

Addictions haunt successful woman

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Residential Treatment Services is a program for mental and substance abuse disorders in Burlington. This is a story about one woman who found help for her addiction through RTS.

Addictions are not easy to recognize and are even slower to win over. This story should serve as a warning for the dangers involved in drugs and alcohol.

Jill Mackin planted her first tomato and cucumber garden this spring. As she swings on her front porch bench on a Saturday morning, she reflects on her newfound interest. She grew up in the North and never expected to be in this North Carolina community, dead-heading flowers and waiting for the tomatoes to turn red.

A year ago, Mackin wasn't concerned with plants, gardening or relaxing on a bench outside. She was constantly occupied with her addiction to alcohol and drugs. When she came to Residential Treatment Services, she

"felt like this old woman. I have never been suicidal, but I was ready for God to just snatch me up," she said.

Mackin is one of the first women to take advantage of the halfway home on Mebane Street, which opened this past January.

"When they leave they'll be able to support themselves," said Ron Osborne, RTS executive director. "Our goal is that they won't have to be financially dependent on anyone or anything other than themselves."

Mackin hopes to be out of the home by the end of the year. She has been sober for just over a year, which is the first time since 1998.

"RTS is really good to me," Mackin said. "Counselors are always available to speak to me. I'm an alcoholic and drug addict. I have a disease but I am not a derelict. With them, it's not about the almighty dollar. They brought me back from the dead-emotionally, spiritually and physically."

Mackin's journey to RTS was long. She started drinking in high school. "The first time I drank I blacked out," she said. "Every time alcohol got in my system I couldn't stop. I tried everything. I said I would just drink beer or wine, but it didn't matter."

Her professional career is impres-

sive; she has traveled the world in the military and in her career at non-profit agencies. During Mackin's three years in the military she frequented beer fests. Officials told her she was brilliant professionally, but had problems controlling her personal life.

"One night I was partying in Georgetown with a friend," Mackin said. "She wasn't drinking and I kept asking her if she was having a good time. Going home, I asked her to pull over and I got sick. She asked me, 'Are you having a good time now?' That's the moment I realized I had a problem."

At the time, she was working as a fundraiser for the Human Rights Campaign and then as a development director at the National Association of People with AIDS.

"As long as I was in the 12-step program I was doing well," Mackin said. But instead of drinking, she decided she would just get high on drugs. She started smoking marijuana and using cocaine.

"I just became a garbage disposal," Mackin said.

Eventually, her intense work ethic and powerful drug addiction caught up with her.

"I had a psychotic breakdown. My

brain was so soaked with chemicals and coupled with mental exhaustion, and I broke down."

She was hospitalized and was in control until she went to London in 1997 to work with the National AIDS Trust. When she went to a 12-step program regularly, she stayed sober, but one drink at the bar escalated slowly into many more nights with many more drinks.

"When my work visa ran out, I came back and was offered a job as development director but I was drinking around the clock," Mackin said. "I was going through two quarts of vodka and rum daily."

Instead, she moved in with her mother on the Delaware coast. But after her mother died of a massive stroke, she lost control. She was even drinking in the hospital. "I thought to myself, 'I can't stop drinking, I'm just going to drink myself to death.' I got a DUI the same night my mom died."

Mackin inherited her mother's assets, but she squandered it with her addiction. "My mom gave her whole estate to me and I put all of it up my nose. I lost it all," Mackin said.

"When my aunts called I didn't talk to them because I thought they would know that I was drunk." They sent cards that

said "Happy holidays, happy birthday, we love you, get some help."

Her brother in North Carolina let her stay with him. He tried to save her with religion but she wasn't able to give in. His prayers just didn't seem to work for her.

"I thought, 'Doesn't God love me anymore? Why are all these miracles happening to other people?' The real miracle is the 12-step program."

Mackin then moved to Raleigh, but couldn't sustain work long enough to keep her apartment.

"When I was little I wanted to be a senator. But I couldn't get out of using and drinking. I ended up in these B.S. minimum wage jobs instead. I was homeless, helpless."

After six treatment programs, she finally found a home at RTS.

"You're not just part of a herd of patients. Everyone is looked at as an individual with worth and dignity. There is not a general treatment plan. It's based on the individual's ability to make progress, not as a group," Mackin said.

Now she works in the RTS office 20 hours a week. She is helping RTS with a new program called JobSeek. The program provides training to teach participants how to find and

keep a job. RTS is currently in the fundraising stage to get the program up and running.

Mackin's professional background allows her to give special insight to this area. She is creating a logo, letterhead and Web site for the program.

"I have done a lot of fundraising for non-profits, and if there is any organization worthy of having its name up in lights...it's RTS," Mackin said.

"She's one of those clients that didn't fit into the typical category. She traveled, she's educated and she has been exposed to more than most people in general are," Osborne said.

Her family has started to trust her again, too. "I made amends for the havoc I caused in [my brother's] life. He is really proud of me."

"There's an organization tucked here in this county saving lives," Jill said. "They're really humble about what they do. It has to be a little part of Eden," Mackin said.

Contact the Counseling Center if you are concerned about a friend's or your alcohol or drug use.

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This article may also be found in the September issue of Alamance Magazine.



There is no cure available for alcoholism and drug addiction. Addicts may relapse more than once before taking control.

Common signs of drug and alcohol abuse or addiction

Information from "Let's All Work to Fight Drug Abuse" by L.A.W. Publications, <http://www.madd.org> and <http://www.ncadi.samhsa.gov>.

What to watch for

- Withdrawn, tired and careless attitude
- Hostile and uncooperative behavior
- Deterioration of relationships with friends and family
- Irregular class attendance and bad grades
- Lost interest in hobbies and previously fun activities
- Different eating and sleeping patterns
- Difficulty concentrating

Alcohol abuse affects you, friends, family & strangers

You:

- Problem drinkers may expect a 10 to 12 year decrease in life expectancy.
- Cancer, liver disease and heart disease odds increase.

Your family and friends

- Those who are around alcohol abusers have an increased risk of being injured or affected by violence.

Strangers

- About 40 percent of all violent crimes (violent and non-violent) were committed under the influence of alcohol.
- In North Carolina in 1994, 35 percent of traffic deaths involved alcohol. Almost a third of the drivers had over a .08 Blood Alcohol Level.