug-of-war between parents and we refused to do that. He has come to stay with us every Christmas. My husband and I and Kaitlyn would go out to visit him and so forth. Two years ago he decided--he was fully retired--he decided to move back here, so he moved to Duluth. He can't stand it. He's leaving, but at least he got a couple years with his daughter and be her dad. That's been really good. She's had three parents. She says she's had three parents to raise her.

We've done well, and again I think that's because we all come from the same process. We process our feelings through the same steps. When he's irritated with me he can go and deal--it's his problem. It's really not my problem. When I'm irritated with him it's my problem, not his problem. I get to go and process that and then bring it back and try to talk about what we can do different or whatever. It's made it work. And now my daughter is in recovery because our stories weren't enough. She had to have her own damn story. She never saw any of us loaded. Never saw us use. All of my friends are in recovery. She knew clearly about addiction, and she got hooked on meth at a young age. She is thirty-one now I think and has four years. She's our area chair. She sponsors people. She does all the steps. I guess the family that uses together can recover together too, right? We didn't use together! I wouldn't say that, but you know what I mean.

**SL**: Any last thoughts?

**RE**: We can recover. There is hope. It doesn't matter why you come. If you don't come you won't hear our message. If you don't hear the messge you don't know that there's hope. I think that drug court has done society a great service because they allow convicts to find a way out that they didn't have when I was younger. That stigma once an addict always an addict runs deep. It's nice to know that women are coming out of their shame. For some reason society accepts males as addicts easier than they do females. "Good mothers have their children. What's wrong you that you would use?" Those kinds of things. A lot of shame attached. It's not about that it's legal or illegal. It's completely irrelevant. Completely and totally irrelevant. Maybe if they put as much into anti-drug wars or the fighting the legality of it as they put into education and creating fellowships before people have addictions. That might be a cool thing. It's not happening at church. And that we come from all walks. And that our anonymity isn't about protecting our last name. It's about being the same. It's about it doesn't matter if I get here in a Cadillac or on the city bus. It doesn't matter. We're all the same when we walk through the doors. That's why our anonymity is important. It doens't matter who we are out there. It matters who we are in here. I'm just another addict. Good luck with your project.

**SA**: Thank you so much.

**SL**: Thank you so much.