

**THE REHABILITATION OF
THOMAS MARK**

tom crites

headpress

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This memoir is dedicated to those
living with depression.

With thanks to Joe and Bonnie,
the greatest friends anyone could
ever have, ever.

'I don't even know why I'm bothering to write this. It isn't like I'm going to ever read it, and I certainly wouldn't see the point of showing it to anybody else. I suppose it's just for the sake of writing, even if it's not very creative or even particularly interesting, at least it's writing.'



Rehab *First month*

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Friday, August 3, 2012

I'd been duped. What I'd been led to believe would be seven to ten days rehab has turned into a months-long rehabilitation. Everybody knew I had it coming, even me. Twenty-five plus years of chronic alcoholism: so many fuck-ups and mistakes, but it only got truly, truly bad over the past three years as unemployment, depression, loneliness and frustration took their toll. A few beers at lunch and drinks around dinner turned into straight alcohol (vodka, whiskey, rum) from the first opening of the eyes on through to blackout. The amount of food eaten declined exponentially in relation to the increased intake of alcohol, and the results were not good: two head injuries resulting from standing pass outs that caused total unconsciousness and required hospital stays, and a face-first fall down a flight of stairs from the top, giving me a scar by my eye that I'll have for a while, bleeding my nose, cracking the upper right arm bone, and putting scabs and bruises on all my arms and legs and, along with the constant drunkenness, causing me to miss a trip to Portland to visit the family and see Dad and Linda's great new home.

So, almost the very moment that I agreed to treatment, after more than one person suggested that I might need it (Dad, Joe) I had a tote bag packed for me and a handler/transporter escort me to the airport (all the way to the gate). There was somebody there waiting to haul me away on an hour-long drive to Treeline Treatment Services, a detox center in the hills (not far from Santa Cruz), and when I did finally reach the facility, I was entering the full throes of withdrawal: seizures, the works. There was a nurse, Rita, who saw to me initially, but it was Abby, the Queen of the Castle, who was to be my primary caregiver over the next few days. I was so shaky and fucked up I could barely even sit up, much less walk; when I did walk, not only did I need a walker, but I

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needed somebody to help me walk with the walker.

That lasted for days, but with medication (ativan, phenobarbital), hydration (plenty of Gatorade), and three meals a day (each of the three rotating staff members served not only as counselors and caregivers but also as cooks), along with plenty of rest, I gradually improved, which is just shy of miraculous, seeing as how, by all accounts, I was near death. Abby had to check on me multiple times a night at the beginning to ensure that I was still breathing.

Once I was able to get around, after three to four days, I began to appreciate my environment.

Saturday, August 4, 2012

Letters sent today to Joe (re: needs/wants, rants) and Dad (re: status, rent).

Treeline Treatment Services is basically a house. I was a bit surprised when my driver (who took off before I could even think to offer a tip for the timely pick-up and hour-long drive), instead of pulling up at the ER-type entrance of some hospital, pulled into the driveway of a modest-looking single story home with a red painted front door. And the place was actually very nice—much more like a hotel than a traditional detox clinic (at least, as I had imagined). Comfortable, immaculate (thanks to Abby's eye for detail and insistence on cleanliness), and with all of the amenities and more.

For start, they had a large-screen, hi-def, television with a massive cable package, and because for most of my stay I was the sole "client" at Treeline Treatment (aside from one night early on, when Jimmy, from Buffalo, NY, stayed over, but he had what appeared to be some kind of speed-inspired paranoid freak out and accused the entire organization of being a money grubbing Scientology con before picking up and bailing back to Buffalo: and Julius, who arrived a day or two before I left,

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halfway through an oxycontin detox), I didn't have to share the remote with fucking anybody. There was an exercise machine so fancy I can't even remember the name of it (never used it), and a sweet patio where people could smoke (I've quit) or play cards and watch the ridiculous golfers on the golf course abutting the house chase their balls around.

The staff was entirely female, and they were all amazing. Abby was a great old broad, a wise and caring grandmother, she'd been running (although not in ownership capacity) Treeline Treatment for about three years and had seen over 300 people through detox/withdrawal. And she had a few stories to tell—I kept encouraging her to write a book: having been there myself, I'd really like to read it. It was mentioned by someone, only half in jest, that she might have OCD, as it was not uncommon for her to stay up until the wee hours-rearranging the contents of the cupboards and refrigerator, and, although a kind and compassionate person, she was rather rigorous in her standards when it came to the ladies' cleaning chores. She's the farthest thing from mentally ill however; she just liked things a certain way.

The staff consisted of three women who alternated shifts, splitting each day between two of them (generally), there was Hope, half-Japanese, very cute, very friendly; Libby, a (grand?) mother and baseball fan; and Karen, gorgeous, well-traveled, well read, compassionate... She and I actually became very friendly, despite my inexplicably breaking down in uncontrollable tears in the middle of a conversation the first night I met her, but I rallied and taught her "The Game with no Name" (more on that later). Oh yes, she's a guitar player as well. Oddly, Abby told me once that Karen's only flaw, even though she was the youngest and least experienced member of the staff, was that she didn't interact with the clients enough. Her other job was/is as caregiver for a feisty old lady, but when she was at Treeline Treatment we would literally spend hours playing cards, laughing, joking, making sarcastic and

nonsensical remarks, and generally having a really good time just screwing around. Because I was a seizure risk it was suggested/required that I stay for the full initially prescribed ten-day period, so there was plenty of time for the alcohol to leave my system and to start being weaned off the drugs. As a result, I was fairly sharp and clear for about half of my stay, and able to enjoy things like food, company, games, cable TV and walks—Karen took me on some walks around the area that can only be described as magical. In part because I was in her company, the sole person in her company, but also because it's truly amazing how many bizarre, interesting, and beautiful things we found and saw in a single circular route of about a quarter mile:

'The haunted port-a-potty': abandoned on the edge of a field/crop, this thing is a creepy old orange metal monstrosity, with its Halloween coloration and disturbingly gleaming bone-white commode still in place. Rumor has it that the thing has actually moved over the years. Just out of reach behind a barbed wire fence, it would be great to get over there and photograph any kind of brand logo and put it on hats and t-shirts.

As Karen pointed out, there was a Steinbeck-style scene of a farmer in a tractor plowing his field. From the giant yellow and green beast far out in the field came the strains of country music.

The 'little people palms': among the great variety of flora we saw, the one which amused us the most were these little numbers; Karen pointed them out, and I observed that they might be dwarf palms (man-sized, rather than the traditional sky-scrapers. I think that's a thing, right?). Karen found this amusingly improbable, but in any event we decided that it would be politically incorrect to call them

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‘dwarf palms’, so they became ‘little people palms’, which for some reason amused us both to no end.

The ‘Halloween tree’: it’s been so long since I read Ray Bradbury’s odd, brief book *The Halloween Tree* that I’m not really sure what it was about; a magical and vaguely sinister tree that spirited children away on eerie adventures. At any rate, this tree simply fully embodies the notion of the name the Halloween tree. A huge, ancient, leafless monstrosity with jagged thorny branches twisting out in all directions. Yet it bore what looked like pinecones, though it did not appear to be a pine tree. I could look at that thing every day and not get tired of it.

Even some of the trash we saw was interesting. Plus, I found a dollar bill, just lying on the side of the road. “Lucky Dollah!” (And she makes the best Cobb salad I’ve ever had. Just had to throw that in.) By the time we got back to the ranch, Karen was so happy and in such a good mood she was singing little people palms songs. I was happy too.

So that was good.

And then there was the game, “The Game with no Name”. Taught to me by the limey cat Been Wallers, of the Country Teasers, well over a decade ago, I’ve taught it to everyone I know. And I have yet to meet anyone who has failed to love it—most people get addicted to it right away. Fast moving, the perfect blend of luck and skill can make you immensely happy or piss you off immeasurably. In short, it’s fucking great. Right away I began teaching the ladies how to play. First Karen, then Hope, Libby and finally Abby. They all loved it—Libby even taught her twelve-year-old daughter how to play the game. The great thing about the game is that although there are many fiendish strategies one can employ, at the end it can all come down to luck. So it’s not like one person is going to be cleaning clock all day. There can be bad feelings, but

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these are temporary—everyone wins sometime. And part of the game involves insulting the other players as severely and creatively as possible. When I play with Joe and Bonnie, it is not uncommon for family members and farm animals to be combined. I am my father’s legitimate son, but I actually got him to call me a bastard once after a game, I trounced him that badly. It’s all about the good feelings. The ladies, however, refused to participate in this aspect of the game; not only were they too ladylike, but they were all technically working while we were playing, despite all the screwing around, they insisted on being professional. So, of course, I couldn’t say anything overly rude myself (fucking gentleman call me). Karen and I had one marathon where we literally played all day, except for meals and a (great) walk. That, I believe, was on a Thursday or Friday—and I looked forward, with no small amount of eager anticipation, to seeing her again all weekend long (her next shift being Monday). Julius arrived Sunday night however, so I didn’t have Karen all to myself when she came around Monday, and we didn’t get our special walk (need for supervision, medication, regular meal times), but we still got to play multiple rounds and have a grand time. She seemed pleased when I told her I’d been looking forward to that all weekend.

To Dad fm Tom

Hello! Just wanted to let you know I’m doing fine—much better in fact. The people here are terrific, incredibly kind and helpful. They stopped the seizures almost immediately, and completely prevented the usual vomiting associated with withdrawal. I’ve been getting hydrated and gaining weight and am in better health than in months past.

I will be at the address on the envelope until next Tuesday, after which time I will be transferred to another facility, Oakview Recovery, for which I do not have the address. I’m not sure if they’ll even allow mail. I’m told the extensive rehabilitation they offer may

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take three to six months—I had no idea. At any rate, I've asked Joe to forward you my mail, if you could take care of the bills while I'm gone I'd appreciate it. Keep a tab and let me know the balance. (Thank you, by the way, for taking care of the bills I left unpaid on the kitchen table—Armand mentioned it to me. He's a pretty good guy.)

I'm sure this is all costing you a fortune—I don't know if I'll ever be able to pay you back, but I will try. (Thanks, by the way, for arranging for the transporter—that cat took me all the way to the gate.)

I think that just about covers it. I can't thank you enough, for everything.

Love,
Tom

P.S.—you might want to let Lisa C know that I'm getting treatment—I know she was concerned.

To Dad fm Tom

Dear Dad,

Just wanted to make sure things are lined up for the coming months. I was led to believe the rehab process would only take seven to ten days, but the actual rehabilitation will take three to six months. Had I known that, once I agreed to treatment I still would have come, but I would have made arrangements. Like clearing out the refrigerator, doing laundry, chipping some of the frost and ice away from the icebox in the fridge... would have packed a few more items of clothing as well. Also, I'm not sure how I took two shuttles and a plane with only \$39.00 in my pocket. Hopefully the trip back, which, apparently, may be up to half a year away, will be as smooth as the trip here. With a little more advance notice, I would have taken more prompt action toward replacing my missing ATM card; without phone or internet access, I won't be able to check on my account.

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At any rate, I understand you've already been in contact with Armand, and I'm sure he's relayed this information. But just to reiterate:

Rent of \$825.00 is due on the first of each month, payable to: Smile Properties 1, and submitted to:

*Ocean Realty Management
640 W. 8th St.
Long Beach, CA
90804*

Please keep tab of rent and bills that accrue (not sure if I'm using that word correctly) and I will do what I can upon my return. At the moment I am still at Treeline Treatment, but early next week I will be transferring to the following location:

*Oakview Recovery
432 Treeline Rd
Santa Cruz, CA
95060*

The stay here has been truly rejuvenating; I've gained twelve pounds in about a week. I am well on my way to becoming a great fat bastard. As I remain the sole "client" at Treeline Treatment at this time, and all of the counselors are women, I am being spoiled rotten. I do not want to leave.

Armand has shown me some photos of Oakview, and it looks like a beautiful area. Although the prospect of confronting all of my issues and history in a state of full consciousness, without the safety blanket of alcohol, does inspire a touch of anxiety. But, here's hoping it's all for the best.

I think that about covers it; love to Rhys and Linda, and

*Love,
Tom*

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To Margaret fm Tom

Dear Margaret,

Hello! Hope all well out your way—as Dad may have mentioned, I’ll be doing a stint in rehab. I’ve just been through the detox process for chronic alcoholism, and will be transferring to long-term rehabilitation soon. It’s supposed to be a fairly nice facility (I hope so, as it appears I will be there for months), but the notion of confronting my issues and history without the security blanket of alcohol does inspire some apprehension. So, as my PC crashed months ago, and for some reason Dell’s customer service contractors refused to send me a catalog, and I won’t have phone or internet access for months to come, it will/may seem like I’ve fallen off the edge of the world: I haven’t, but I’ve come close to it. This was a long time coming, but hopefully it will do some good. The next head injury could be the last one...

At any rate, the people here are great, they really helped me out during the first days of withdrawal and seizures and have been just indescribably helpful and kind. Not only am I the only “client” at this clinic at the moment, which is so nice it’s like having my own private hotel, but all of the counselors are women so I’ve been getting spoiled rotten. So, so far rehab is a good thing. Hope the next stage is just as positive.

Once again, hope all well out your way... Oh yeah, for the foreseeable future my address will be:

*Oakview Recovery
432 Treeline Rd
Santa Cruz, CA
95060*

*Cheers to Bruce, and,
Love
Tom*

tom crites

To Tom fm Margaret

HELLO TOM!!

Yes, Dad did tell me that you're doing rehab. In fact, just this afternoon, he passed your address along to me, so your letter had perfect timing.

I read about the facility online. I like that it's not a religious or twelve-step based program. I find with those programs, it is too easy for people to swap out one addiction for another without really figuring anything out. I think it's funny that you're the only client at the moment. I don't know when you've ever been the center of attention, and I bet you're just charming all those women.

I know facing the past, figuring out shit, and making a plan for the future can be really overwhelming. But, you're too decent and talented a person to waste yourself on booze/head injuries. If there is anything I can do to help, please don't hesitate to ask. Really. Dad gave me the name of the patient advocate person. If you wanted me to call her and fill in some of the childhood crap, I will do it. Or, if you want to keep up correspondence, I'll be happy to do that too. Or, whatever else you think of that might help.

Bruce and I are well. The school year starts soon, and Bruce is dreading it. He really hates his job. And, the administrators seem to be more self-interested than committed to the school. We're planning on another trip to New Orleans for fall break and probably Christmas too. It is the place where I can relax.

Please write back. I love you. MC

To Dad fm Tom

Hello—here's hoping this letter finds you and the family well, and the new house is breaking in and decorating well also. Again, I am sorry that I did not make the planned visit, but there will be ample opportunity in the future.