

Catching YOUR Memories

THE PODCAST

Recovering from Alcoholism and Learning How to Let Go

This conversation with Roland T. was published on September 8, 2022

Diane: Hey everyone, this is Diane Atwood, and you are listening to the Catching Your Memories podcast. Everybody has an inspiring story, a memory, or an experience to share if only someone would ask. That's where I come in. In this episode, I have a conversation with Roland T., who just celebrated 24 years of sobriety. The most significant clue that he had an issue with alcohol was that sometimes he would drink and have a blackout. He wouldn't remember a thing and when people would tell him what he did, he felt shame. Roland had also suffered from anxiety since he was a child. The thing is most people would never have guessed from the outside how miserable he was on the inside. Roland was at the lowest point of his life when a friend suggested AA. He's also active in the Maine chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness. He now has the tools he needs to stay sober and deal with his anxiety. He says to keep it that way, he needs to give it away. That's why he's sharing his story with us.

Diane: Welcome and good morning, Roland. We're starting this conversation a bit early. For me, anyway. Is it early for you? 08:00 in the morning.

Roland: I'm usually up by like 5:00, so I've already met with somebody this morning and, uh, yeah, this is actually kind of late, so.

Diane: Oh, okay, well, I've been trying to get up at 6:00 a.m., but that doesn't mean I'm ready to launch. We're here because you want to share some experiences that are profound experiences for you, and you are taking what you have learned from your experiences and trying to help other people. Is that hard work?

Roland: Um, I think the hard work for me was going through it in some ways. In recovery, we always talk about it's like peeling an onion, and sometimes the hard work is just you're taking the layers off, and, uh, you know when you're peeling an onion, there's some crying involved, so there is some work to do in the process. I think it's easier work for me to do now that I've done it for a while than it was when I first started. So it becomes an easier process because I don't know, I get more help doing it, I think, and I understand more who I am. I understand who the people around me are or were, and so, I think some of that is hard, but I think the result of that is worth it, so.

Diane: So you have been sober for 24 years?

Roland: Yes.

Diane: How about we go back, I don't know, to the beginning? And what is the beginning for you?

Roland: You know, I grew up in a family, uh, my dad was an alcoholic. There was a lot of chaos. There was a lot of things that were going on in my house and my family, I think, related to my dad's drinking. I spent a lot of time trying to avoid and get away from things that were happening. And I think that was the beginning of my alcoholism because I think for me, drinking was about trying

to avoid feeling trying to avoid any sense of, I don't know if it was responsibility, but it's just trying to get away and not have to have all that chaos. That was kind of the beginning for me, and so I avoided it for a long time, too. I decided that I knew drinking was a problem, and so I stayed away from drinking for quite a while. I didn't start drinking, a lot of people, I think, start drinking a little bit younger than I did. But it was high school, probably my junior year in high school. In the beginning, drinking was me in a blackout, and I always share the story that there were people between me and my next drink who didn't want me to have the next drink because I was already out of control, and I didn't know that as it was happening. But the next morning, somebody told me about it and I always say part of my drinking too was shame, guilt, and remorse. You'll hear that a lot in recovery meetings, and when somebody shared what happened to me the evening before, I was, first of all, I didn't believe it, and then it was like I was ashamed of it, and I felt guilty and didn't want to have that happen again. But I enjoyed kind of the way I was, not the way I was feeling, but the way I was not feeling. I guess it was that moment of not having to feel anything. So, I chased that for a while.

Diane: Can you describe for us what a blackout is? And did that, like, the first time you drank, right at the beginning, you were having blackouts?

Roland: Yeah, most people don't have, um, blackouts very often, if at all. And so the fact that you are having a blackout, I think, is a good sign that you have an issue, I think, with drinking, and um, so a blackout for me is you're still moving around, but you don't know what happened. You don't remember what happened. You don't even know what you're doing at the moment, but you're still acting and reacting with people that are in your sphere. So, um, that's a blackout. With my history and my knowledge of my dad and what was going on with him, that should have been a big red

flag for me. But again, I wanted that feeling or lack of feeling, more than I think, worried about the implications.

Diane: So, you kept drinking and kept having blackouts for a long time?

Roland: You know, for a while. And I didn't have blackouts every time I drank, but it was not fairly regular, but I would have moments of blackouts. So, yeah, I didn't drink for a long, long time. I got sober in my thirties, so that's seventeen to about 30, so, a few years there.

Diane: Can you describe what you mean by the chaos growing up?

Roland: I think my dad, knowing him today, I think, and understanding some of his history that I didn't know back then, um, he was in the Korean war, and I think there was a lot of stuff that he saw that for him, he couldn't reconcile in his own brain. And I think for him, drinking, and I don't think he believed in himself. He had a lot of anxiety, a lot of, um I've learned stuff about when he was growing up that his family life was also pretty chaotic. And I think my dad would go to work, and he was a hard-working guy. He worked at the paper mill here in Westbrook and went to work every day, provided for our family, did the best he could, but when he got home, he started drinking because I think that was just his way of, I think for him, it was probably hard even going into work and dealing with people, and I think that was, again, his escape. Same reason I used alcohol, but when he would drink, he would get really angry when he had a really hard time opening up, sharing feelings, that kind of thing. And again, I think in my history, knowing that that was what I was trying to avoid a very similar thing. And so I would blow things up. I had this anxiety about what was going to happen, when were things going to go bad in the house, and when was he going to get very angry, and something happen, and I became somebody who, instead of waiting for it to happen, I would start causing things on purpose just to release the pressure, you know what I'm saying, and make

it so that for some reason, I didn't like that feeling of things going out of control, but I knew it was going to happen, so I had some control over that.

Diane: That's exactly what I was thinking. Okay, what you're doing is you're trying to control the situation by getting it started.

Roland: Yeah.

Diane: So, you helped with the chaos, but not necessarily in a positive way.

Roland: Right, yeah.

Diane: Did you have siblings?

Roland: I did. I have an older sister, an older brother, and a younger brother.

Diane: And so I'll throw out some terminology that I've learned over the years. So, codependency. Was your mother, were all of you what they call codependents?

Roland: Um, for the most part, I think yeah. I don't think my mother knew what to do with the situation either. And I don't know if anxiety was there, to begin with, or if it was because of the chaos that was happening, but we knew our roles, right? My mother would try to calm things down or make sure things weren't getting out of control. And again, she had no control over that. I don't think any of us did. We all had our roles in what was going on. My older brother would not spend a whole lot of time in the house, and he was off getting into trouble and doing his thing. Um, my sister was the oldest one, and so she was at that point, she was working, and so she wasn't in the house a lot. And my younger brother, I became the protector, kind of my younger brother. But most of my time I was spending when those things would happen, I would disappear. And I spent a lot of time, I spent a lot of time reading. My grandparents lived upstairs. My grandmother was really kind

of my protector and my savior in some of my growing up, too. I would spend a lot of time with her because she took care of me.

Diane: Was this your mother's mother or your father's mother?

Roland: My mother's mother, yeah.

Diane: Did your father ever get sober?

Roland: He did not. My dad was very talented in a lot of things, and I think I feel bad that I didn't get a chance, but he just had no patience to be able to teach me things, and that kind of thing. But I know toward the end of his life, he started feeling some regrets for some of that, and I know he was proud of me and some of the things that I was doing. And he started reconciling some of the things he, about a year or two before he passed, he took this trip to Korea. And I have this picture of him. He's standing at the zone between North Korea and South Korea with some Korean soldiers. And so I think he was just trying to reconcile some of that stuff for himself. So I think in his own way, he was working on what we do when we try to make our lives better, um, yeah

Diane: And did your parents stay married?

Roland: That was the thing that always astounded me. They were married for over 50 years, and he took care of my mother, and he didn't see that growing up. That was the thing for him. Toward the end of his life, he started finding half-siblings that he didn't know he had. And to me, that was very interesting, because starting to hear these little snippets of stories where I think his father was not very faithful to his mother, and I know my dad was very faithful to my mother. And when my father passed away, my mother did not have to worry about anything. They saved money, and it was really kind of neat. But yeah, they were married for 50-something years, I think when he passed.

Diane: And is she still alive?

Roland: She just passed in February, yeah, so.

Diane: I'm sorry.

Roland: Yeah, yeah.

Diane: And what about your relationship with your siblings? I'm curious about that.

Roland: Good question. It's been interesting in light of my mother passing away because there's that connection, and to me, that lack of connection now of, in some ways, we stayed close, and I think that was mostly because of my mother still being alive. We've been having some struggles recently. The thing I struggle with is I'm not sure they've ever really completely worked on some of their stuff or at least done that hard work that I've done, I think, to look at myself and make those connections that I've been able to make.

Diane: But certainly, I bet if you were able to peel some of those layers with your siblings, you would all maybe recognize the threads, those common threads that just travel through all of you. And you all have different personalities and different coping mechanisms, probably because a lot of what you describe makes me think of learning how to cope, trying to cope with the situation as a child. And you have your certain methods, like you said, that you might provoke something so that you didn't have to hang around and wait for him to explode or whatever. But then as an adult, you maybe not need it again, but you still have those coping mechanisms that you use, and maybe inappropriately. It's so complicated.

Roland: It really is. Yeah. I'm still, I think as we grow older, we still figure out how we work. Right? It's that controlling piece. And to me, my brain, just some of those things happen automatically, right? It's the way you cope. An interesting sideline, the other day I was mowing my lawn and my gas cap fell off my lawn mower, and I ran over it with the lawn mower. And my initial reaction was just to

get so, so angry, and I was thinking back to my dad when, my dad would have done that, it would have been a whole day or maybe even a week of just we would have all been paying for some of that because of his anger. And I was immediately able to laugh at myself because of some of this work that I've done. But in realizing that that's kind of what's going on, and I can see my dad and where my dad was at when those things would happen, and realized that he just didn't have some of those coping tools that I've been able to develop over the years to help myself deal with that. And I came inside and I was laughing. And I have an eight-year-old daughter, and we're able to joke about it, and that wouldn't have been my experience when I was a kid, when I was eight years old. That would not have been an experience if my dad had run over the gas cap.

Diane: Wow, you might have gone into hiding.

Roland: Yeah, totally.

Diane: So there are things even today that maybe they're kind of like triggers. Triggers that are almost like visceral. They're not things that intellectually occur to you until after you stop to analyze them if that makes sense.

Roland: Yeah, totally. I think sometimes in my life, in my professional life and the things that I do, I look for a lot of feedback. I know that some of the stuff, growing up and looking for approval. I spent a lot of time trying to get approval that I was never going to get at home, necessarily. I know today, looking back, that my dad really cared a lot about us, but didn't know how to express it. But I spend a lot of time looking for approval, like, am I doing a good job? Am I not doing a good job? Those kinds of things., so yeah.

Diane: Still today, you find that happens to you?

Roland: Yeah, not so much. I'm getting better at it, but that's my go-to in a lot of ways, especially if I'm doing something or I put a lot of effort

into something, let's say, at work, and I want somebody to say, that was a good job because I'll sit there and think, what are they thinking? So, that's probably another control thing, but you know.

Diane: No, but that's very insightful to be able to recognize that in yourself. How about being around angry people?

Roland: You know, it's funny because my whole career has been around dealing with kids who struggle and so I'm around kids who are angry. I'm around that, and for some reason, I have a calmness. I've heard a lot of people share that I'm one of the most calm people that they know. And I had a kid that I worked with the other day who said, you're the nicest teacher I've ever had, and I'm able to listen, and I'm able to kind of I, don't know if it's absorb and again, maybe it's just a byproduct of what I grew up with. That's some of what I can do. But I also have an outlet for some of that stuff. So I know that when I take stuff in and absorb that, I can get rid of that. It's not my stuff. I'm not carrying that stuff, so.

Diane: As you were speaking, the word tolerance popped into my brain. So maybe you developed a tolerance for anger, but it's really healthy that you've got the outlet because you can build up a tolerance and just builds and builds and builds.

Roland: Sure.

Diane: So you started drinking when you were probably around 17, you said, and quickly discovered that sometimes you had blackouts, but you continued drinking until your early 30s.

Roland: Yes.

Diane: So, what happened then that made you realize that you can't be doing this anymore?

Roland: Well, I think I wanted to stop. Part of it, for me too, is I think my drinking was really almost a suicidal kind of thing. I kind of didn't

want to be here, if you know what I mean. I didn't want to necessarily do anything about that forthright, but I always thought that maybe if I drank myself away or something like that, and so I think that was part of what I was doing with my drinking. And it got to be a really lonely existence. I was working, I was teaching and coming home, and drinking. And in retrospect, that was really what my dad was doing, right? As much as I didn't want to be my dad, I was turning into my dad. And I think I probably would have kept drinking and probably doing the same thing if there hadn't been, like, one of these life moments that stopped me. Um, I was working at a summer camp, and we had an end-of-summer gathering. And part of it for me was I knew I probably shouldn't drink at one of these events, and I really wasn't supposed to be drinking there because they were high school kids and that kind of thing. And I drank myself into a blackout. So my first drink was a blackout. My last drink was another blackout. And, um, did some things I'm ashamed of and that kind of thing. And again, shame, guilt, and remorse. And for me, the shame was so great. I was getting more and more suicidal at that point, and things became blew up in the press and that kind of thing. It became something that, um, made the newspapers, made the radios. And I always say in my story that I was good at making things look good on the outside because I didn't want people to know how I felt on the inside, how crappy I felt on the inside. And this was one of those moments where my insides now match my outsides. And in recovery, a lot of times they'll say that's probably one of the best moments you can have, because there's nothing left to hide, right? There I was, and I almost lost my teaching job, but that brought me into recovery. There was somebody in my life who I knew who was in recovery, and they called me up and said, you don't have to keep living the way you're living. Why don't you come to an AA meeting with me and see what that's about? And, uh, I didn't think it would work, but I didn't have another option. Right. So, uh, I didn't feel like I had another option, so I did. And that was almost

24 years ago that I showed up there. And I just keep showing up. And I do what the program of AA lays out. I don't do it perfectly, but I do it perfectly enough for me to grow. And for me, it's that community. It's that gathering of people, like-minded people that we all get together and I know I'm not alone, and I never have to be alone, but that was what brought me to that first meeting.

Diane: And you didn't go kicking and screaming. You went resigned, it sounds like.

Roland: Kind of resigned. There was a part of me that was still I'm not sure this will really work, but let's give it a shot.

Diane: And so even though the incident kind of went public, it wasn't so awful that you lost your job?

Roland: I had to go before the school board, and I had to speak up for myself. And it was interesting because we talked about this blackout thing. And I remember one of the people at one of the school board meetings basically said that they believed me, that I had no idea what was going on. And they also believed me, that I was pretty earnest in wanting to do something different. That was what allowed me to keep my job. We had some stipulations around I had to check in, I had to see a counselor and that kind of thing. And I was resigned to that too, because, uh, all that was just helping me. I did something that I shouldn't have done and these things were going to help me, and they did. That's the great part about all that.

Diane: That's pretty wonderful. They saw your worth.

Roland: Yeah, I agree.

Diane: Definitely. And so you went 24 years ago. What was it like in those first meetings? Was it a gradual thing, a gradual acceptance? Or was it the light bulb went on? Or how did it happen for you?

Roland: I think it took a while to really kind of, um, believe it was going to work, but I always share in my story that that the first meeting I went to, and there's always this funny thing in AA. It's a bunch of old men around coffee pots. And so the guy who invited me to that meeting took me to a meeting where there were people my age and there were people younger than I was at the time. I was 30 years old, I think, but I was able to hear people sharing things that had been going on in my brain that I had never really heard anybody else share before. And so, for me, there was that immediate connection of, uh, understanding, or being understood and understanding. And the interesting part was, there were a couple of meetings that I went to. I was seeing this counselor like I said, and she suggested a meeting. She said, Maybe you should go to more meetings. And I ran into her at a meeting a couple of weeks ago. She just turned 80, and she's been sober, like, 40 years, and she was my counselor, and she said, you should try this meeting. And so I went, and I hated it. And so I went back and I said, I hated that meeting. She said, well, just don't go to it anymore. And I got mad at her because she suggested I don't go to this meeting. So, I started going to this meeting regularly and it was the best meeting I could have gone to. It was a bunch of old people, but everybody had various degrees of issues, but they were all speaking my language, and that became one of the best meetings I could have gone to. And then there was another meeting that somebody and, uh, this was probably very helpful for me, too. There was a meeting where they would have people raise their hands if they had a year or more of sobriety. And so I would sit there in complete awe at these people who had this sobriety, but I wanted to get there. And I still remember the day that I was able to raise my hand after a year of sobriety. Those things helped me stay in the program, doing those things.

Diane: I think it's interesting when you talk about how everybody's experience, the, uh, details of their experiences didn't necessarily

match yours, but the feelings, perhaps the reactions, it was like, oh, my gosh, here I am. I'm with my people.

Roland: Yeah. And it's like a tribe. It's called a fellowship. And yeah, I think we all, it's the deep level. I worked with a lot of kids for a while as a counselor in recovery, and sometimes the kids would have a hard time looking past, um, there'd be this 70-year-old guy, and he's got wrinkles and that kind of stuff. And it's like, well, he doesn't understand me. And I knew deep down that they probably understood you more than you understood yourself sometimes. And it takes a while to get there, I think. But yeah, there is that connection on that feelings level or not wanting to feel.

Diane: What about the spiritual aspect of twelve-step programs? I know for some people that is a barrier.

Roland: Sure. Yeah. And it's interesting. The thing I love about AA and I've heard various things. To me, it really connected me back to my God, my higher power I call God. And in my 24 years, I've been able to nurture and develop even my own faith in some of that. But the thing I love about AA is all of its suggestions, and some people don't hear it like that, but it really is, it's suggestions. And so you're allowed to have whatever you want for your higher power, for your spirituality, and you can have none. I know people in recovery who are atheists, and I always laugh because I'm not sure they really are atheists. They will go to their dying day telling you they're an atheist, but I'm not really sure they are. But that's okay, they can be who they want. And the whole thing is just keep coming back, don't drink. And even if you do drink, come back. And that's the thing I love about um, it's very accepting. I always call AA what a real church should be, in some ways. I think there are some churches that spend too much time judging people and there's not a whole lot of judging in AA other than it would really be better for you if you didn't drink.

Diane: And we're here to support you and you to support us.

Roland: Yeah.

Diane: So your primary goal, if that's a proper word, is to not drink. But when you talked about peeling the layers of an onion, there are other programs that help you to better understand what it's like, say, to grow up in an alcoholic home, to try to get at the roots of why you are the way you are. There's programs to help you if somebody in your life is still drinking and you're trying to cope with that. There are all kinds of groups out there. So to me, it seems like a continual process of really getting to know yourself and I don't know, trying to be a better human being all around or just trying to get along in a healthy way.

Roland: Yeah. And I think the further you get in recovery, and I think you can find whatever works for you. If AA is the place, then great. If you need something else, find it and use it. But it's continual because you're continuing to have these experiences, right? These things that have caused you to drink in the past. And so it's really taking a look at some of those things. I got to the point, so I was sober for quite a while and I realized my anxiety got better as kind of a byproduct of that. And eight years ago, I had my daughter, and it brought up these father issues for me. I mean, I had these father issues anyway. And part of it was also losing sleep and all the things that go along with being a new father, and I was an older father too. So, all of that hit me really hard. My anxiety came back, and I was working in a job that was a little bit more stressful at the time, and all of these things brought my anxiety back and I was having very bad anxiety attacks. And up to that point, I had never taken medication for it, but I needed to seek something out. I was, again, in one of these situations where it's like, something has to change because I can't keep living this way. And I did find medication which was good, that worked. And I found NAMI. I found the National Alliance on Mental Illness. And part of it for me was, again, it's working on some of those things, that anxiety piece that keeps me down and connecting to, you know, I run support

groups for people with mental illness, and I'm one of these people who, uh, helping people helps me. I volunteer a lot with NAMI. I'm the Portland affiliate president or whatever they call me now. But I run these support groups, and again, we have community, and we've got this group of people who we get together and we get together weekly, and we just talk about what we struggle with. And I think we learn from each other, and we get a better understanding of ourselves from helping others and hearing other stories.

Diane: Is there a direct connection between alcoholism and anxiety for you?

Roland: I spent a lot of time wondering this because I used to think that I was an alcoholic, that caused my anxiety, but then knowing some of the stuff I've learned about my dad, I wonder. And I had anxiety before I started drinking with what I grew up with, um, it's the chicken and the egg for me. I don't know which came first. To me, it doesn't matter. I deal with both of them. And so that's kind of the way I approach it. There is a connection. The more anxious I am, the better chance I probably have of maybe grabbing a drink. And if I'm drinking, I'm probably going to start getting anxious again because I'm not going to be taking care of myself. So those kinds of things. And so there is a connection. I can't tease one out from the other, and I have to go with both of them.

Diane: What does anxiety feel like for you?

Roland: Anxiety? I've heard anxiety spoken of as you're all wrapped up in a little ball. To me, it's the opposite of connecting to people. It's like I'm so stuck inside myself and what I'm worried about and all those kinds of things, and the more anxious I am, the less other stuff, not that it doesn't mean anything to me, because I think for me, my anxiety is that everything means a whole lot to me. I'm a really caring, feeling person, and sometimes that's hard, and that causes some of that anxiety. I want the right things and the good

things for people, and sometimes that doesn't happen. But that, for me, is anxiety. Just being so wrapped up in myself and not being able to get outside of myself. I mean, I was to the point with my anxiety that I was having trouble going to work because I couldn't function. I was not sleeping. My brain was always just, like, spinning. I could never slow it down enough.

Diane: So you've been on anti-anxiety medication for eight years, and that does not interfere with your sobriety? I know that's an issue for some people.

Roland: Some people that is. For me it was for a little bit, and you talk about the spirituality and I go to church a lot, and that's part of my thing. And I've heard from people at church that you're taking the wrong way out and that God should be able to fix your anxiety. I took all that in for me, um, I'm on such a low dose, too, of anti-anxiety medication. It helps me to have those things. It doesn't interfere with those things because without it, I couldn't focus on that stuff. Those things were in danger, and those things were in jeopardy. I have a stronger faith today than I ever had prior to taking this anxiety medication. And I think, you know, you talk about God and where God comes in on some of this stuff. I think God provides some of these things for us to be able to use to help our situations. I do know people struggle with that. The alternative for me was living in this shell and potentially getting suicidal because I really couldn't see myself living that way I was living. Much better off today.

Diane: Well, I'm glad to hear that. So, describe who you are today.

Roland: I'm a husband, I'm a dad. I am connected on both those levels. I am a teacher. I am connected on that level. I'm a community member. I'm somebody that can give back to my community. I am somebody who is using my experiences that I've had, the negative experiences that I've had to, I hope, make ripples and make my world a better place to live in. Today I try to share hope and I

think people see that in me. A lot of ways I'm proud of who I am because I get a chance to help change lives. I get out there and I'm doing stuff, and when I was drinking I wouldn't have been doing that stuff. And with my anxiety as deep as it could go, I wouldn't be doing these things. So today, for me, the blessing is that I get to use these experiences that a lot of people would see as negative, and I can flip it around and say, look what we can do with these, and I connect with people because they've got similar stories to what I have or whatever, and they can hear what I'm saying and connect with me, hopefully. And then maybe I'll say, come along, follow me a little bit. This is what I did.

Diane: And some people do.

Roland: And some people do.

Diane: Are you still a teacher?

Roland: I am a teacher, yeah. I work with kids who basically have dropped out of high school. Um, I helped them to get their HiSET. A lot of my kids that I deal with have dealt with anxiety. Some have dealt with or are dealing with substance abuse. Some have dealt with anxiety from their families, um, chaos in their families. And so, again, I get to use some of the gifts that I've been given to teach and move kids along.

Diane: You said you help them with their HiSET?

Roland: Yeah, it's like the GED. It's a high school equivalency, so when they're done with me, they should be prepared. And a lot of them take their tests with me also. They'll be high school graduates.

Diane: That's awesome. So you work with these kids. You, um, facilitate the support groups for NAMI. And are you on their speakers' bureau as well? You go out and do public speaking?

Roland: I do do public speaking, but I don't do it as part of their speakers' bureau at this point. I just haven't done the training yet. NAMI has

me do a lot of — I did the Hope Conference this spring in Augusta. I basically shared about support groups. I still do a lot of going around and connecting with people. I am also one of the Maine State trainers for support group facilitators. I get to train people in leading support groups for NAMI, so that's kind of neat. I still spend a lot of time in AA and help people and get to a lot of meetings and do all that stuff, too. I run a couple of meetings. So, yeah, I stay pretty active in service work there.

Diane: It's kind of a lifelong process, huh?

Roland: Yes, but it's a lifelong process that gives me the life that I have, and so that, for me, is well worth the time.

Diane: And you're active in your church?

Roland: Very active in my church, yes. I just started doing the sound, so I'm running the sound stuff. I speak whenever my pastor asks me to. Our church does a lot of community outreach, so we do a lot of free meals and that kind of stuff. And so I'm out there talking to people, and people get to know me and they know who I am and what I'm about, and so I get to connect with people that way, too. It's kind of neat sometimes to have that connection.

Diane: You're kind of more of a one-on-one guy.

Roland: I like one on one more than anything. I think some of that might be my anxiety, but it's nice to connect. Like this morning, I met with somebody. We do a Bible study and addiction-related Bible study, and we help each other. He's got less time in AA than I have, but he helps me all the time when I talk to him. So that's the neat thing again, for me about recovery, is that we're helping each other and we're giving each other a hand up, so we're a little bit better at the end of it than we were when we started.

Diane: Do you have any advice for somebody who's at that point where they're kind of desperate, maybe isn't the term hit their bottom?

Roland: Hit their bottom? Yeah. Ask for help. I mean, that's the thing. And that's the hardest thing to do. But that, to me, was when you hit a bottom. I always share that when I hit my bottom, I was down on my knees, and I have three things to do when I'm down on my knees. I could keep digging, because that's probably what I'm doing, is digging this hole, or I could reach out and ask for help. And the bigger thing is I could reach out and ask for help from a higher power. But the first thing to do is to stop digging, and the next thing to do is to reach out and ask somebody for help on that level. And then if you find something that works for you, it's connecting to that higher power that gives you that hope moving forward.

Diane: And when you say asking for help, some people might not know where to turn.

Roland: Sure.

Diane: So just ask anybody, please help me.

Roland: I mean, you could do that because I think everybody has life connections. 2-1-1 Maine, connecting on that and finding something that can help, depending on whatever issue you're struggling with. If it's a substance abuse issue, it's not just AA. You could go to a treatment facility or there's a lot of peer recovery centers around that you could just kind of walk into, and you can connect with people. NAMI Maine is always a good place to go for mental illness stuff, but, yeah, there's a lot of options out there. People are willing to help.

Diane: What about family members? You're the person who needed help, but sometimes family members are there. Like, maybe you and your dad sure. Wanting to change the situation. Do you have any advice for family members? I know there's Al-Anon, but, like, in the heat of the moment yeah.

Roland: NAMI Maine also has family groups for people struggling with mental illness. I consider alcoholism a mental illness, in a way, to any substance abuse disorder, I think so those are helpful. Again, I think any way you can connect with somebody who struggles with the, it halves the problem, right? If you can find somebody who's struggling with the same thing that you're struggling with, it kind of takes some of that burden off in a little way. Maybe you're still dealing with the issue at hand, but I think you take that step back instead of being in the middle of it all the time. And so I think just finding those things that are out there talking to people, there's lots of people who are willing to support out there.

Diane: Okay. Is there anything that I have failed to ask you that you think I should have?

Roland: I don't think so.

Diane: Well, I'm going to give you almost the last word. Any other final thoughts or words of wisdom that you'd like to leave people with?

Roland: I think for me, the key is that, uh, I think when you're struggling really hard with things, that we usually have this feeling that we need to grab on tighter to things and that we almost give this death grip. And I think the big thing for most people that is helpful is that's the time where you really have to kind of let go. And for me, there's that level of being able to trust that things are going to get better and not hold on so tightly. That doesn't mean you're giving up. That means you're putting your hands in the hands of something greater than yourself and allowing other people or other organizations, whatever you connect with, to help you. And that, to me, has been the key of my recovery, is that whenever I've been deepest in my misery is because I was just trying to again, it goes back to that issue of control. I've been spending so much time trying to control this that when I step back and just let things happen the way they're going to happen, my life gets better.

Diane: Well, thank you for that. I appreciate that very much. And thank you for spending time with us today.

Roland: Thank you. I appreciate it. Getting the message out is helpful to me, so thank you.

Diane: That brings us to the end of this episode of the *Catching Your Memories* podcast. Many thanks to Roland T. for sharing his story with us. If you would like to learn more about NAMI Maine and the services they offer, see a directory of 12-step programs available in Maine, or leave a comment, go to CatchingYourMemories.com/podcast. Be sure to come back next month for another episode of *Catching Your Memories*.
catchingyourmemories.com ~ diane@dianeatwood.com ~ 207-415-1315 17 And if you have stories or memories you would rather not share in a podcast but would like to preserve for your family, I also record personal interviews. You can learn more about that at CatchingYourMemories.com send me an email – diane@dianeatwood.com. This podcast was created, produced, recorded, and edited by me, Diane Atwood. *Catching Your Memories*, the interview of a lifetime.