**Wade Lang**

**Narrator**

**Amy Sullivan**

**Interviewer**

**January 30, 2017**

**Minneapolis, Minnesota**

Wade Lang -**WL**

Amy Sullivan -**AS**

**AS**: The first thing I’ll ask you to do is give me permission to interview you.

**WL**: I give Dr. Amy Sullivan to use the content therewithin.

**AS**: Thank you. It is January thirtieth and we are at my house in Minneapolis for this interview. You were holding a thought, so why don’t you just start with that.

**WL**: Well, I don’t know if I lost that thought. We were talking about opiates and—

**AS**: And pain and trauma.

**WL**: Yeah. I was stealing opiates at the height of the opiate epidemic.

**AS**: Where were you stealing them from?

**WL**: From customers.

**AS**: In your carpet cleaning business? Let’s hold that one. [laughs]

**WL**: We will come back to it when it is chronologically appropriate.

**AS**: That’s where the big jar came from you were talking about?

**WL**: Yeah.

**AS**: When were you born? Where did you grow up? What was your family life like?

**WL**: I was born in 1972, Marshall, Minnesota. I born to one Patricia Hanson. My birth name was Wade Hanson. I was raised by my grandmother and grandfather until I was four years old. My grandpa, who up until that point I thought was my dad, had a massive heart attack and died. There is a blank in my life up until probably either five or six years old. There is a year there where I really don’t remember anything after he died. It is really cloudy. I should probably get some therapy around that.

The next memory that I have is my current stepdad coming into my life and moving into a little town called Sleepy Eye, Minnesota. I didn’t know any of this information as far as my birth name being Wade Hanson until I was fourteen years old. I didn’t know I was adopted until I was fourteen. It was kept a secret.

**AS**: How old was your mom when she had you?

**WL**: Eighteen.

**AS**: She never married?

**WL**: No. I have no idea who my dad is. I have a picture of him. He looks like Cheech from Cheech and Chong sitting on a comforter made of several different colored—like a quilt, or something like that.

**AS**: The height of the seventies?

**WL**: Yeah. Pants that were sewn together and a long mustache that showed his ethnicity. He was very Hispanic. That’s about all I know. I never met him. I looked for him when I was eighteen or nineteen for a little while.

**AS**: Do you know his name?

**WL**: My mom told my now wife, who was my girlfriend at the time, his name was John Rost, but it just doesn’t even sound right compared to what he looked like. I grew up in a community where ethnicity was not celebrated.

**AS**: That’s a nice way to put it.

**WL**: I took a multicultural class. I know what I am supposed to say here. [laughs] There was a lot of shame, I’m sure. I was the darkest thing in my neighborhood probably until 1981 or 1982 when the migratory employees started to come to town. That was the first four or five years.

Because this is so closely tied to my opiate use and my drug use in general the first recollection I have at age five or six was being sexually molested by a female babysitter on a weekly basis. Every Friday and Saturday night because my step dad played in a three piece country band, and they would leave at four or five o’clock in the afternoon and return at two or three in the morning. They left me and my baby sister that was probably a year or a year and a half at that time. Then she would go down and the act would take place every time. That was pretty impactful.

**AS**: You remember that?

**WL**: Here’s the thing. I had repressed that memory until I was probably nine or ten years old. We had a little clubhouse that we built, me and the buddies back in the day, and we found a crumpled up old Playboy in a garbage somewhere. We went Dumpster diving on our bicycles to find treasure. We found this magazine and we took it back to the clubhouse to look at it. When I looked at the female anatomy everything rushed back. All the feelings. The overwhelming loss of time, loss of location, I didn’t know where I was. I remember telling my best buddy at the time, “Carl,” I said, “There was this babysitter and she did this and this and this.” Carl just was like, “What?” And I was like, “Yeah.” You know? You can’t tell your mom! I had never told anybody. Not for many, many years.

**AS**: So you didn’t tell your mom?

**WL**: No, I didn’t tell my mother until I was thirty-three years old. That was five, six, and seven. Probably almost to eight years old when that occured until my babysister got old enough to really get in the way and know what was going on. It was the full gambit of sexual molestation. It was not good and it warped my sense of sexuality and perceived position and appropriateness. As a young six, seven, eight year old I would grab grown women in wrong spots because I thought it was okay. I didn’t know any different.

I was punished for things but I didn’t know what was going on. My stepfather uses a belt and a stick and his hand to try to correct everything. I am really confused. I have a double bind situation going on where I have this thing going on and I can’t tell because it is a secret and if I tell I am going to get in trouble, but I’m getting punished because of the behavior and the behavior is because of the thing that I can’t tell about.

I started to eat. Eating was my first addiction. I would eat everything and anything. Crackers, cups of sugar, anything I could find in the house to the degree that my mother had to put a lock on the refrigerator door. An actual combination lock on that and on the pantry doors because I would get up in the middle of the night and eat, or I would get up earlier than they because they were out doing this band thing until four in the morning. They were exhausted and drunk and they would sleep until noon. She would lock us in our rooms. They put locks on the outside of our doors so we would just have to stay in our rooms until noon. I remember as a kid I would piss in the closet because I couldn’t get out to pee or anything. I would just pee in the corner of the closet. I had a boot that I would pee in every once in awhile and then pour it out the window. I would hide food in there the night before because I knew I was going to be hungry. I remember packs of white almond bark I would put in my underwear drawer and stack it in there because I knew the following morning I could sit and eat white almond bark.

**AS**: Were you in the same room as your sister?

**WL**: At first, yes. We stayed in the same room. There was a time where we had to separate because I think I was being inappropriate with her. They separated us in two different rooms. We would talk to each other through the doors. I would say, “Go holler for mom.” When she would holler she would come. When I would holler for mom she wouldn’t. I would entice her, “Go holler for mom.” This is all normal. This is what everybody goes through! This is just a stage. [laugh] You laugh because otherwise you cry, obviously.

I ate and ate and ate and at nine or ten years old I was pretty obese. I was getting teased I remember. Uncles used to grab my fat rolls and squeeze and shake them. They would pinch so hard that it would leave black and blue marks. It was as if they were going to try to rip it off me. Again, I’m this dark skinned, young—the word they would use was bastard. They would call me a little bastard child. I didn’t even know what that was. I ended up using it one time when my stepdad was around. I was mad or something and I said bastard and he came at me with a wrench in his hand and ended up cutting my brow. He said, “We don’t use that language.” And I didn’t even know it was language. That’s what my uncles called me. I didn’t even know that was a swear word. I was learning. I was getting it down one cut at a time. I ate to soothe.

By age twelve was my first drink. I remember distinctly this young kid came over to the house and he had a can of Tab in his hand. I said, “Give me a drink of that” and he said, “No, you don’t want any of that.” I said, “Yeah. Give me a drink.” He said, “You don’t want none of this.” I said, “What is it?” He said, “It’s whiskey.” I was like, “I want some!” “No. You can’t handle it.” I grabbed that can away from him and guzzled half of it. I remember him getting mad because I was drinking all his whiskey.

It was Tab and Sloe gin. I’ll never forget that warmth in my belly and how fuzzy my mind felt. That overwhelming warmth. It was almost as if I was seeing the world through new eyes. Everything was brighter. I could run faster, jump higher, ride my bike faster. I loved it. I just recalled that my stepdad had some of this and it was in the basement. They had a whole liquor cabinet . A bar. I was like, “We can get more now!” He said, “Okay!” So, the first time I drank I got intoxicated to puking because I didn’t know how much was enough. Now, with my addiction you can see that I had this propensity to escape into whatever I could find. Having that I was like, “Okay, I am going to drink this.” Twelve, thirteen, and fourteen—

**AS**: Did you get caught at that point?

**WL**: No. Actually, I didn’t. My parents were very removed from parenting. They were actually just like people that lived in the same house. We took care of ourselves. We parented ourselves. They would throw down a couple of bags of Doritos and a frozen pizza and they’d leave.

Probably at about twelve I started babysitting my nine year old sister, my six year old half brother, and my next half brother was three. I was taking care of them at age twelve and stealing from the old man’s liquor cabinet the second they walk out the door. That works.

**AS**: Did you get a baby sitting badge? [laughs]

**WL**: I went to babysitting training, but omitted that I used alcohol. I didn’t want to lose my badge. [laughs]

From eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve it was all food until I found liquor. It was quicker, so there was no reason to continue to eat. I still had a hard time with food and portion distortion and governing my amounts and kinds. There was always this lack of food in our house. We were poor, we didn’t have much money. We had government cheese, powdered milk, WIC [Women, Infants, and Children] came out about that time. Food was a commodity that was scarce. When it did come around—

**AS**: When it was there you ate as much as you could.

**WL**: All of it to the point where my mother would not store food in open areas. My other siblings used food as their comfort as well. She became obese very quickly because of it. It was a great way to escape into Doritos or a frozen pizza instead of thinking of how shitty life is. How we don’t get encouraged and loved. There was no parenting at all. Again, we lived with them.

The drinking continued on an every other day or every day basis to the degree that I started stealing beer from garages around the community. In Minnesota there is this thing where you have the house refrigerator and then you have the garage refrigerator. The garage refrigerator is full of beer and liquor and wine coolers. And sometimes old cake from graduation or something. You break into a garage and you steal a case of Stross thirty pack and a cake because you are going to get hammered and then maybe eat some cake after. So, that was always a treat.

We would steal beer for quite a long time there. The alcoholism really got to a point where I would drink at school. I remember taking paneling off the wall in my bedroom—a whole four by eight sheet of paneling—and I pulled the nails out, pulled the paneling away, and then on the cross member two by fours I stacked [unclear beer name] beers inside the wall when I would steal from these garages. I had several cases of these beers stored in the walls. That way when I was quarantined to my room and locked in there I was okay. I could survive because I had several cases of beer in the wall.

My parents have since sold that house and I really thought I want to go back and pull that paneling—I wonder if they ever remodeled because to pull that off there there were empty cans of beer in that wall. Lots. There was another spot I put empties. Another piece of paneling that I took off where I left a four foot portion and then I crumpled them and put them in the wall in the insulation. Probably not much of an ‘r’ value there with the aluminum. [laughs] I wonder if some of the cans were tin? No, I don’t think I was that old.

The drinking got really sickening for me to the point where I would buy booze—I would get other adults in the community to buy me booze. I started working for a dairy farmer out of town and there was this man named Chizzy and he was one of the hired hands and he was an alcoholic. I think that out of all things I have this real intuitiveness. As soon as I saw this guy I knew he was an alcoholic. I knew he was a drinker. I went up to Chizzy and I said, “Listen, if you get me a six pack of beer tonight I’ll buy you a six pack.” He said, “I better not do that.” I said, “Come on.” “Alright.” So, that became our arrangement. He got a six pack then I got a six pack. Pretty soon I would get a thirty pack of Strauss and he would still get a six pack because Chizzy started to rely on my income for his alcohol. That’s how I kept him. I just made sure that he always knew that I was going to hook him up almost every day. I became the guy to get alcohol from in ninth or tenth grade. If you needed beer you came to Wade, but I’m charging a premium. If they want a case of beer it’s going to cost them double. One for you and I get one. I would store it in my room. I would, at times, literally have hundreds of beers. Warm, in my room, stored. I drank warm beer and I didn’t care. I would slam them by the threes and fours and get the buzz on. It wasn’t for the flavor.

I graduated to alcohol and liquor and whiskey and I just got tired of beer. I went to everclear and it was the next level. Until I started blacking out and wandering around town and didn’t know where I was or how I got there. Where’s my bicycle. Pretty soon it was, Where did I leave my truck? When I was sixteen I ended up getting and 1971 K-Ten Blazer. That probably was a bad mistake. I never did get a DUI; I was smart enough to know that if I was going to drink I was going to walk. I just knew I couldn’t drive. I was not that good. I was a sloppy drunk. I didn’t want to drive. It was too nervewracking for me. I like to find a spot in the middle of nowhere with a bunch of people, or towards the end with just myself, and just drink.

That’s how it went until I was seventeen years old when I was introduced to marijuana. I took a job at Kentucky Fried Chicken and one of the employees who was an adult said to me, “Hey, I’m going to consult the dugout on break. You in?” Like you, I did the same thing. Eyebrows down and I was like, What the hell does that mean? I didn’t want him to think I wasn’t cool, so I looked at him and said, “Sure.” Breaktime comes around and we stand outside. He pulls out this little wooden box and puts this little steel bat in there and he goes, “Here.” I said, “Go ahead. You go first” because I didn’t know how to do it! [laughs] I had no idea how to do it.

**AS**: You had a good sense of how to get somebody else to show you.

**WL**: “You go ahead, go ahead.” I’ll watch. I’ll learn. He hits this oneie [a smoking device], smokes his weed, and hands it to me and I did it. I think I took two, maybe three puffs, and then we went back in at the end of the break and I thought, This did nothing. I hate weed! It’s stupid. Ten minutes later I’m giggling. I just can’t stop laughing. We are throwing chicken across the kitchen, into the friers, I mean, I’m just doing stuff and it is the funnest, most funniest day in my entire life. I can still remember today how we played with flour, throwing food, giggling at patrons as they are coming in. I was so in love with marijuana I thought, Where were you when I needed you most? Where were you when I was eight and nine years old? I could have used you then, but welcome to my wonderful world. We are going to have such a wonderful love affair.

I think I probably stopped drinking almost immediately. I asked him if I could get a little bit of that to go. I asked him how I could get it. He would sell me joints for a while until I said, “I can’t afford however many dollars for each joint. How much for a bag of that?” Within a couple of weeks I’m walking around with a bag of pot in my pocket everyday. That became my new love affair.

In the tenth grade I met this gal who I really was head over heels for. She was in college and I was in tenth grade and I thought that was great. I had scored. I definitely scored. She was cute, but she didn’t like weed at all. I had to hide it. That was hard to do because it’s stinky. There was a lot of fighting back and forth. “You can’t do that, but it is okay to drink.” That was the social expectation in my community: drinking was fine, but don’t smoke weed. Don’t be a druggie. That’s what they would call them. It’s okay if you are bombed off your ass with alcohol, but not marijuana.

When I met her I tried really hard to moderate. I tried to not use, and it wasn’t easy. When I tried to stop using marijuana I’d go back to alcohol. It was like, I can’t do this. She wound up getting pregnant when I was in the tenth grade. Now, I’m going to be a dad. Now I need to get my poop in a group. This is not a good idea to do this and try to be a dad. School is not good. I am starting to experience this—looking back on it I can see it plainly today—there’s this emotion disregulation that has happened because of all the prior stuff. I go from zero to one hundred with anger. So quickly.

**AS**: At this age, you mean?

**WL**: Yeah. Throwing things, breaking car windows, slashing tires. I don’t know if this is incriminating, but we’ll say I think the limits are out, but my principal at one point told me, “You’re nothing but a piece of shit. You’re going to end up in prison before you even graduate.” He called me a bunch of names and I walked out of his office. That night I went back to school and I cut every wire in his brand new Chevy S-10 that I could to teach him a lesson. That you don’t fuck with me. I was that kind of person. Very malicious. If you wronged me I will burn you’re house down. I will cut you’re car up. I will do something to hurt you. I will do something to retaliate. I can plainly see today that that was supressed anger and emotion from all the PTSD that I was dealing with at the time. I didn’t know how to deal with it. If I wasn’t self medicating it was coming out other ways.

In the eleventh grade I joined the military.

**AS**: What happened with the pregnancy?

**WL**: She had him. Zach was born on the sixth of November in my eleventh grade year. I went on about being a teenager and a dad. I went to basic training through my eleventh and twelfth year. It was called spit training at that time. I went to basic and then came home for my senior year. I was excused from ninth grade English all together. I never took English. Don’t tell my master’s program that. [laughs] “Do you have all your credits?” “Everything but ninth grade English.” My senior year the principal and I had an understanding that I only needed to come to school twice a week. As long as I showed up and did the tests I didn’t have to do anything else. I worked two or three jobs at the time. I worked at Perkins at night where I bused tables. I worked at Godfather’s Pizza during the rushes to deliver pizza’s, and another restaurant job someplace, but I can’t remember. But I had three jobs.

I finally fought back at that point with my stepdad. I omitted most of this, but he used to hit me with everything. He used to have a two by four that he carved his hand into. It said Board of Education on it. It literally was a fucking two by four. When he would hit me I would put my hands behind my back to try to guard my ass and he’d break a finger periodically. That pinky finger right there has been broken so many times. It is just part of the deal, but I would never cry and I prided myself on the fact that I would never cry. I remember him asking the question: “Have you had enough?” My response: No. He would bring it again. Whack, whack, whack. He would keep hitting until he was tired. Guess who won? Me. That’s how it was. That’s how my will was. You can beat the shit out of me, but you will not break my will. It will not happen. That has carried over into adulthood, of course.

**AS**: It also shows a very strong core person.

**WL**: Tenacity. Unending tenacity.

**AS**: Whatever we want to call it it is a survival—

**WL**: He called it stubborn. I like to shift it into tenacity!

**AS**: It is also a survival mechanism.

**WL**: I would just go to the other place. When I’m getting hit I would just go to the other place where it didn’t hurt. I didn’t feel anything. I can hear it. I can see it. I can’t feel it. It’s not there. It never did work. I think he threw me up on the cupboard one morning. It was bright and early. I had come home and I was drinking and he punched me in the face, and once in the gut and then threw me up on the counter. He was hitting me over and over and my mother got involved. She was crying and grabbing onto him. He hit her with his elbow as he is coming back to hit me again. That’s when it ended. I came back at him. It wasn’t with a knife. It wasn’t with anything. I just came back at him with all I had and it wasn’t enough. After all of that I had had enough. I didn’t come back. I moved out. Went and stayed with friends for a while.

I ended up buying a 1974 Schult mobile home. They rented to me out at the skyrise mobile village.

**AS**: Were you seventeen?

**WL**: Yes, seventeen years old.

**AS**: This is all still in Sleepy Eye, New Ulm area. Even within that, at fourteen years old I had found out that I was adopted by him and it was this huge shellshock of, You have to be fucking kidding me. You beat me from the time I was able to remember until I was fourteen and you’re not even my fucking dad? You don’t get to do that. It was at fourteen, fifteen when I started fighting back.

I’ll get to this later, but there has been a shift today where it’s not like that anymore.

**AS**: With him?

**WL**: Yeah. He’s very remorseful, timid, and apologetic in his way. We don’t talk about it, of course, we do the Minnesota thing. [laughs] Even as a psychotherapist I know not to touch that. What good is it going to do? Shame him? Make him feel terrible that he was unable to parent in an effective manner? He was born and raised by an alcoholic, my grandfather, anyways. You just do what you learn and that’s what he did.

Going back to progression. From my senior I had to go back to AIT, which is advanced infantry training. I went to Newark, New Jersey. It was during that time that my then fiance was coming into being twenty-one years old, visiting bars. I had learned while I was active duty that she cheated on me. I wasn’t there to break shit and hurt her and retaliate, so I just shut off. I shut down all my emotions. I shut down everything and was like, You’re done. You’re dead to me. That was pretty much how it went.

I went back home after AIT. There was this brief time where we tried to make it work, but I couldn’t let go of the fact that she had been with someone else. I took a job in Iowa just to get away. I remember driving away that day with all my shit in that same K10 Blazer driving to Iowa with her holding Zach and running down the road begging me not to leave. I never turned around. I took this job at another restaurant down there and lived in a little house by myself. I would assistant manage this restaurant during the day and hold on all day until I could get Stauss at night and drink. It gets rid of all of the pain. I would fill up these to-go cups of beer—like six of them every night out of the keg—and it wouldn’t cost me anything.

**AS**: From the restaurant?

**WL**: Yeah. I would go home and drink these six large drinks of beer nightly until I’m puking. One day I got promoted to manager and they moved me to Indianola, Iowa and I’m still doing the same behavior, but moderating a little bit. Not by much. I had been introduced to a lot more by then. I was introduced to cocaine and methamphetamine. This was in 1993 and 1994 when crank was big in Iowa. That was when I met my now current wife. She was going to Simpson College at the time and she walked in after a football game on October third. I couldn’t take my eyes off of her. She comes up, puts her order in, and I’m being Joe-Cool and I say, “It’s on me.” Didn’t card her, didn’t care. I was just giving her the stare the whole time she was in the restaurant. Just straight up cute. She comes up and asks for another beer and of course it’s on me and we would chit chat for a little bit and then she goes and sits down.

The one thing about me is I don’t think I have ever asked a woman out ever in my life. It goes back to being sexually molested by a woman, you know, I’m intimidated by women in most cases. Of course, being a psychoanalyst I’m going to analyze my own behavior. If it wasn’t for my wife, who was the girl that I gave beer to, she called me that night at home. One of my employees called and said, “Hey, the girl that you gave that beer to? She called in and wants your number.” I’m like, “Yeah, idiot, give it to her! You have to call me to ask that? Dumb! Give her the number.” She calls.

**AS**: It is appropriate for him to call and ask. [laughs]

**WL**: Yeah, but I think I was nineteen or twenty years old at the time. I didn’t care. She could be an axe murderer. It’s a female! Have her call! Because I don’t have the gumption to say, “Hey, you’re hot. Do you want to go out?” That wouldn’t have happened. That has never happened for me.

She calls me at home and said, “Hey, I just wanted to call and say thanks for the beer.” “Yeah. Cool. Great.” “I’m going to this frat party. Do you want to go?” That was not okay, because I was not frat party material. Even the word frat party doesn’t fit. I am lower than blue collar. I don’t go to school. I had asked to go to college when I was in the eighth or ninth grade and my mother laughed at me. I don’t go to college. This is not me. I said, “Yeah. I’ll go. Tell you what why don’t you come over to my duplex first and I’ll get changed and we can go from here.” “Okay.” She comes over. We never leave the house. I got her drunk or high that first night and we had sex on the living room floor. I didn’t feel comfortable going to that frat party. Plus, she’s hot as heck and didn’t—

**AS**: Didn’t want to watch other guys looking at her.

**WL**: No, not at all. She left that night. The following day she called me again and we have this real quick she wants to talk to me everyday and I’m enthralled by it. She is just cute as a button and I had just got done talking to my old fiance about three days prior to meeting her. I had talked her into moving down to Iowa and it was because I was lonely. I wanted to uphold my responsibility in being a father to my son who was now two. I convinced her and she rented a U-Haul and she put everything in the U-Haul and she was coming the following Friday. That same Friday. The weekend happened with this new girl and she keeps calling me and my old fiance moves in and puts all of her things in my duplex. This new girl is telling me, “I don’t care if you smoke weed. That’s fine with me. You can drink. I don’t care if you do that.” I’m thinking, My finance is not okay with that. You are. I didn’t know what to do.

Fiance is there about two days and we get into our first fight. Immediately I’m thinking, You’re gone. My fiance leaves for the weekend and she’s coming back the following Monday with her mom with more stuff. Colleen comes to the house, this new girlfriend, she stays, the following morning she is in the shower and I go to work. My fiance comes home, raps on the door several times with a ‘who the fuck is in there’ type screaming directive, and this new girlfriend comes walking out in this skimpy green robe and waits until my fiance collects up all of her belongings out of the bathroom and walks out. She grabs as much as she can and leaves and calls me—the girlfriend calls me—at work: “Did your fiance have blondish-brown hair?” “Yeah.” “I think she was just here.” “Oh shoot. Okay. How are you?” “Yeah, she screamed at me and I thought she was going to hit me, but she didn’t. She left. I think her mother was here.” I’m like, Oh great her mother was here, too.

I’ve got this history with this woman, I can’t stand to be alone, so I have her move down and then my girlfriend is in the bathroom. I had to make a decision immediately. The desicion was already made, but I can say this with all authority that when I made that decision I didn’t love the new girl at all, but that was the choice I made.

**AS**: Would you say it was because of her tolerance for you’re using?

**WL**: Definitely. She was okay with it. It was the first time I had ever heard that from any girl. It was always, I don’t want you to do that. Don’t do that. There was always this control factor. So, that drew me to her. That was the deciding factor. You allow me to do drugs, so you’re in and she’s out. That started quite a long love affair with drugs not her.

She ends up moving in with me. We cohabitate for quite awhile. Her parents are really—I don’t want to say strict and Christian—but they have a moral value system. You don’t live together before marriage. You do this the way it is supposed to be done. My wife—that girl—is telling her parents that she is living on campus, but she’s really living with me so they are paying for a dorm, and she’s living with me and we are engaging in all kinds of drug use. We start using meth and cocaine. Mostly meth at the time because cocaine was cheap and hard to come by. We get involved with some people that are cooking so they are making it in their bathtub. We get it cheap and I start selling it on the side. I’m selling it here and there. There’re several years there when I just went from job to job because I could never keep a job because of the drug use.

Colleen and I got married in ‘93. Six months after meeting her I asked her to marry me. I lost my job at the restaurant because of drug use. I was manipulating money to meet a bonus structure for labor. I ended up getting caught, so I got fired. Fired meant that I wasn’t just going to find another job, I was going to go home. I don’t have any money. I went back to Sleepy Eye, Minnesota and lived in my parents’ basement. I got this girl from Iowa who is calling me, is okay with me smoking dope, and my brain went, How do I get out of Sleepy Eye? I’ll ask her to marry me. I drove down to Iowa. I went to her dorm room and got down on one knee and asked her to marry me. She said yes. I did that so I could get out of Sleepy Eye. I didn’t do it because I loved her. I did it because I wanted out and I wanted to go back to drug use again. I couldn’t use weed and alcohol and methamphetamine in my parents’ basement and get away with it.

Her parents helped us get an apartment in Clive, which is a suburb of Des Moines. They said, “If you are going to get married we are cutting her off from nursing school. She will have to do that on her own.” “Okay, fine.” Well, I ended up slinging dope and working in a restaurant to pay for her college. I don’t know how much weed, but by the quarter pound we would buy it and flip it, buy it and flip it.

**AS**: So she could go to nursing school?

**WL**: So she could go to nursing school! Yeah. I put her through nursing school. She is a great nurse. She is the director of nurses now. The whole foundation on which she stands is based in drug sales. That’s how I financed that. Much more lucrative than trying to work an hourly wage.

She graduates, gets a job as a nurse, and I am constantly trying to tell her to bring some fentanyl home. Some kind of an opiate of some sort. Tell them that it fell on the ground and you threw it out. Big deal. Bless her heart her upbringing prevented her from ever doing it. She would never do it. I stopped asking. It was not going to happen.

I ended up learning that I wanted to be a white collar person. I was up late one night at two or three in the morning and I was watching Carleton Sheets. You can buy property no money down. I know this sounds funny, but when you’re an uneducated kid from Sleepy Eye, Minnesota you don’t know how to become anything other than a factory worker. Make calendars. You don’t know anything. I am watching this TV program and I’m half soused and I thought, I’m just going to do that. I’m going to be a white collar worker. I am going to get some suits and I’m going to buy and sell real estate. I am going to flip houses. That’s what I am going to do. No money down!

The longer I am sitting there I am thinking if they make a lot of money I bet realtors make a lot of money. I looked at my wife at the time and I said, “How do you become a realtor?” She said, “I don’t know.” I called a realtor the following morning. I said, “Hey, I was watching this program last night and I was thinking about how to become a realtor.” He said, “Well, who am I talking to?” I told him my name and he said, “My name is Mark Grossman. I’m with Iowa realty.” We talked for a little bit and I said, “Yeah. I really want to do this.” He said, “You sound like you’ve got the gift of gab. Why don’t you come down to the office?” I went down and there and he told me I was hired. He said, “I’ll put you through real estate school, you’ll get your license, and you can work for us. You will get this commission rate. Every time you sell a house for one hundred thousand dollars you get three percent of any home you sell.” I was like, “Three percent. Are you kidding me? Done! I’ll do that.”

I studied hard and I really applied myself. This was the first time that I moderated my alcohol, I moderated my marijuana use to very low amounts. A little weed here or there, but nothing to where I am losing continuity. I am still plugged in. I am learning. I studied hard. I don’t know how many weeks this course was, but I had to take my boards and I got a ninety-eight. I got a ninety-eight. I knew this stuff by the back of my hand. I was going to become a millionaire. That’s what I was going to do.

I started working for Iowa Realty and I slowly realized that it was not what I thought it was going to be. You sit in these open houses for a long time and you don’t have anyone that calls you and you have to make cold calls. I met some people that were selling conventionally listed properties on contract. Basically you take this conventionally listed property and you create a contract, sell it to a third party investor, give cash to the seller, enough to pay off the brokerage fees, and a contract to the buyer enough so that I get paid, the broker gets paid, the seller gets their money, but the people who buy get an inflated price with an inflated interest rate. I put adds in the paper saying: Bad credit? No problem. I can get you a house. Call Wade. The phone rang and rang and rang.

In the first year I think I did forty-three thousand dollars in income because I was closing deal after deal. It was very shoddy because I was putting people into a fifty thousand dollar house, and they were signing notes for a seventy-five thousand dollar contract with a fourteen to eighteen percent interest rate. They were not getting anything that was going to end up being theirs for seven years and then going back to the owner. Or, in this case, back to the contract holder, which was the third party investor out of Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

**AS**: This is what happened with the housing market.

**WL**: Yeah, it’s illegal now. [laughs] I am to thank for that.

**AS**: You were just part of it.

**WL**: The other part is that during the open house period I found that using open houses as meeting places to do dope deals was the most protective thing I could ever do. I had a key code for every listed property in the whole entire city of Des Moines. I ended up getting in contact with some people that were a part of certain organizations that I really don’t want to get into. We would move larger quantities through these residential homes because they were empty. I would let them know: don’t show up with shitty cars and thumping music. Show up in a suit and tie. Show up in your grandmother’s Ford Tempo, and you walk in as though you are interested in buying my house.

**AS**: Were these houses that were empty as in completely empty? No one was living in them?

**WL**: Correct. They were prospective homes.

**AS**: Oh, okay for builders.

**WL**: Some vacant properties because they have been gone for awhile and they are looking to sell them. I would pick the ones that I knew nobody was coming around to. We wouldn’t stay long, but it was an easy spot to do a switch of money and dope and not have problems. I was the go-to person. I was the one to facilitate the transaction more than anything else, but I took my part, which was money and dope at the time.

**AS**: What was it at that time that you were using?

**WL**: Crank. It was all crank back then. It was pure and clean. It was biker crank.

**AS**: It was cocaine?

**WL**: It was methamphetamine. Very much methamphetamine. Not coke.

All of a sudden we have this situation where there is an investigation. The investigation was getting bigger and bigger and the name RICO came out. I said we are leaving. We are done, we are out, and we are moving. At the time I had a friend moving to Kentucky with his wife who was a postmaster. We asked if we could go with and said we were sick of Des Moines. Maybe we can crash with you guys for a couple of weeks so we can find a place? They said yes.

**AS**: What is RICO?

**WL**: RICO: Investigation Racketeering [Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations].

**AS**: Oh, with the business?

**WL**: It wasn’t the realty business. It was the dope deal and everyone that was involved with what we were moving. To be implicated in something like that meant I could do some real time and I don’t do time. That’s just not me. I did one day in jail my whole entire life and that was enough for me.

**AS**: You were deciding to clean up your act at this point?

**WL**: Well, no. [laughs] We are just out, we are just leaving. We sold as much as we could and left what we couldn’t sell and we went. We started over. I took a job as a bartender and my wife took a job as the steady-Eddy she is as a nurse. She got a transfer with the company that she was with in Iowa, so that worked to our advantage. We just tried to settle into our new lives living in this foreign land called Kentucky. I took a job with a country club. It was the oldest most prestigious: Harmony Landing Country Club. It was just old money. A lot of old money. I learned how to serve and how to be a good servant. I put the fork and the knife in the right spot, how to pour mint juleps, how to accept hundred dollar bills as tips. How to drink vodka and Diet Coke so that I don’t gain weight and they don’t smell it. A year after that, of course, I got fired for being drunk on the job. Whoops. I knew I shouldn’t have drank that gin that night.

So, I stole alcohol from them for quite awhile. There is this underculture of drugs. Just to ask somebody in a mixed grouping if they partake is just code enough. “So, do you partake?” You don’t even have to say the word. It doesn’t even have to be what you do. Do you do this or this? It is “Do you partake.” “Yeah.”

**AS**: If you say partake to someone who doesn’t they will know.

**WL**: They will go, “What?” And you go, “Oh, nevermind. I thought you were somebody else.” [laughs] There is this underculture where you kind of take care of each other. When you are out you ask somebody else and they will cover you and back and forth and that is how it all works. I soon became a part of that culture again in Kentucky. I battled it. The crank followed us down there. I ended up having my first psychotic break and it was after a nine-day stint where I was awake for nine days and I had been playing around with the shotgun for however many days. I tried to commit suicide by sticking the shotgun in my mouth that night.

Obviously I didn’t pull the trigger, but the following day I woke up and I was broken. I just needed to get this fixed. Again, I don’t know what to do. I go and asked my wife and I said, “Hey, when someone is this fucked up what do they do?” She said, “I don’t know either. I will talk to my medical director and find out.” I said, “Don’t use my name!” she said, “Of course I’m not going to use your name.” She finds out there is a place you can go for treatment and you get treatment and there it is. I’m like, “Okay, that’s what we’ll do. I’ll get treatment and I’ll be good.” I went to a center and I’m sitting around in this group of people who are all probably almost twice my age at least.

**AS**: How old were you at this point?

**WL**: First time I went into treatment I was probably twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two. I was probably twenty-three.

**AS**: This is the late nineties?

**WL**: Yeah. Colleen is so much better with dates. I was probably twenty-three years old and everyone was twice my age. The counselor is wearing a plaid shirt and has a pen protector and I’m thinking, What the fuck am I doing here? He comes around to me and says, “Wade, how about you? How are you? What is going on with you?” “I’m fine.” “Really?” “Yeah. I’m fine. I’ve been listening to all you old people sitting here talking about how fucked up your lives are. You should all do what I did: quit!” I had just quit like three days before. “Quit! I did.” You could hear the snickers. Everybody is breaking. I was like, “What?” I didn’t even know. I got through their program. I went every time.

**AS**: Was it outpatient?

**WL**: Yeah. It was so many weeks. I was working construction at the time framing houses. I came home one night and I told Colleen, “I know I can’t have meth. I know that. But, a beer is not going to kill me.” I went and got a six pack of beer and we both had beer. I drank the rest of it that night. The following day I got some meth. The very following day. But now she doesn’t know I’m doing it because I’m not sharing. I had to fake sleep.

**AS**: Was she using?

**WL**: Nope, she was not.

**AS**: In the beginning she did a little bit?

**WL**: She did it in the beginning. Just a little bit, and it scared the hell out of her. Demons and these shadow people and all these drug induced paranoid schizophrenic delusions that you have. I will leave the neurobiology out of it because it doesn’t pertain to the story, but that’s what happens. I’m back on meth again and I can’t not do it because it is so alluring, but I have to pretend like I’m sleeping. At ten o’clock I go lay down with her until I hear her fall asleep. I sneak out of bed and commence to smoking meth all night long until my alarm goes off at about ten to five and I slip back into bed and close my eyes. When her alarm goes off I open my eyes as if I slept all night long. “Morning. I’m going to go take a shower.” That was day three, day four, day five. I would do four or five days in a row like that until it all fell apart, obviously.

I think it was in ‘97 that I fell off the cable end of a roof nineteen feet. This was October. There was dew on the roof. I was up there to take off some pump jacks and my tennis shoes started to slip and I turned over crab-style and I jumped off the roof because I tried to correct the trajectory of my fall. I thought if I jumped maybe I would just break both of my legs, but I’d still be alive. The trajectory took me forward. One arm went underneath me and I peppered my left wrist, punctured my lung, concussion. I’m whispering my dying wishes to a buddy named Gary in this indentation of dirt where I landed. The next thing I heard was choppers in the background. They called the ambulance and they had to lifeflight me because we were about five miles out of town. That was the last I remember until I woke up in the emergency room.

Colleen tells me there was a chaplain that met her at Mercy Hospital and said, “There’s a good chance that he may not be okay.” That was the next stopping point, which was usually some physiological, some accident, something that brings me to this point where I’m like, I can’t do this anymore. I thought at that point that I needed a safe job. I needed something that doesn’t have a risk of falling fifty feet to my death. I saw this add for carpet cleaner and I thought that it was a technical job, I would get paid fifteen bucks an hour. I’ll take that.

I go interview and the guy looks at me from across the table and says, “You’ve got the gift of gab.” I thought, “Shit, I’ve heard this before.” He said, “I’ll tell you what. This is a commission job, but we send you out with a certain amount of money. It is about fifty bucks on the ticket. All you’ve got to do is sell more rooms.” “All I have to do is sell more rooms? Really? For cleaning?” “Yeah, all you have to do is sell more rooms. Add them on. If you get it up to one hundred bucks you will get thirty.” That couldn’t be that hard. I would do four of those in a day, that’s one hundred and twenty dollars a day. I could live on that. “Done. You’ve got a deal.”

I come to find out that I’m really good at that. I would take tickets from forty-five dollars to one hundred dollars really fast. I wasn’t a bad looking young man. Plus, I had this gift of gab. I did really good work. When I’m working I work hard. I would clean the carpets and I would show the lady in the house the carpets. I would say, “I’ve got a quote for you in the other room.”

**AS**: She’s got one clean room and four dirty rooms! Because it was only forty-four dollars.

**WL**: That’s right. By the time I’m leaving I’m collecting a check for three hundred and fifty buck and I’m making one hundred and something per house. I’m making three to four hundred dollars per house. I was thinking, I’m really good at this and I really like this, too. One day Jimmy comes up to me, the guy I was working with, and he says, “Here, take a couple of these.” He hands me a couple Vicodin. I said, “What the hell do I want them for?” He said, “Fine.” I was like, God, this reminds me of something. Then I was like, “Yeah, I want those. Let me try those.” “Oh, you can’t have two of them.” “Give me two! I could probably do three. Give me two.” I fell in love. Vicodin was it for me.

**AS**: Every time you get a new drug you’re like, Oh, that’s the one.

**WL**: Yeah. I went to Jimmy and asked if I could get five or six more of those for the weekend. He said, “I don’t have anymore.” I asked him where he got them and if he could hook me up. “ I can’t tell you where I got them.” I was like, “Come on dude. All of a sudden now you’re Mr. Secret.” “If I tell you you can’t tell anyone.” “Of course.” “You get them from the bathrooms.” “What are you talking about?” “When you go to your customer’s house you ask them if you can use the restroom. They are in there.” “In every house?” “Not in every house, but most of them.” “Really?”

I couldn’t wait until that following Monday. I had my eight a.m. appointment. The first thing I do after I get going was to ask if I could use the restroom. I opened up the medicine cabinet and it was almost like hearing angel’s sing. There were like three bottles of Vicodin in there. They were Vicodin tens—blues. I was like you have to be shitting me. This is awesome. I just took them all.

**AS**: You took them all?

**WL**: I took them all. I had no couth. I didn’t care. My addiction overrode any common sense that might come into play. I looked at the dates and they had expired. I didn’t think they were going to be digging around in there. They were expired.

**AS**: They were so old that nobody was using them.

**WL**: Well, they were like a year old. They weren’t nineteen years old and rancid. [laughs]

**AS**: Well, we know they couldn’t have gotten them that long ago.

**WL**: They were expired and I knew she wasn’t using them currently. It seemed like every house I went to had them. If it wasn’t Vicodin it was Percocet. Big, orange, Percocet tens.

**AS**: If this ‘98, ‘99?

**WL**: Oh yeah.

**AS**: We are right in the deluge.

**WL**: I was there when Oxycontin hit the street. I remember finding the big yellow oxy eighties. I found a whole pack of them in this guy’s safe. It wasn’t locked. I am digging around everywhere to find dope I don’t care. If the lady is downstairs I will go through her underwear drawer, through her jewelry drawer, I will go through everything to get these oxys.

**AS**: With the machine on so it sounds like you are working.

**WL**: I can run the machine with one hand and dig around with the other hand to find them. Exactly. I started collecting them in a Ball jar. We would exchange those and it became a currency in our company. “I’ll give you ten fives for two tens” because it had less acetaminophen in it. My wife being a nurse was teaching me that I could only take so many of these in a day before my liver would give out. I bought a PDR—a physician desk reference. I could cross reference medications to their size and type to know what they were just in case I found a bottle that was unmarked.

**AS**: Pretty resourceful. [laughs]

**WL**: Thank you! Thank you! [laughs] I knew you’d see the value in that. Every once in a while that would catch me though. There were times when I ended up taking a barbituate that I didn’t know was a barbituate. Luckily by this time I’m doing so well in my carpet cleaning that I have an assistant or two. Within the first year and a half the first franchise owner sold the franchise to me and one other employee. The other employee was the telemarketing side that would call and set up the jobs and I was the field side. I did all the carpet cleaning and took care of all the guys.

All the guys used. Every one of them. I would use that as pay and bonus at times. If they would run a job at five o’clock that needed to be ran and no one else would run I would say, “Listen, you run this and I’ll throw five oxys in for you.” I used it as currency and it was very effective. They would do things for oxys that they wouldn’t do for cash. I would tell them I would give them two hundred dollars to run the job and they wouldn’t do it. Then I would say I would give them three oxys and it was done.

That whole time we were stealing pills. There were times where we could find someone who really liked Darvocet—I don’t know why—but they would like Darvocet. I would collect up all the Darvocet and I would sell it for one chunk of money or exchange it for what I liked. We had guys that really liked benzodiazepines. I would take them not because I like benzos, but because I could exchange them. It was a currency. It has a value system. One orange football Xanax is worth a specific dollar amount. Very little, but very specific. This continued until I lost my franchise in 2002.

I went to treatment a couple more times in between there. Always for someone else, never for me. Colleen caught on that I was using again when things had gotten desperate and I went again when I was twenty six. One more time again when I was twenty-eight or twenty-nine. It was always these outpatients that weren’t very effective.

**AS**: Did you have kids by this point?

**WL**: The twins were born in 2000. This was 2002 so they were two at this point. At the point they were born I was sober for a very short period of time. The one thing that I’m not proud of, and I will share this, is that when the twins were born my wife almost died on the table because she was preaclapsic. She had Josie and then she fell asleep and was bleeding internally. Jake was still in there.

**AS**: She had a natural birth?

**WL**: The medication infiltrated. The spinal tap didn’t work, it came out. It created this huge pustule in her back of medication that never got to her. I convinced her that it was working because the doctor didn’t tell her it was working. They only told me and I said, “Don’t tell her.” I looked at her and I grabbed her by the collar as she is in excruciating pain and dying because of blood loss. She said, “It hurts so bad.” And I said, “Can you imagine how bad it would hurt if you didn’t have the pain medication? Now push!” She pushed and Jake was born. He was born not breathing so they had to intubate him and he began to breath immediately. Now she was the problem. She was dying. I am sober through this whole time. I am seeing all the things I have done and I’m like, Holy shit, I’m going to be here with the twins and she is going to die and I’m not going to know what to do. I can’t hold it together. The first thing I thought of was, There is no way I am going to be able to stay sober and take care of these babies. That is not going to happen. That all went through my mind immediately.

They stabilize her. They get her breathing and she is fine. They take her to the room and a few hours after, maybe five or six, some people come and visit and it is towards the evening. There was a movie store—this is back when there were movie stores—and she said, “Why don’t you go grab a movie and we can watch a movie and you can lay by me here in bed.” I went and used. I came back and she was crashing again. She was dying. Now I smell like weed and beer and even today I’m just mortified by it because it is so reminiscent of what the addict does. You use no matter what.

Her oxygen drops into the seventies. They are about ready to intubate but she bounces back one more time. I get this look from this nurse. I will never forget this look. She was like you piece of shit because she knew. I had no rebuttal I was just thinking I know I am. That was that.

As the twins got a little bigger and were moving around and Colleen was doing better life on the outside seemed really good. My addiction was starting to really flare again. The opiates were the reason. I can’t not take them because then I get sick. I take them even at night. If I wake up in the middle of the night I will take them. I was taking Xanax at night so I could sleep because I was taking all these opiates during the day which would just crank me up. The opiates gave me the talkies—I couldn’t stop talking. Great for sales! On my thirtieth birthday I had decided I was going to stop. I wasn’t going to do this anymore. I think that Josie was three at the time. She was so young. I swore to myself that night before my thirtieth birthday that I was not going to use. At ten thirty in the morning I realized that I was already high on my birthday. I had forgotten about staying sober.

**AS**: You mean in the middle of the night?

**WL**: The night before I made the affirmation by the time the morning came I had already used. I had forgotten I had made the affirmation. I literally did not remember that I had used, but at ten thirty when I did remember I was so mortified with myself. I was self-loathing. I hated me. I was like, You know you’re going to die you fucking junkie. You are just going to die you piece of shit. So I used a lot. I have no idea how much I used that day.

I ended up going to the pool hall. I maybe went down to the office for a little bit. I don’t think I did any work. I just used. I took a Xanax in the evening. When I came it was eight o’clock at night and there balloons throughout the house. My wife made chicken primavera for me—my favorite. The twins were there for the birthday party. I came in and yelled and screamed at all of them and was like, “Fuck you.” I walked down the hallway, I fell on the bed, I overdosed and I died. Josie came into the bedroom, my wife is in the kitchen crying. Josie went out and got my wife and said, “Call 911. Daddy is dead.” At two years old.

Colleen came into the bedroom and I am gray. I am not breathing. She gives me a few short rescue breaths and I start to shallow breath. She gets out the stethoscope and starts to monitor my heart. It isn’t normal it is very weak. She breaths for me and she doesn’t call nine one one because there is dope in the house. There is cocaine in the house, there are stolen pills in the house, there are scales in the house, marijuana, baggies. There is a whole shop set up downstairs. To call the ambulance means that DHS comes in and takes the kids. They take me to jail, they take the children away, they take everything. She is literally the person that saved my life that night.

**AS**: She was able to stabilize you?

**WL**: She was able to stabilize me. She gave me mouth to mouth. She breathed for me and kept me alive. I fell asleep after I got to a point where I was stable and my breathing was normal. She let me sleep. I woke up at one thirty in the morning and I said, “Where the fuck is my chicken?” I have really very little emotional response because I don’t remember any of that.

**AS**: But she told you.

**WL**: Yeah, several times in detail. [laughs] After that you think a person would stay sober and stay clean, but I kept thinking, I’ve got this. But I couldn’t because every time I would stop I would get sick. I would have to chew the pills in the morning to get them in my system faster. I would drink some kind of liquor with it because it would immediately hit my system and I would get in the hot shower all at the some time. I was in the shower, hanging my head, chewing Vicodin, with a shot of whiskey in me getting ready to start my day. I would brush my teeth and go clean the carpet again.

At that time I was making probably two thousand to three thousand dollars a week and we needed the money. In some ways she kept me going that direction because she knew we were making good money. I kept promising her it would slow down and when it would slow down we would be okay. I told her I was not going to do it like I did before and I would stay away from the Xanax because that was the problem.

Not long after that my business partner set me up. I had been stealing money from the business. The opiates were the problem. I tapered myself off of opiates, but I started doing cocaine really heavily. I started doing cocaine in late 2003. 2003 and 2004 was all cocaine and I started stealing from my business to support it. It was delivered at that time. Under thirty minutes or it was free.

**AS**: Under thirty minutes?

**WL**: It was like a pizza. Under thirty minutes or it was free. It was nothing to go through three hundred to four hundred and fifty dollars of cocaine in a night. Between me and her because now I’ve got her back on it. I’m good at keeping people sick around me. I was good at that.

My business partner had a hunch that I was stealing. A good hunch. They set me up so they had someone call and say, “I’ve got this huge house and it is empty. I just want you to go over the carpets because they need to be done. I don’t care if they are dirty or not I want you to charge me for every room because the last person who was there is going to pay the bill so it’s not that big of a deal. Whatever you come up with is fine with me just don’t make me have to remortgage the house.” I was like, “Okay, great.” “Listen, I’m just going to pay you. If you could keep it a little cheaper than going through the company that would be great.”

At that time I had no reason to think that was unusual. I had been doing enough side work up until that point where the word had gotten around that if you needed something done and you wanted it a little cheaper and you want great work you call Wade and he will do it for cash. She called me and we set it up for me to do this job. I would say a month later I got served papers. They were suing me for breach.

**AS**: Your business partner?

**WL**: That’s right. Because I am an addict, because I am full of self, because I have no real connection to anything that is reality I represented myself. I thought I didn’t need a lawyer. He took me to court and I ended up losing everything. Over 1.3 million dollars worth of assets and cash. Everything reverted back to the franchise owner. My identity was crushed because I had gone from being this nothing to being a local mogul. We would go to downtown Louisville and I would take all my employees and it would be nothing to pay two thousand dollars for a night’s worth of booze and food and walk away thinking I’m Johnny Big Shot. Get on my boat and ride the river all the way back to my dock in prospect. People thought I was cool. Here I am getting served and I was losing everything that I thought was me. Or so I thought at that time.

I remembered one day I had stolen some needles from this old lady that was a diabetic. She had a brand new packet of BD thirty cc thirty one gauge needles. I thought, I’ll just throw these in my van. I was sitting in my house depressed and alone because I had lost everything. I remebered those needles and I thought I’m going to try that. I am going to see what that is like. I went out and got them. I mixed up some cocaine in the spoon and I didn’t even use a filter. I drew it all back into the chamber. Colleen’s a nurse. She has practiced putting in IVs with me over and over. I gave plasma when I was broke as a joke. I’ve got the perfect know how. I go ahead and I shoot up for the first time. I remember thinking to myself I will never come back from this. This will be the end of me. I loved it. I loved it more than life itself. The allure and the enamore—I can’t—it just is. That went on for two years.

**AS**: How were you affording it?

**WL**: I stole some equipment and a list of patron customers and I started my own sideline gig even though it was forbidden. I had stopped cleaning myself. I hired my buddy Joe to come clean with me. Joe would go do the work and I would pay him half.

**AS**: Because it wasn’t you doing it.

**WL**: I didn’t have to work anymore. My dope dealer would front me and I would steal the money from Colleen when she would put money in the bank. It didn’t matter. I would sell stuff, sell other people’s stuff. It didn’t matter. Whatever I had to do in order to get it.

Towards the end there all I did was shoot dope, drink Miller High Life, and eat Donettes. That was the only thing I could keep down.

**AS**: What are those?

**WL**: Those little white powdered donuts in a bag. [laughs] I would wake up in the morning and eat a half a bag of those and then I would throw up, shoot dope, and drink beer the rest of the day.

**AS**: You must have lost a lot of weight.

**WL**: I was skin and bones. The reason my wife called my stepdad and my grandpa was because she knew I was going to die. It wouldn’t be long. I had a gangrenous sore on the inside of my left thigh because of all the dope I was doing and the dirty water.

**AS**: You were shooting into yours legs at this point?

**WL**: Well, I was, but not solely. It was mostly my arms. I had abscesses on both my arms up and down. Sometimes I would use my calves at times to find spots. My neck at times. The abscess is from dope not being able to metabolize in my body. In animal studies we call it intraperitoneal. It is the blank cavity in the body, so the only place it would go was to settle in the groin area. You could literally brush a powder off of my leg like dried cocaine. I was losing that leg, I could tell. My toes were getting dark blue. My leg was getting black. I didn’t care. I thought if I lose this leg I can get on disability. If I get disability I will be able to do dope for the rest of my life until I am dead.

A lot of paranoid schizophrenia stuff with the cocaine. I would hunker down in the basement. I almost shot my wife one night as she was walking downstairs.

**AS**: You almost shot her?

**WL**: I had a shotgun pointed at her head. I used to rig stuff up at the top of the stairs. I would put a beer bottle on the door knob so that if someone would come in it would fall down the steps and I would hear it. I always had a loaded shot gun next to me because if the cops came I was not going to jail.

**AS**: You were going to shoot yourself?

**WL**: Yes. Like I said, I don’t do time. I won’t do time. I can’t. I was locked inside my mind for a long time as a kid.

**AS**: You were locked in your room.

**WL**: I never thought of that. That’s got some emotion there.

**AS**: It is fresh in my head so it is easy for me to make those connections when I’m listening.

**WL**: Goddamn, you’re right.

**AS**: When somebody says, “I don’t do that,” well, what if someone told you you had to?

**WL**: I would kill myself.

**AS**: Right. I couldn’t have asked you that thirty minutes ago.

**WL**: Yeah. I ended up going to treatment. They called my stepdad and my grandpa, who was really cool about it. They kind of rigged it all. Colleen left for work and all of a sudden my buddy Joe comes up the driveway like he normally does to get the carpet cleaning equipment. The door slams and I say, “I’m in here.” I’m sitting in the chair with the guitar in my hand and sunglasses on in my house. I don’t want Joe to see my eyes and now how sick I am. Joe knows I’m sick. Joe talks about me in the third person already at this point. I will hear him and my wife talking in the kitchen about me: “I don’t know how far away he is from dying” and that would just infuriate me. Don’t talk to me like I’m not here.

**AS**: Even though you weren’t.

**WL**: That’s right. I thought I had it together.

He comes up, door slams, I say I am in here, and all of a sudden there is my stepdad and grandpa. He puts his hand on my shoulder and he has this look on his face.

**AS**: Joe does?

**WL**: My dad. He wasn’t okay. You could tell by the look in his eyes he was not okay with what he was seeing. I am one hundred and forty-five pounds. I have long sleeves on because if you see my arms they are abscessed and not okay. He said, “We are going to take you back to Minnesota to get some help. Why don’t you come with us.” I said, “I can’t do that. I can’t.”

Then my grandpa walks around the corner. I’m like, “What did you bring him for?” He’s cool. He’s been through this. He is thirty-four years sober out of AA. He was the town drunk. He has been doing twelve step calls his whole life and he has seen people way worse. He looks at me and he says, “Well, you’ve got yourself into a real fix here, didn’t you? I’ll tell you what. You’re probably feeling pretty shitty right about now. Why don’t you go ahead and get your stuff together and we will go up and get you some help. It is going to suck, but you’ll be alright.” I said, “Okay.”

**AS**: Is this your stepdad’s dad?

**WL**: Yeah. I said, “Okay.” He said, “Really? Okay.” I took a teener of cocaine into my bathroom and my dad said, “Just keep the door open.” I said, “No, I’m taking a shower. I’m not keeping the door open. I’ve got nothing in here. We’re good.” I put the teener in the spoon, drew it back as much as I could, and I shot the whole thing into my arm hoping I would overdose. I didn’t. I got really, really sick to the point where I fell into the shower. They helped me up, got me dressed. On the way out the door I even asked if I could drink a few beers. My grandpa said, “Go ahead. It will be your last.” I must have hammered four or five beers and then got back in that truck and headed to Minnesota.

On the way there my family tried to call and get a bed and there wasn’t a bed at [unclear], there wasn’t a bed at teen challenge. They finally said they had one over in South Dakota. Do you want to go to South Dakota? By this time I’m eating Trazadone because it is all I have left. I was like, “I don’t give a shit where we go. Let’s just go before I get sick again.” After two and a half days in the car—we slept in the vehicle, we kept in the vehicle. They would stop periodically to get me a little more booze here and there just to keep me level.

We got to Canton and at Canton I had just come around and they introduced me to a nurse. I stuck my hand out and gave them the best smile I could do. They gave me a room and they said, “We understand that you have been doing some pretty heavy amounts. We would like to make you as comfortable as possible. Are you allergic to Xanax at all?” I said, “Why, no. I’m not.” “Okay, take this. This will really help you to be calm.” “I will, thank you.”

**AS**: This is what treatment looks like.

**WL**: I am allergic to Xanax because every time I take it the left side of my body goes numb; totally dead. I went back to my room and lay down. I woke up at about eight or nine at night and I left the treament center. I went to the bar and I had a few drinks. I tried to steal a car, and I couldn’t. There wasn’t anything pre-1985 that I could ‘Dukes of Hazzard’ this thing and leave. I stole a bicycle and I drove that back to the treatment center after falling on the lawn a few different times because I must have drank a fifth of whiskey sitting at that bar plus a Xanax. I found my way back there because I was going to bicycle all the way home but I asked someone where I was and they said, “You don’t know where you’re at?” I said, “Just tell me what town I’m in.” “Canton.” “Canton, Kentucky?” “No, Canton, South Dakota.” “How far is that from Kentucky?” I literally thought I was going to go home. I didn’t care. I was going to get home.

I got to the edge of town and got tired. I figured I better go back to the treatment center and figure it out tomorrow. I went back to the treatment center and threw the bike down on the lawn like I was a nine year old kid. I walked into the treatment center and went under my bed. The nurse came in and tried to get me out of there and I guess I tried to hurt her. I used to hide underneath my bed when my stepdad used to hurt me. I don’t know what happened. I must have reverted to something.

The following day it happened again. They gave me Xanax again and I ended up going to the bar again. This time they sent one of the counselors named Bill. I think he is still there. He is a marine. I was at the gas station this time drinking a Deuce and he finds me sitting up next to the gas station drinking this beer. He takes the beer and says, “You’re not going to need this to get in the back of my truck.” I got in the back of the truck. I’m already drunk because I went to the bar first and then went to get more beer. Went back to the treatment center and they called this pastor Al Pratt. He is a six foot five two hundred and eighty pound biker who is a pastor but did a lot of time but now had turned his life over. He settled me down, but they had to shoot me full of thorazine to get me to stay. For the next three days I did the thorazine shuffle all around that treatment center. I woke up three days later on the men’s wing.

**AS**: The men’s wing of what?

**WL**: Of the treatment center. This was in 2005. Three days later I wake up bald and I’ve got no facial hair. No nothing. I look in the mirror and go, “What the fuck.” Everybody is laughing and I don’t know why they are laughing. I thought it was really disturbing and not okay. You don’t do this to somebody. I don’t care how drunk they get. You don’t shave their head. I went to the director of the place and pitch a fit. I’m like, “Who shaved my head?” She was like, “Wade, Wade, Wade. You did. You were standing in the men’s bathroom stark naked, shaving your entire head. We weren’t going to stop you! We figure the worst that could happen is that it would grow back.” Okay. Shaved every ounce off.

That began my forty-five day stay at that treatment center. My daughter still reminds me of the time she saw me with no hair or beard.

**AS**: She does? She was like four?

**WL**: Yeah. It scarred her. We found a picture of it not long ago and she can’t look at it. She does not like it. It’s not the daddy she left in Kentucky. They had to go stay with parents because I went to treatment. My twins went to stay with my mother in Minnesota. Our one year old went to stay with my wife’s mom and dad in Iowa. My wife is still in Kentucky, and I’m in South Dakota. Split apart and I didn’t think we were ever getting back together again.

**AS**: So pastor Al Pratt shows up. I want to hear about how you got into college, how you got here, and what you’re doing now.

**WL**: I met pastor Al Pratt and was enamored by his coolness. He’s got tattoos up and down his arms, wearing a biker jacket, says ‘pastor’ on it. He’s got this story of drinking bleach to clean his system out prior to UA to such a degree that he has to have a steel lining in his gut because that is the degree that his addiction took him to. I’m thinking if that happened to you I am so much better than you. You make me feel really good about how it turned out for me.

After going through that treatment and going home I got into an aftercare program. They had a counselor come to my house every week for a good eightteen months.

**AS**: Were you back in Kentucky at this point?

**WL**: Sleepy Eye, Minnesota where I grew up.

**AS**: So the whole family moved?

**WL**: Yeah. My wonderful mom found a three bedroom branch home that was for sale and manipulated the sellers to rent it to us. My mom is a very dynamic person. She’s got us living in this 1974 home that is decorated in 1974. I went from living in Louisville, Kentucky in a very prestigious neighborhood—even though I was dying from addiction I was used to finer things—to a house with shag carpets, linoleum, smoke colored walls, dark chocolate cabinetry, orange countertops. I’m just flabbergasted at where I’m at in now in my life, but at the same time it’s like I know I need to redeem myself. We dig in the best we can.

My wife gets a job as a nurse in a geriatrics facility in a little town. My kids get enrolled in kindergarten. We’ve got baby Jane and she’s doing well.

I started going to meetings. I went every day for a year. Sometimes I would go twice a day: an afternoon meeting and then a night meeting on top of that. I got to the point where all I would do eat, live, breath, and shit recovery. I’m chairing meetings now, I’m going to speak at treatment centers, and I go back to Canton every month to share my story about how I ran away from the treatment center and I ran down to the bar and got hammered. I had become this celebrity in recovery where people were recognizing me. They would say, “Hey, Wade. We have this date and can you come talk?” They would put stuff up with my name on it. It got to the degree where I was like, Is this what it is supposed to be like? But I was loving it. I was having a great time.

My spiritual life started to increase and I started really wanting to know god more and what he had in store for me if anything at all. There was always the ‘why me’ every time I had that ontological argument of is there or isn’t there. If so he’s off his game because he could have saved me here and here and here and he never did. So why now?

I reached out to pastor Al and went back to Sioux Falls. I went to his church a few times—it’s a biker church. There are tattoos and bikes and Jesus. I liked it. I liked being vulnerable. I liked saying I needed something more than me in my life. I need a higher power in my life. Pastor Al said the thing that I keep hearing: you’ve really got the gift of gab. I told him one thing that happened to me—I had mentioned to you at the restaurant that I had this fight with god.

**AS**: Do you want to talk about that?

**WL**: Sure. At about day forty-four I was going to commit suicide. I was told by my wife that we weren’t going to be together right away and it may not happen for awhile because we didn’t have a house and this and that. She got on me about if I hadn’t done this it wouldn’t be my fault. She threw some blame at me, which is totally justifiable. Definitely. Tell that to a self centered, narcissistic, egotistical addict that’s got a wounded spirit. That doesn’t work really well and that’s not what I needed to hear at the time. I put a bag around my head and a belt around my neck and I went into my room and locked the door. I was bound and determined that asphyxiation was going to be the easiest way out because I would just simply pass out and die.

As soon as I did start to black out a hole is torn in the bag and it is a nurse. She says, “Wade, what are you doing?” A nurse never came back to that room ever that whole time I was there, and now all of a sudden there is a nurse outside of this locked door and happens to have a key in her hand? And opens it up at that exact same time? That makes no sense to me.

After that episode I went to the backyard where they have this dirt track and I just started to walk around the dirt track over and over. I got into this big fight with god of, “You did this and I hate you.” I was trying to induce the wrath of god. If you are real, zap me dead right here. Finally I screamed at him to either do something with me or kill me. I fell to the ground. I just collapsed. I don’t know if it was emotion or what it was. I just went down and cried. I remember just laying there crying for the longest time. That deep visceral kind of thing. You can’t catch your breath.

After that I went and sat in this lecture hall and listened to this speaker talk about getting beaten. When the old man sends you to the closet to the get the belt that he is going to beat you with do you get the wide belt or the thin belt. I said, “The wide belt.”

**AS**: You said that out loud?

**WL**: Yeah. The speaker says to me, “There is a man that has been beaten.” It pierced me. It felt as if god was talking to me through this person. How did they know? Is that really reminiscent of a beaten person that they would go get the wide belt? Of course it is because it has greater surface tension and it’s not going to hurt as bad. I know that because it has happened. I am not going to give you the thin belt.

It was all of those things in combination that made me go back to visit Al Pratt. He was the speaker who said that. I went back to him and shared with him that something had happened on that dirt track. There was a revelation that happened. I didn’t want to seem too weird, but god told me I was going to be a pastor. That was something that was almost a knowingness. I called my wife before I went into that lecture hall that night. I told her about that day and what happened. I told her I had this overwhelming knowingness that I’m supposed to be a pastor or something. She was at a hotel with my parents at the time, and she goes, “That’s great.” I could hear the patronizing tone. I said, “You don’t understand. This is real. I really feel like there was a spiritual entity there and I had there experience. I can’t even explain it.” “Honey. That’s great. We are behind you no matter what.” I just surrendered. She was not going to believe me. Not now; I’ve got to walk it out.

As I am home doing outpatient I just have this feeling that I need to go back and see him. He puts it on my heart to read the Bible, and I did. I sat down at my kitchen table with a pot of coffee and a pack of cigarettes and my recovery bible. “In the beginning.” My mother in law called to check up and see how we were. I never liked her because she was a godly woman and I never was a godly man at all. This time I had a real hankering to ask her about god and what it means to her. I just talked to her for awhile. I said, “Mary Jane, I’m reading the Bible and I was interested in what your experience is.” She said, “What are you reading?” I said, “Genesis, you know, in the beginning.” She said, “You don’t want to start there!” I was like, “What are you talking about?”

**AS**: So you had no religious upbringing?

**WL**: I was the CEO of the church—Christmas and Easter Only. [laughs] My parents would drop us off and we would go to Sunday School and they would pick us up.

**AS**: So, you have some—

**WL**: Not about the books. I know the characters of the Bible, but not the order that I am supposed to know to get confirmed. That never happened. I faked it.

She says, “You need to start in the gospels. Start with John. From there,” she said, “Once you get to Revelation stop. Then go and read Genesis and read through that.” I did it and I read through it. I sat there day after day for hours and hours and read the Bible word for word. I did not miss one word. I figured at the very end there was going to be some kind of an epiphany or knowingness. A spell or a potion. I don’t know. I had this strong urge that I had to read every word. Even in books where all they did was recite the family lineage. I read every word to the best of my ability figuring there would something. “You faithful son! You’ve done it all. Here is your reward.

There was a reward. My faith grew so that today I do believe there was a man that walked this planet and was God incarnate who had every attribute of the living God and took upon himself every single sin past, present, future, and died an innocent man. When I talk about it it does get me. I’m appreciative of that. I can’t think about how I could do that. If I was asked to do that—no. No! Of course not. I don’t even stop to give people on the side of the road money let alone die for them. It gave me a perspective. It opened my eyes and really got me to understand what it means to care for somebody other than myself. That was new for me up to that point. I was so busy trying to survive that I didn’t give a shit about anybody but me. Reading the scriptures made me go, “Here is this man who is God and could stop time altogether, but he didn’t. He took it all and never once complained. Here I am this little human complaining and whining: “Early recovery is hard.” I don’t know, it really helped. It made me want to share it and go give it to someone else.

I contacted this pastor in Sleepy Eye and I said, “Would you mind if we gathered at your church on Saturday nights? It would be me, my wife, a couple of other people who are in recovery. We will bring our guitars down and we are just going to do some music, hang out, and talk about recovery and how God is a part of that. Is that okay?” “Yeah, sure.” We started with just that and it grew to one hundred and fifty people in just six months. Pastor Al recognized what was going on and took me under his wing. The Southern Baptist Convention through the Dakota Baptist Convention recognized me and sent their guy out to underwrite our ministry. They funded it. They gave us money every month to help us buy equipment and travel and train me. Within a short period of time, in 2007 I became ordained.

**AS**: In the Baptist Church?

**WL**: Yeah. By this time we have our own church and congregation of about one hundred and nine people. We are doing youth group every week, clothing drives, food drives, and we are speaking on the behalf of people in recovery in the church community to let them know, as I learn more about what drugs and alcohol can do to a human being, how to be mindful. How to navigate this whole thing. We told them, “Throw your old medications away, take them down to the police station because I will come to your house and steal them. I will eat them all and I will die.”

I would show up in the church with my vest and my tattoos and they would immediately be dumbfounded by the level of intelligence and then what I looked like. That’s the demon of meth.

**AS**: You had the church for how long?

**WL**: Almost three years. It grew into this really cool thing. Towards the last eight to ten months we had ‘normies’ come in—people that were seeing—

**AS**: Before this had been pretty much people in recovery? It was one of these recovery churches?

**WL**: We called it a recovery bar. We got kicked out of that Lutheran Church on the 364th day. We were about to recognize one year and they came to me and said, “Wade” —and they wouldn’t call me pastor— “You guys are going to have to go. We found cigarette butts out front and that’s not going to be acceptable.” “Where are we supposed to go?” “That’s not our problem. I’m sorry, you just have to go.”

**AS**: Wow. Because you had a very large crowd?

**WL**: People from Sunday morning were coming on Saturday night.

**AS**: And then not coming on Sunday.

**WL**: That’s right.

**AS:** When did you get the tattoos?

**WL**: Not until I got sober. I didn’t get my first one until I was clean. I was arrested once. Remember I told you I went to jail one day? I went to jail one day and they took a mug shot. I watched them take everyone else’s that was in line with me, and they made them take off their shirts and they took pictures of their tattoos. I swore as a person dealing dope and running guns and doing stupid crap I was never going to get a mark on my body. Too easy to recognize.

This solidifies my recovery. Now I am very recognizable; it is hard to forget me. Hard to forget. I want to mark myself. I am marked with the cross literally because now people go, “That guy is marked with the cross, marked with a Jesus on his arm, he’s got scripture, how he has battled sin and wants to do the right thing. If it’s not him that does it is the sin that does it.” I want to be recognized. I don’t want there to be a chance to ever go back to that life. I want to be marked.

**AS**: Would you mind sharing the scripture?

**WL**: Corinthians five seventeen. Romans six and seven. Romans seven is Paul talking about his battle with sin. If you take it and replace the word sin with addiction it makes perfect sense. It is the addiction within me that does these evil things. “Oh what a wretched man that I am. Who will free me from this life that is dominated by addiction?” Thank God the answer is in Jesus. That is what Pastor Al showed me when I was in that treatment center that time. He challenged me. He said that addiction was in the Bible. I said, “Yeah, right. No it’s not.” He said, “Replace the word addiction with sin in that paragraph.” The more I read it the more I started to cry. I was like, “You mean Paul was an addict?” “I don’t know if Paul was an addict, but the battle is the same, isn’t it?” He’s doing something that he doesn’t want to do. Oh what a wretched man that I am. Who will free me from this life that is dominated by all of this? Everything fell in line.

At the end of the three years in ministry, a lot of it had to do with normal, regular people that have great intentions, came in, and their traditions were not seen there because we didn’t do communion.

**AS**: You didn’t do their Baptist traditions.

**WL**: We didn’t do that. That’s not me. I don’t have a comfort in that.

**AS**: So did the Baptist Church hear of you and then—

**WL**: Pastor Al took me under his wing and taught me all things.

**AS**: Is he a Baptist minister?

**WL**: He is with the Dakota Baptist Convention. Part of the Southern Baptist Convention. I’m trying to think of the executive director’s name. He was told by Pastor Al that he had this young protege and his is just sharp. He is on fire for the Lord. He has this gift of gab. Man, he can preach up a storm. He just brings it and the emotion behind it. You’ve got to go see him. He comes to Sleepy Eye and he sits in the pews like a visitor. Afterwards he goes, “Wow.” I said, “What?” “You have a gift.” I said, “Thank you. Who are you?” He introduced himself and said he wanted to underwrite my ministry. I said, “I don’t know what that means.” “We will give you money.” “Okay.” [laughs] “We need that. What can we do with the money?” “Anything you need.” “We need a trailer so we can go to a different church once in awhile on Sunday mornings to bring the message.” It turned into a huge production. It turned into a five piece band and a ten thousand dollar PA system and soundboards and computers and a board of directors. “Normie” church.

We just started this thing with guitarists hanging out talking about what recovery really means and why it is so important to—

**AS**: Have a spiritual life?

**WL**: Yeah. Then it turned into money. It turned into, “I want you to do a baptism for my grandson. I want you to marry so and so. I want you to do communion. I want you to do a mass.” Whoever came in with ten thousand dollars to donate wanted me to do something different for their family or their stuff. They thought themselves to be significant enough because they donated. Pastor Wade will just do it.

**AS**: How long did it take you to figure out it wasn’t working?

**WL**: Three years. I told the congregation I was leaving. I told them we had lost our mission and it doesn’t look anything like Set Free anymore.

**AS**: Set Free was the name of it?

**WL**: Yeah. I just said I was done. I’m going to go to graduate school now. I graduated with my four year degree. I didn’t start college until a year after I was sober.

**AS**: How old were you?

**WL**: Thirty-four. I started my bachelor’s because my wife said, “You’re so smart. You should do this.” I said, “You’re wrong. I’m not as smart as you think I am. I’m a manipulator. I’m really good at getting what I want.” She said, “Do one class. It’s no big deal.” “Fine, I’ll do one class.” I did one class.

**AS**: What was the class? Was it psychology?

**WL**: Well, my undergrad is in human services; management. It was probably literature or English or a writing course.

**AS**: But you liked it?

**WL**: No. Well, I had to take the textbook and set it next to the dictionary because every other sentence I did not know any word. The first word I had to look up was efficacious. This is how far down the socioeconomic scale I came from. Efficacious is not a word that my people use. What are you talking about? Even to know the definition wasn’t enough because it didn’t settle with me. I didn’t get it.

Today I think learning is so great. The first class I got an A. My excuse was that it was an easy class. The second one I got an A and I told my wife that everyone in that class got an A. It was an easy school. It was a crappy school. The third class I got an A in. The teacher was a pushover and she didn’t care. The fourth one I was sitting with peers and I was saying the same thing. This girl with tears in her eyes looks at me and said, “If you say one more fucking time that this is easy I’m going to slap you. I got a C last class.” That helped me. Immediately I was like maybe Colleen is right. Maybe I have some smarts.

I got through the bachelor’s and graduated with honors. I went on to my master’s degree and took another master’s at night while I was going that. I got to meet Marv Seppala, the chief medical officer at Hazelden [Betty Ford Foundation]. We became weight room buddies and started talking about neurology. He told me about addiction neurology for free as I taught him how to lift weights.

**AS**: You just happened to meet him?

**WL**: He is the chief medical officer at Hazelden.

**AS**: Right, but how did you meet?

**WL**: I was a student there. As he walks in I was like, “Hey, Dr. Seppala. How are you?” “It looks like you lift weights! I could never gain weight.” “Well, you’re an ectomorph and this is why. You need to eat this way and lift like this and you will put on a few pounds but you are never going to get huge, but you can feel better about your body.” “I’ll tell you what I’m going to be in here every so and so. Do you want to come in and talk about addiction and you can show me how to do this.” Done. I got a free tutor. And so did he.

That was the two years following ministry. I stayed up in Center City during the week and came home on the weekends. I became kind of an uncle to my kids. My wife started drinking to cope with being a single mom. My meeting structure shifted. I maybe went once a week. My eating disorder flared. I have been bulimic since I was twelve. I learned how to meet weight when I was wrestling. Having low self esteem from growing up how I did was a way to keep my body composition in check. I could binge purge and I wouldn’t drink or use when I was doing that. I did that pretty badly during graduate school. I got really thin and exercised twice a day. I was feeling shitty about being a dad that’s not there, but trying to get to the next level of my life because I have to do this. It wasn’t something I felt like I could do—I had to do it. I felt compelled to do it. Got to graduation day and got it done. The only people there for graduation was my wife and my inlaws because five years prior to this I cut my mom, dad, brother, and sister out of my life for six years. I couldn’t have their chaos in my life anymore.

**AS**: Which had continued?

**WL**: Just because I quit drinking doesn’t mean that that stopped. Her gambling and her lying and manipulating. My brother’s meth use and my sister’s—I don’t know. She had several children with different men who were addicts. It was just never a healthy scenario. There were six years where there was no contact whatsoever. Not even a phone call. We lived in the same town, so we would see each other and not say hi.

Two years at grad school and then for the three years following that I was at Project Turnabout in an intensive inpatient treatment center there working with gamblers for the first two years and with chemically dependent for a year after that. Nine months after that I was in public mental health at Sioux Trails in New Ulm. Just this last October I gave notice and said I was going to start a treatment center. I had no idea how to do that or if that could ever happen. I prayed about it and quit. I had the gift of gab and we could make this happen. I’ve been talking to people, our policies and procedures have been submitted, the building has been bought, the outpatient building has been bought, furniture has been bought, and the employees have been hired. We are just waiting for two licenses and we are ready to go.

**AS**: In Montevideo?

**WL**: Yeah.

**AS**: What kind of a treatment center? Then can you talk about your work with trauma?

**WL**: Yeah. This is going to be a mixed cohort of men and women. There will be ten in the inpatient center.

**AS**: There is inpatient and outpatient?

**WL**: We have an inpatient and an outpatient, two sober homes, and a gambling unit all at the same time. All or none! Here we go.

The inpatient treatment center is a six bedroom, four bath home. It is forty-six hundred square feet. This is in a residential setting. It is a beautiful, big house. Ten folks in that place. We are going to focus on trauma using excelleration therapy. We are going to treat trauma first, and then we are going to treat chemical dependency second. I am very much in belief that chemical dependency is a coping strategy for whatever got you there. Very seldom do you see the organic alcoholic where they take that first drink and say, I love that and I have a supportive enviornment. My parents loved me, I had everything that I needed—well, that can be a problem too. I firmly belive that trauma is the nucleus of compensatory behavior such as drinking, over eating, shopping, gambling, relationship addictions. In some way I am getting out of dealing with the original issue, which could be in my case the childhood sexual and physical trauma.

**AS**: What do you mean in some way you are getting out of it?

**WL**: You don’t have to deal with it. I don’t have to deal with the somatic responses that are procured from my amygdala from the trauma.

**AS**: What does ART stand for again?

**WL**: Accelerated Resolution Therapy. The God of my understanding works like this: he always shows me things that I need to know first hand. The veteran that I worked with almost a year ago now that was committing an act of suicide caused in me PTSD. My symptoms were—

**AS**: This was a man you were treating?

**WL**: I was called to an emergeny situation. I was not treating him. He had put on social media that he was taking the coward’s way out. He was done. He was not happy. “I will be by the lone tree” was the word we got. I and another therapist and my wife raced across two counties to get to this place.

**AS**: You knew where it was?

**WL**: My colleauge did. He had a recollection as to where this was. We raced to get there at ninety miles an hour to get there. Behind me is a state trooper with his lights on. He zooms past, so I get right behind him. Another five miles goes by and he pulls over. I pull over in front of him and he says to me, “What are you doing?” I said, “I’m going to the same place you’re going. I’m going to find so-and-so.” “Who are you?” “I’m a mental health professional. I’m going to the scene.” “Alright, but you can’t go faster than me.” I said, “Okay.” [laughs]

We got up to the spot. He went past the turn off and I took a right and there were squad cars and an ambulance. I thought, Shit, he already did it. We got behind the ambulance and my phone rang. It was him and he was asking me where the fuck I was. I said I’m behind the ambulance and he told me to go up there. I’ve got to talk to these guys and see if they can let me through the blockade. I went up to the sergeant and said, “Here are my credentials. I’m a veteran. Let me talk to him.” “He has a weapon.” “I understand. I just need to go up there.”

They let me through and I spent three hours at his window. It got to be nighttime.

**AS**: What window? Was he in a car?

**WL**: Sorry, he was in a car. Yeah. He had a gun. Three hours of trying to negotiate with him. I shared with him my military experience and his and how can I do this and then live. How can I take that many lives and not be affected. I was like, “Listen. You haven’t had the kind of therapy that I do. I want to work with you and help you to get better.” I’m telling him about Accelerated Resolution Therapy which at the time I had only heard of. I hadn’t done it. I hadn’t needed to. I had heard of other veterans who have. I was just telling him to work with me. Anything just to get him.

Finally, we get down to that last minute and he looks at me and says, “I can’t. I’m going home.” He grabs the trigger and I screamed as loud as I could. I said, “By the blood of Christ I bind you.” And he stopped. He cried. He said, “If I get out of this car they will put me in jail.” I said, “If I go and get a letter that says no charges pending will you get out?” He said, “Yeah, I’ll get out.”

By this time the lieutenant is on the scene. He said, “You’re not going back out there.” I said, “Just give me the damn letter. He is willing to come out.” I had to negotiate with him and send him a picture to his phone. Finally he did get out. I get in the ambulance with him. I fill in the social workers. I told them he was a vet and these were his experiences. This is what is going on. Be cautious. Just trying to give them some insight. We go home.

I’m fired up. My adrenaline is off the charts. I don’t go to bed that night until four in the morning. Three weeks go by and I start to not feel okay. I don’t know what is going on with my. My motivation is low, I don’t want to do much. I come home at night and I just lay around. Pretty soon I had stopped shaving, I called in sick a few days, and I start to get very angry at the drop of a hat. I was suicidal and I’m not telling anybody that I am and I am. By this time my wife started to notice. She said we needed to call somebody. I started my own process of Accelerated Resolution Therapy. I went and got one session and my PTSD was gone. It was lifted. I walked out of there like I was pre-episode. I’m crying at my wife saying how sorry I was and that I didn’t even know. I tried to explain myself as to why I was being such an asshole before. She is such a sweetheart she just said, “It’s okay; you’re better now.” I don’t deserve you.

I go back and do five more sessions. We work on things like an old man that used to beat me with a stick and punch me and kick me. I babysitter that used to stick things in me and have sex with me when I’m little. All of the bullshit I did when I left my son. I worked through that with Accelerated Resolution and I rewrote every one. I went and rewrote my first drink, my first cocaine experience, my first marijuana experience. I don’t remember it anymore.

**AS**: Can you give me a quick description of what that means?

**WL**: The reference on this is that this would be Dr. Candell and his work around dendritic spines and the protein synthesis that happens. Images sit on the dendritic spines. It takes protein synthesis to activate the image in the brain. When you recall a traumatic image it renders it unstable. At that point it is maleable and can be manipulated. When we use bilateral stimulation in the way of horizontal eye movements that mimic REM sleep we know that it reduces brain waves from a sedentary eight to thirty hertz to one to four. My theory is that that’s what peels away the emotional response from the traumatic issue because it is like throwing icy cold water on hot trauma. Just like that.

Immediately I went from being unable to talk about the experience to calm. I went through the image in my mind as I was looking at the bilateral stimuation of the eye movements. The first time I went through it I emoted. I emoted around the fact that I saw his chest being blown open. I emoted around I couldn’t save him. I emoted around I’m standing here and nobody is helping me. This colleague that I brought with me went up to the window with me and fell apart. He didn’t make it. He saw that man and he was drunk and had a gun and my colleague couldn’t handle that. He starts to weep. I was like, “Dude, go tell those police officers to go tell those ones over there to shut their fucking lights off. Go do that.” I sent him away. Abandonment has always been an issue for me. Now my best friend abandoned me to stand at this window by myself to save this guy’s life. All that tied together I worked through with the eye movements for me because it was very much connected to past stuff.

As we rewrite it we use imagination. Positive images. We rewrite it using the same bilateral stimiulation because it is maleable and we can write new images. All we have to do is imagine it. It is voluntary image replacement. The therapist I’m working with said, “You could replace this now. The first time through the scene is emotion. The second time through is no emotion. The third time through you’re the director. You can make it better. How would you make it better? You can bring angels or a higher power.” My imagination was when I pulled up on the scene I walked around the corner of the ambulance and someone came and walked right in between me and my colleague. He’s got a big right hand. He walks up to the window and the guy that is in the car that sees me there with none other than Jesus looks at him, starts to cry, gives Jesus a big hug, and we walk away and get him treatment. That’s it.

When I think about that story I think about how real it is to see Christ standing there between me and my colleague at the time. It is a new, better image that prevents new triggers and new things. When I say I rewrote my first drink, instead of Derek handing me that Tab I slapped it out of his hand and I watch it roll across the street going all the way down. I never drank.

**AS**: Why would you say that? Why does that make you feel better?

**WL**: Why does that make me feel better? Why does making the right choice make you feel better?

**AS**: Are you saying that is replacing a painful memory in your brain? That you have pushed it away?

**WL**: I’m saying that I’m no longer an addict or an alcoholic.

**AS**: You know your history, clearly. Retelling it doesn’t affect you in the same way anymore because—

**WL**: No. I’m not ever going to use drugs again because I know today as a professional what drugs do to the body. Since I’ve had ART I’ve had a drink. I don’t drink to get drunk. I don’t drink everyday. I don’t steal from garages. I don’t—right? I say that not to prove a point but because I’m using myself as an experiment.

**AS**: I think there are a growing number of professionals in the field that are thinking the abstinence only and abstinence always attitude towards substances—

**WL**: When I went back and ARTed myself for every first that I had, I then felt comfortable enough to have a glass of wine with my food. I still felt guilty the first time. It’s been eleven years. This is okay.

**AS**: Right. What will I do the next day?

**WL**: I didn’t do anything. This was October. The first drink I had was in Tampa. It was with my wife in a beautiful restaurant and we had a beautiful night. I drank two glasses of wine and I didn’t think, “We should get a ball of cocaine!” [laughs] I’m not going to advertise what you should do after having ART therapy. What I am going to do is give people the knowledge that the traumatic event and the compensatory behavior to eliminate the somatic response induced by that original trauma—when that trauma goes away you aren’t going to have the need to use. You’re just not.

I’m not recommending that someone do that in the first twelve months. I think there is a period of acclimation that needs to happen in the endocrine system because we have acetylcholine, GABA, and glutamate and our transmitters that are very important in regulating my central nervous system. Just making sure that those things return to equilibrium and homeostasis. We know homeostasis can take eighteen months for some people who have used exponentially. Give yourself that time. It has been eleven years for me and I’m not going to revert back to the town drunk in a week. I am being very scientific about this. I am journaling when I drink and how much I drink and what the effects are. In four or five years, or less than that, when ART becomes the go-to modality for the world I’m the first. I am the first addict or alcoholic that has some kind of documentation that says this works. What does that mean for AA and NA? I don’t care. I don’t think those fellowships will ever go away because it is great to come together beneath one—

**AS**: Yeah. It is the support. Can you talk about the ear thing? I looked it up but I would like to have you describe it.

**WL**: The bridge is a device that was created for the sole purpose of pain relief. It was originally created for people dying of cancer. They had dire pain. A doctor recognized this opiate addict that was having this pain and utilized this machine on the opioid addict. He found out that it attenuated his opioid withdrawal symptomatology. He took it off of him and the symptoms came back. They created this device called the Bridge. I wish we knew we were going to talk about this because it is such a new science and it isn’t my specialty. I don’t have all of the details.

**AS**: That’s okay. Just that you are considering using it.

**WL**: Yes, we are going to use this. It has been FDA approved, not that that says a lot.

**AS**: Same with Oxy!

**WL**: Yeah. [laughs] It does attenuate the withdrawal effects up to 62.8 percent in twenty minutes.

**AS**: It is a medical device?

**WL**: Right. No drugs are used. It is an electronic device. It sends an electric signal through the cranium into the amygdad reducing the amygdala’s response by fifty-two percent. The amygdala is the fight or flight, freeze or faint. It is also affecting other areas of the brain such as the hypocampus to reduce symtomology. Imagine if you would jsut for a second offereing to an opiate addict like myslef, “Okay, listen. You can be clean and it won’t cause any pain. Are you interested? Yes or no.” I would have said yes. No pain whatsoever? Well, you might get the shits. Other than that, no pain. On day five they are boasting ninety five percent.

**AS**: That is phenomenal.

**WL**: There are videos. I will forward you the videos so you can watch these patients prior to and after having this device put in. they wear the device for five days and in that five day period they become biologically clean. At the end of the fifth day we transfer immediately into medication assisted therapy [MAT]. Our treatment center is going to specialize in MAT. We are working with an addiction psychiatrist for prescriptions. We will be doing a lot of telemedicine because of our location.

**AS**: Are you going to do Suboxone?

**WL**: Suboxone, right. Suboxone is the only thing I am comfortable with. I am not as comfortable with methadone. It just has too long of a half life and has no naloxone in it. I don’t want to take the risk of someone being on that and then using because they will die. It has happened so many times.

That is our focus. The ten inpatient group will come in as a cohort: they will get there together and leave together. It is not going to be the same—

**AS**: You gain a person, you lose a person.

**WL**: Nope. You come in together and you leave together.

**AS**: What if someone leaves?

**WL**: We aren’t going to fill another bed. Tough.

**AS**: If it is down to three people—

**WL**: Then it is the three survivors. That’s right. It is like a platoon.

**AS**: You will also be using a different financial model, as well.

**WL**: We are using funding from the state. We are going to refund money when it comes down to—

**AS**: You might be using money from the state but if people leave you won’t be getting money anymore.

**WL**: No.

**AS**: You’re taking a new approach.

**WL**: God is our financer. Do you think I’m kidding? I’m not kidding at all. Watch him do it. I want to share something with your listeners. Probably a couple of graduate students that are writing this up for you—

**AS**: Undergrad.

**WL**: Undergrad. Oh my gosh you are getting them young.

**AS**: They are very smart. Great typers.

**WL**: Smarter than most. Great typers. Very educated. Here is something you will be entertained by. I left the public mental health clinic in October. My mantra was: I am going to outgive God. I am going to work until God is made to look a little foolish for not giving. Yeah.

**AS**: Are you challenging God? [laughs]

**WL**: A little bit.

**AS**: What does that do for you? What is the impact on you?

**WL**: Here is what happens. He’s already blazed away. He introduced us to a donor; the patriarch of this family. He owned a goldmine. When I say goldmine he literally owned a goldmine. He left for the wife, the children, and the grandchildren a trust. They decided to spend all the amounts of money they have to spend in order to reduce their taxable responsibilities on recovery in Montevideo. I don’t know how much that is yet because we haven’t been given the check, but she asked us what we needed and we rattled off, “We need a van for this, we need a sprinkler system in the homes, medical devices.”

**AS**: Did they buy the house, too?

**WL**: No, we bought the house. This is what I mean by God has bypassed anything I could do. The house was already zone R4 when we bought it. We didn’t know that.

**AS**: What is R4?

**WL**: Residential Four mean that it is ready for occupancy for the levels we want it to be. Otherwise we would have needed a conditional use permit from the city. I even went to a city planning zoning meeting and one of the people there said, “I’m sure there will be a public hearing on this.” The city manager said, “No, there won’t because it is already zoned R4. We wish Recovery 101 all the best.” [laughs] I was like you’ve got to be kidding me. I walked out of there in five minutes and it was done. There is nothing they can do to stop us.

We have people coming out of the woodwork to help. There has not been one bump. It has everything to do with the opiate issue that is going on.

**AS**: The people in the area.

**WL**: Yeah. We’ve got Dr. Willenbring that is doing all of our scripts. Shelley Alkington is our board president who lost her daughter at age twenty-six to opiate overdose just last year. She has a bill at the House right now that would add a certain percentage to—don’t quote me here—but I think every microgram of opiate that is prescribed. She came up with that.

**AS**: A tax?

**WL**: It’s a tax. If that happens that will mean literally millions of dollars, if not close to a billion dollars, in relief for treatment in Minnesota.

**AS**: That’s like cigarettes and the tobacco companies.

**WL**: How many therapy facilities do we have? Less than a handful.

**AS**: We don’t even have enough treatment beds. We don’t have enough sober houses and we don’t have enough—people should not have to wait a second when they say they are willing to go in.

**WL**: Yeah. Now that we have this bridge device, now that we have medication assisted therapy, now we have all these little things together. We just need these great marketing tools to say, “Here we are! If you need us here we are! No pressure; no rush.”

I used to be an interventionist where I would go stiffarm people to go and leave no matter what. Then there is this blow back of the addict that doesn’t want to go, or they fail and the family comes back and says, “We want our money back because our person didn’t get fixed!” I’ve so walked away from that. It’s just not a model I’m interested in anymore. There were so many times along my own process where I was willing. Balling, willing, wanting out, but not knowing how to get out. If I knew there was a way, a number—we’ve got the new law too where if you call—

**AS**: Steve’s law? The Good Samaritan law.

**WL**: Yeah. And that came out of a non-profit organization that Shelley is on as well.

**AS**: The Steve Rummler Hope Foundation.

**WL**: Yeah. We see all these great things happening.

**AS**: Your wife might have been able to call for help without anyone seaerching the house.

**WL**: That’s right.

**AS**: If your wife hadn’t been a nurse you would have died.

**WL**: I wouldn’t be doing this interview right now. Not at all.

**AS**: How is she?

**WL**: We’ve been married twenty-four years. She’s very healthy.

**AS**: And your kids are seventeen—

**WL**: Seventeen, twelve, and seven. My kids think I’m a hero today. They really do. My youngest, seven, who thinks dad is going to be some kind of celebrity.

**AS**: How have you dealt with the issues of drugs and alcohol with your teenagers?

**WL**: I’m open. I said, “If you are going to use please just let me know.”

**AS**: Do they know your story?

**WL**: Not the details, but enough to know. I don’t harp on things.

**AS**: Do you tell them they are likely—do you use the genes thing?

**WL**: No, but I let them know that it is very easy to use as a coping mechanism for things. To use for coping. You can get caught up in that. I try to have an open and communicative platform to say how we feel. Being a psychotherapist I am attuned to eyes and facial expressions.

**AS**: Are you kind of driving them crazy?

**WL**: No, I give them their privacy. I am a little less direct with them. I give them a little space. I let them fall. When there are obvious things going on I have no problem saying that we need to wrestle with this a little bit. Let’s talk about this. They are great kids. I know they haven’t used. I just know they haven’t. I think they really want to make the best of their lives. They have seen me struggle. Even in early recovery it was so hard to go from living in that old house. I have remodeled every room in that house.

**AS**: Are you still there?

**WL**: Yeah. I took pine palettes and broke them apart a month into my recovery. I stored them in my garage for like five months. They were enough to create wood floors for my kitchen, dining room, hallway, and living room all down to one and three eighths inch butt jointed together and laid them all myself. Sanded them, stained them, polyurethaned them, put in carpet. I have a lot of energy coming in. [laughs]

**AS**: Went to college, redid your house, ran a church.

**WL**: Yeah. That’s it.

**AS**: Thank you.

[End of recording]