

Alcohol, drugs controlled man's life

After 35 years, many of them homeless, Greg Scott found a path up

By Bob Hansen

Greg Scott remembers little of his father.

Growing up in Danville, Illinois, little Greg wanted to please his father, an alcoholic whose own father was an alcoholic. Greg would run to the refrigerator and grab a Pabst Blue Ribbon beer for his dad, who would pop the top and then let his son take a swig of cold brew.

"I joke that I was a PBR baby," Scott says. But, "Dad left me and Mom and my half-brother when I was five. Drinking was more important."

Scott's life became a journey down, down, down, and almost out. Drinking led to drugs, lost jobs, failed recovery programs and suicide attempts. He lost his driver's license the first time at age 17 because of driving under the influence.

Eventually, his life led him to a church that prayed for him.

Before he got sober as an adult, he spent 13 or 14 years homeless. He was in and out of detox programs. Thirty-three times he was in mental stabilization crisis units battling suicidal thoughts. He lost his driver's license four more times.

As a teenager he used marijuana and experimented with other drugs: "Amphetamines, acid, anything to intensify my high."

He remembers his first blackout clearly and dimly remembers his last.

His first came when his brother, four years older, had a party. Scott was 14.

"One of his friends gave me a pint of Southern Comfort. I woke up the next morning in a puddle of puke."

That didn't matter to him. "When I was drunk, I could

dance, I could sing, I could get along with my big brother, I could stand up to my big brother. It (alcohol) gave me anything I wanted with none of the pain. I drank to black out."

A few years later, alcohol and drugs controlled his life. He remembers riding a bicycle through three hurricanes to get his crack cocaine. But after 35 years, something finally connected Scott to a way back up.

Now 55 years old, he's stayed sober for the past seven years.

It will be eight years on Aug. 6, a date Scott keeps on his tongue, ready to tell any listener his story in the hope that those with their own demons will find their way out.

His redemption, he firmly believes, is because the people in a church in Florida believed in him. They didn't give up on him and their religious beliefs led them to pray for God to intervene.

Finally, he says, their prayers for him were answered after his last blackout.

"I'm not lucky, I'm blessed," he said.

Homeless, he'd been attending a Methodist church. They gave him shelter and prayed God would enable him

to climb out of his deep hole. They had a food pantry where he could get food and a thrift store where he got clothing.

He had started working jobs out of a labor hall. He'd get paid at the end

of the day and spend all his money that night on cigarettes, alcohol and dope.

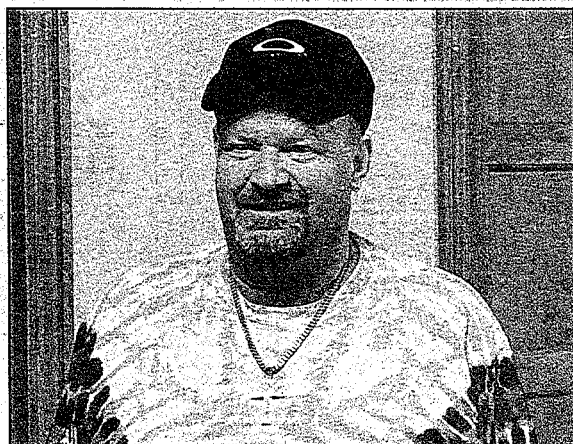
He vaguely remembers his last blackout. He had smoked \$20 worth of crack cocaine and drank 20 tall boy 20-ounce beers.

"Evidently, I went into a subway sub-station and told her (the ticket seller) I needed \$40. She told me she couldn't do that," he recalls.

"I woke up in jail. They told me I'd been arrested for robbery."

He was already on probation from a felony and his probation officer told him he'd have to go into yet another 28-day recovery program or prison. He chose the program.

A counselor there worried that he would go back to the street. She got him into a halfway house for men. Friends of his who'd known him told him before he entered treatment that he'd never get



Greg Scott is the custodian at Central United Methodist Church in Richmond. He shares his experiences with alcohol and drugs as a volunteer leader in A Better Life - Brianna's Hope Richmond chapter. Photo by Bob Hansen

About Brianna's Hope

Greg Scott, who shares his life story in this issue's Scaling the Mountain article, is a volunteer leader and board member for the Richmond chapter of A Better Life - Brianna's Hope.

"We concentrate on Steps 1, 2, and 3 of the 12-Step system used by Alcoholics Anonymous," Scott said.

According to the AA.org website, those steps are:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than our selves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

Scott says the first step is important because "you've got to surrender, admit defeat and accept that I can't do it. I've proved to myself for 35 years I'm not capable of helping myself."

The large group breaks down into table-sized discussion groups. Along with volunteers like Scott, staff from Centerstone helps facilitate the group.

"You don't know an alcoholic unless you've been one in meetings. I'm not going to pull no punches. I'm going to tell the truth. And maybe that is going to save your life," Scott said.

Before stopping meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic, 45-60 people attended the Richmond group's weekly meetings on Mondays. Other chapters meet throughout Wayne and surrounding counties.

For information about the group, visit its Facebook page or contact Scott.

sober, would never complete the 28-day program and would go to prison.

He went in "dirty" on Aug. 5, 2013.

"Being the good alcoholic that I was, I drank before I went in and I had smoked cocaine, so it wasn't out of my system."

But a day later, on Aug. 6, 2013, all desire for alcohol and drugs had left him. That, he said, was the answer to the prayers of the people at church.

After detox, he went into a rehab program where he discovered that God might have a sense of humor.

Men in the program could get a job after 30 days. His was at a restaurant with a full liquor bar. But for the first time in his life he could look at it and pour it down the drain.

To clear the palates of customers, the bar offered Everclear, a very strong grain alcohol. But when the headwaiter offered him some, he had no desire for it.

While in the halfway house for men, he joined the Alcoholics Anonymous program, started working through the 12 steps of AA and went to 90 meetings in 90 days. He had a mentor who he could talk to

anytime. He made what AA calls a coffee commitment, agreeing to make the coffee before his home group meetings. Later, he led an AA group at the same recovery center for 2½ years.

But before that last blackout, he'd been in detox 13 times, getting dried out but unable to stay sober after release.

Scott is a meat cutter by trade but he hasn't been able to hold that kind of job for years. For one thing, his hands got unsteady. He had to drink before he went to work in order to steady them. He cut off part of a thumb.

But even now, sober, steady-handed and with people willing to vouch for him, he still can't get that job.

When he applied for a meat cutting job at a large store in Richmond, everything looked fine and the department manager was ready to hire him.

But the human resources department checked his background, finding felony arrests and a record of jail time. That nixed the job.

Fortunately, a relative who is a pastor in Richmond, knew of a job opening at another church and they hired him, knowing his story.

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COVID-19 Vaccine Now Available

Please check the Indiana State Department of Health's COVID website for the current groups being vaccinated at [coronavirus.in.gov](https://www.coronavirus.in.gov). If you qualify, you can schedule your appointment by visiting www.ourshot.in.gov or by calling the Wayne County Health Department at (765) 973-9245.

Vaccination Sites

Wayne County Health Department Site	Reid Regional COVID-19 Site
Former Elder Beerman Building 601 East Main Street Richmond, IN 47374	Kuhlman Center - Wayne County Fairgrounds 861 Salisbury Road Richmond, IN 47374

You must register for an appointment, walk-ins are not being accepted.

Study evaluating how pre-teens make decisions

From staff reports

IU Health is conducting a study to understand more about what leads some children to make potentially risky decisions and develop drug addiction as they grow older.

Boys and girls ages 11 and 12 are being sought to study their behavior and scan their brains in a magnetic resonance imager (MRI). Participants will be paid up to \$370 and receive a free mental health evaluation. Researchers are seeking children with or without Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and/

or behavioral issues.

Brain function will be assessed using experimental decision-making tasks along with behavioral assessments of impulse controls. Participants then will be invited for interviews about their behavior practices over several years, with a goal of developing new interventions targeting high-risk youth.

The principal investigator is Dr. Leslie Hulvershorn.

Registration is available at <https://medicine.iu.edu/faculty-labs/hulvershorn> For more information, call (888) 264-0005.

Hagerstown native releases first musical single

By Joe Klemann

"I have lived a very blessed life," says Katherine Swain. "But just like everyone, things have not always gone as planned, and when I sing, it helps - even if just for those few minutes."

Katherine, or Katie, Avery to those who knew her growing up in Hagerstown, has sung since she can remember. She is the granddaughter of Chuck & Michelle Avery, and Kay & Roger Esker, who are also singers and performers. She says they encouraged and provided her resources to become more involved with music.

"I have to say one of my biggest influences when it comes to music has to be my big brother, Nick. My early childhood was filled with him listening to different Hip Hop artists in his bedroom, while I played Barbies across the hall, or ran around while he watched music videos on MTV. My parents also have a deep love for music."

Growing up with music playing in the background - everything from The Beach Boys to Aerosmith or Frank Sinatra, during Sunday dinners - Katie was cultivating a lifetime love and desire to pursue a musical career.

"My mom gave me her col-

lege radio, so I also listened to a lot of pop and R&B while playing in my room during the mid to late '90s. My parents didn't hover over the music that I listened to, so I was able to fully take in and find what my heart was drawn to vocally."

Katie was also influenced by a church she attended in Cincinnati. The services were full of live music and it was the first place she can remember performing in front of a big group.

Katie married Drew and now lives in northern Ohio in her great aunt and uncle's farmhouse with multiple animals. "Yes, I am a crazy cat lady," Katie admits. "I spend my time gardening, swimming in Lake Erie any chance I get, and cooking while performing free concerts in my kitchen, multiple times a week."

After this move, around three years ago, Katie started working seriously on her musical career with an extended play single.

"I already had a contact in Columbus, DJ Kid Magic," reflects Katie. She had worked on some songs and recorded a handful of demos when she happened to see one of Magic's Facebook posts about New York-based GRAMMY-nominated music producer,



Katherine Swain, who was called Katie Avery while growing up in Hagerstown, has released her first single called "Make Up Your Mind," and is working on an album. Supplied

Haas G of the UMC's (Fantom of the Beat). Magic suggested she send some of her music to him. "I waited a few days and finally told my husband about it and how I was feeling unsure. He kind of looked at me like I was crazy, and then gave some much-needed encouragement."

She felt she waited and waited, but it paid off. When Haas

received her music, he wanted to have a conversation. Fast forward a couple of weeks and she was in Columbus making her first recording.

"It is a song that will be featured on my upcoming EP (extended play), but after I recorded it, we were sitting around wrapping up my session when Magic said he had another beat from Haas and

started playing it. Only a couple seconds in, we looked at each other and smiled, knowing what we were listening to was something special. It had hip hop, R&B, and soul influences, and that's why I was immediately attracted to it."

Katie sat for a few minutes alone and wrote the hook (chorus) and then the first verse.

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Control (Continued from page 3)

Today and for the past five years, Scott is the custodian at Central United Methodist Church in Richmond.

"I believe God led me to Central United Methodist Church to work and serve him in this house and to serve him as board member and leader in Brianna's Hope Richmond chapter."

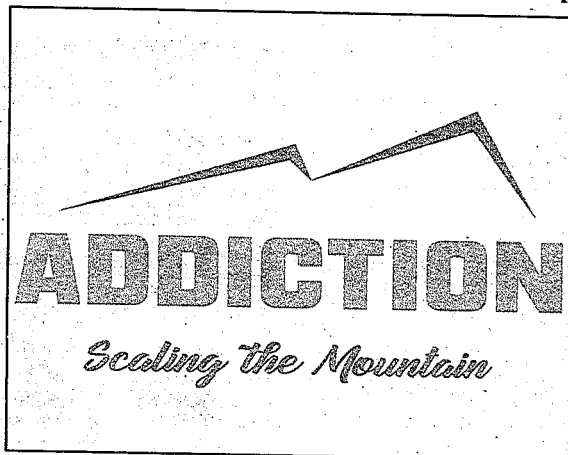
He still doesn't have a driver's license. He gets around on a scooter.

He was in his early 20s, still living in Illinois, when things had started to get really bad for him. His fiancée got hit by a cement truck and wouldn't let him help her. She told him she had to do everything for herself.

"I was mad at God," he said. "I started drinking before work, I started drinking on the job." He got a factory job where he hid vodka under his seat and sneaked drinks. And, "Cocaine was very plentiful."

He moved to Florida in 1989 and lived there until after Hurricane Andrew hit in 1992.

He calls his old habits a "vicious cycle." He'd party and get drunk, then drink to steady himself before going to work. He'd do cocaine so he could drink even more. Then he'd



Scaling the Mountain is a series of articles about the local costs of addiction. By sharing the life stories of our neighbors in Wayne County who are living with substance use, the Western Wayne News staff hopes to help explain what they go through. Additionally, the series will examine various local paths that can lead to recovery. This is the third article in the series. Graphic by Jordan Auker

drink at work and drink some more the next night.

It got so that he knew just how much beer would get him through the workday. "If it was an eight-hour workday, I needed four packs. Six hours, I could get by on one."

He got arrested on various charges. "Even the times in jail, you'd think I'd get away from it but I'd get out and I hadn't had a cigarette for 30 days but the first thing I needed was beer, and a cigarette.

That's insanity."

After returning to live in Illinois, he fell back into the same routines, getting his third DUI and becoming addicted to cocaine.

In 1995, he tried to overdose with pain pills, hoping to kill himself. The doctor pumping out his stomach said it looked like he had an alcohol problem. Later the same year, he stabbed himself and woke up in the hospital with 65 staples holding his stomach together.

After a fourth DUI -- his second within 30 days -- and facing prison time in Indiana, Scott packed up and moved back to Florida. At first, he stayed with a friend, until that friend kicked him out. He went from Miami to Gainesville, where he got a job as a meat cutter.

On the way to that job, he passed a sign for Long Island Ice Tea, an alcoholic drink. It beckoned.

"I went by it twice. The third time I went in," he said, and that started another round of near endless drinking. He lost the meat cutting job.

Working at jobs through a labor hall, he'd get paid at the end of the day and spend all his money that night on cigarettes, alcohol and dope.

A friend gave him a job painting houses. He couldn't because his hands shook so bad.

In 2012, he earned his fifth DUI and lost his Florida driver's license.

"I was one of those guys flying the signs at Walmart. I could make \$150 in 20 minutes holding a sign," he said. "It was a matter of panhandling to get my money for drugs, to get enough to be high

and drunk."

He and a couple of friends would go out panhandling together. One of them died and the other got hit and killed by a car.

"I lost my two road dogs so I was out by myself," he recalls. He sold his food stamps for 50 cents on the dollar to get money for drink.

By this time, he had been staying at the Methodist church.

"Those people prayed for me for seven years that I would get a message and get sober," he said. They took him out for a good meal every week.

Today, he is in recovery, a process that never ends.

He tells his story often. He wants others seeking help to know that he was once where they are -- at the bottom -- and that they can find a better future.

"God's given this to me for the past seven years. I've been given the gift of God and sobriety. I know that if I put anything before God, my sobriety will go. God and my sobriety has to come first," he says now.

"You get sober and get your 'git-backs: you git your dog back, your wife back, your life back," he said. "You get to restore all the good in your life."