To thine own self be true.
Someone once said to me that living sober seemed to be more about moving away from something (negative) rather than moving towards something (positive).

But I didn’t just want to survive, living sober, I wanted to thrive, living well.
I came to believe that *living well* is about living consciously, or *intentionally*, moving towards my highest aspirations (being true to myself) while doing my best not to step on other people's toes.
That sounds great, right? Good plan!

What happens when things don’t go according to plan?
“Everyone has a plan, until they get punched in the mouth.” - Mike Tyson

Which is funny, unless you’ve actually been punched in the mouth. The pain is real.
Whether it's a physical punch, a verbal one, or a "behavior", we've all been on the receiving end (hello, triggers!). How do we react?

Are those reactions helpful?
When I talk about my reactions, there are really two parts:

**There’s the internal part:** the feelings come first, and then I start thinking – although if my feelings are really overwhelming, I might not be able to think very clearly in the moment.
Then there’s the external part: when I’m reacting it is instinctive or habitual rather than a thoughtful and deliberate response; so it’s fight, flight, or freeze, and for me, it used to be freeze first, then come out fighting.
What we are striving for is to break free of habitual triggers and be able to respond to conflict in ways that bring us closer to what we want, both within ourselves and in our relationships.
This story is about how I was able to break free by changing my behavior, even while my family members chose to continue in theirs for several years.

And as a result, I reached a whole new understanding of what was actually happening in the present, not just the past.
The language and process I used at the time were based in 12 step recovery, so my story will describe in very practical terms (action steps) how I discovered the difference between accepting what I cannot change, deciding what I am willing to change, and what happened as a result of doing something different.
If you are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with 12 step recovery language or processes, these same principles are reflected in many other wellness practices and spiritual traditions you are probably familiar with, we’ll touch on some later.
EVER HAVE ONE OF THESE?
“Some things are nice to know, some things you need to know.” - Denny S.

When something bad happens I often get caught up in wondering why, which is sometimes nice to know, when what I really need to know is what to do about it.
First question: Should I stay or should I go?
It’s not necessarily about good or bad, or right or wrong; it’s about, is what I’m doing working? Is it bringing me closer to what I want? If it’s not, what am I willing to do differently? First I have to figure out what I really want.
○ What are our feelings and needs in a specific situation?
○ What is negotiable and non-negotiable for us – what is the difference between a request and a demand?
○ What kind of supports do we need outside that situation to continue to process events as they unfold?
We have the power to define our own core beliefs.

We have the right to decide what we are willing to do.

But we don’t have to do this alone!
There are lots of ways to do this, the 12 steps is one path.

What are some of the practices, or programs, you have used?

Any of these sound familiar...?
- Transactional Analysis (TA) – drama triangle
- Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) – radical acceptance
- Non-Violent Communication (NVC) – feelings and needs
- Intentional Peer Support (IPS) – what we are moving towards
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) – cognitive circle (TA/dk)
- Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) – an action plan
- Mindfulness – awareness, memory, comprehension
All of those are reflected in parts of my story:
What has been happening here?
What part of this do I need to accept?
What are my feelings and needs?
What do I want to move towards?
Mood follows action:
What am I willing to do?
How do I remember all that in the heat of the moment?
Can you identify a situation in your life where you’d like to break free of something that just doesn’t work for you?

Do you have the supports you need to dive into the challenges of making a change?

Do you know of a practice or process you’d like to explore to create change?
When stuff is happening, it triggers feelings (which I can’t control, and that’s okay, I’m allowed to have my feelings). Then hopefully I’m thinking and I can choose how I respond. When my feelings are so intense that I can’t hold onto my core beliefs, sometimes I don’t react well.
What has been happening here?

Observations:
- What has happened outside me?
- What is happening inside me – what am 
  I feeling?
- What have I said and done?
- How have others responded?
For starters, you can’t turn back the clock.
What are my feelings and needs?

You can use the lists if you need some ideas.

Which of my needs are non-negotiable in this particular relationship (partner, child, employer, friend, etc.)?
What are my core beliefs?

Here are some guiding questions:

- Is what I want reasonable?
- Is it reasonable to expect it from this person?
- Is it reasonable to expect it right now?
- Even if what I want is reasonable, do I have the right to try and compel someone else to meet my needs?
- Can I get some or all of what I need from other people, now or in the future?
What do I want to move towards?
What would I LIKE to happen here?

If things were “going well”, what would I feel like inside?

What would be happening on the outside?
Mood follows action. So what’s my plan?
What do I have the power to change?
If what you have been doing isn’t helping you move towards what you want, on the inside or on the outside, what are some things you might be willing to do differently?

- Do you want to keep trying?
- Can you ask for what you want?
- Are you willing to negotiate?
- Are you willing to walk away?
- If you are not willing to walk away, what are you willing to accept?
- Can you use more support? Where can you get it?
And the big $20,000 Question: How do I remember all that in the heat of the moment?

Practice, practice, practice.
Write about it. Talk about it. Role play it.
Create some affirmations - read them or say them right before you walk into the room.
Pray if you pray, before, during (!), and after.
Talk to a friend or support right before, and after.
In the original Buddhist tradition, **Mindfulness**, or *sati*, is literally 'memory'. It is described as “an awareness of things in relation to things... whereby the true nature of phenomena can be seen”...

which bears a striking resemblance to the Christian charism of **Discernment**: “identifying the true nature of a thing”.
Remember, it’s progress not perfection. Guilt trips are nuthin’ but a detour to a dead end. Hold on to where you want to go! What’s most important is knowing we’ve done our best in a difficult situation, regardless of how others choose to behave.