



“You don’t grow in good times; you grow in tough times.”

— Gary, Southwest Network Member

Gary is quick to command the room with his resounding, baritone vocals and thoughtful anecdotes he’s coined about recovery. His unabashed confidence and profound insights would have you think he’s practiced his whole life to inspire others. *Perhaps he has.*

Badly abused as a child and teen, Gary led a tough young life. He endured gut-wrenching depression. He endured physical beatings that led to four different spine surgeries. He endured homelessness and addiction. But, more important, he endured.

At 22, Gary picked himself up and rebuilt. He married and immersed himself in intellectual studies, earning three degrees in Education and certificates in Business Management and Mathematics. He rose the ranks in his career to serve as Vice President of a food service company for 11 years. And he poured his heart and soul into his family, as a devoted husband and father.

By his late 30s, Gary had accomplished more than many people do in a lifetime. Financially stable and well-grounded, he took his experience and executive presentation skills to the middle school math classroom. There too, Gary succeeded, earning a “Teacher of the Year” honor in 2008.

But recovery is not always linear. Despite all his success, Gary suffered with post-traumatic stress

disorder (PTSD) and depression. He turned to alcohol to self-medicate and began having terrible episodes, resulting in multiple hospitalizations and a sleep disorder, which would become the basis for a serious mental illness (SMI) diagnosis.

Gary’s wife divorced him, and life as he knew it unraveled. He lost his job, his house, his retirement fund, and his family. The “suicidal depression” would also claim his hope — leading to a 100-pound weight gain and the need for a red walker/wheelchair to move virtually anywhere.

But Gary had prevailed before, and the hero in him would do it again. He sought services from Southwest Network and began putting the pieces back together. He worked with his team on his mind, body, and spirit. He shed the weight through thrice-weekly gym visits, and can now hike 8-10 miles on the North Mountain Preserve. Additionally, he found comfort in yoga and nurturing his intellectual aptitude, working to earn his “Peer Support” certificate. His achievements have been so impressive that he was enlisted by Mercy Care as a public speaker for recovery.

While Gary may reflect on his past, he stays focused on his future. **“The windshield is larger than the rear view mirror,” says Gary. “Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again.”**

Share your Recovery Story by emailing
Dan Morrow: danielm@southwestnetwork.org