

REAL RECOVERY PODCAST

RRP 113 — Katherine L. / Is It Odd or Is It God?: Recovery, Spirituality, and the Long Road to Portland

Presenters: Julie P. Lewis and Peter B. Dowell | **Episode Length:** Approximately 1 hour 47 minutes | **Release Date:** May 8, 2026

Katherine L. grew up south of Boston in a home where alcohol was always present — a stocked liquor cabinet, homemade sambuca, and big parties that normalized drinking from an early age. By the time she hit her corporate career, she was a blackout drinker trying and failing to control something that was already controlling her. The death of her mother at 25, a tumultuous marriage, and a string of relationships driven more by loneliness than love — none of it stopped the drinking. What finally did was waking up on the bathroom floor on July 29, 2011, physically sick, emotionally sick, and spiritually sick.

What followed was a decade-long journey through AA in Boston — the AWOL women’s group, a home group of 200 people in Braintree, and a sponsor named Rita whose son had just died from the disease. Then a career pivot from six-figure sales work to cutting fruit at a deli. Then, in March 2022, an 11-day cross-country drive from Boston to Portland. Halfway across the country, she realized she had everything.

Now coming up on 15 years sober, Katherine lives by one question: is it odd, or is it God?

KEY POINTS

00:04:00

Sobriety date: July 29, 2011. Katherine says she never wants to forget waking up on that bathroom floor — physically, emotionally, and spiritually sick.

00:10:00

Growing up south of Boston: homemade sambuca, a stocked liquor cabinet, and a culture where drinking was woven into everyday life from childhood.

00:16:00

Her mother died suddenly when Katherine was 25. A father who told her a week later: “Everybody’s mother dies. Get over it.”

00:21:00

First attempt at AA in 2008 — nine months in, she drank again. Three more years of “drinking like it was my job” before July 29, 2011.

00:25:00

Her therapist’s advice: “Go find a women’s meeting.” Katherine calls it the best advice she ever received.

00:27:00

The AWOL program — 26 weeks through the steps with 60 women in a church basement in Quincy, MA.

00:29:00

Sponsor Rita: her son had just died from alcoholism. She taught Katherine: “This is a disease that tells us we don’t have a disease.”

00:37:00

Sobriety built public-speaking skills that carried Katherine from the rooms of AA to presenting a textile recycling program across 100+ Massachusetts school districts.

00:42:00	December 18, 2018: a car accident, a letter from her boss, and a decision to walk away. Rita's direction: "You're going to make AA your job."
00:50:00	"I had nothing per se, like my life in the back of my car, but I had everything." The cross-country drive: 11 days, planned around AA meetings, a stop in Akron.
00:55:00	A pancake breakfast in Troutdale connects her with Brad — her Portland sponsor — who called the next day.
01:09:00	Her daily practice: all 12 steps before leaving the house, every morning, for nearly 15 years.
01:35:00	FROG — Forever Rely On God — and the screen printing shop whose owner turned out to be in the program.

"I never want to forget what it was like waking up on the bathroom floor, physically sick, emotionally sick, and spiritually sick." — Katherine L.

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