

RRP 122 — Jen L / When the Light Found Her, Part 1: From Bucking Hay to Finding Her People

Presenters: Julie P. Lewis and Peter B. Dowell **Episode Length:** 1:18:00 **Release Date:** July 10, 2026

Jen L. grew up on a cattle ranch in Roseburg, Oregon, bucking hay and worming cows. She was a science nerd, a jock, and by 15, a blackout drinker buying liquor in small-town stores. By 17, she came out to her mom and left home in the middle of the night. In Part 1 of this two-part conversation, Jen traces the long arc from a rural childhood full of secrets to the kitchen window where a 150-foot cross started shining through — and the recovery that began on the other side of it. Alongside co-hosts Julie (her friend of 29 years) and Peter, Jen shares the story of finding the rooms, losing a partner who refused to watch her die, and the sponsor who walked beside her for 26 years.

Key Points

- **[00:00:00]** Jen arrives with a freshly broken leg and ice on her foot — "If she can make it, you all can" — and Julie introduces the friend she's known since Jen walked into Lunch Bunch / Extended Family in August 1997
- **[00:08:00]** Walking into the rooms: "I found my people" — the group conscience that keeps showing up, and the diversity that's grown over nearly three decades
- **[00:17:00]** Growing up on the family cattle ranch in Roseburg: bucking hay, worming cows, chopping wood, and hiding from the bull named Caesar in a crabapple tree
- **[00:22:00]** Costa Rican exchange student at 15: blackout drinking, discotheques, and Kahlua on the porch with fireflies and her host sisters
- **[00:25:00]** Buying liquor at 15 in small-town stores; the party where her friend Michelle got alcohol poisoning — and making amends years later in a Fred Meyer aisle
- **[00:31:00]** Coming out at 17, leaving home in the middle of the night, and the one family member who said: "We love your friend, and she's welcome here any time"
- **[00:35:00]** The Chemeketa paramedic program; first time at Embers at 16; and the friend Corey whose recovery coin sat in a cigar box by the river
- **[00:39:00]** Kathy's ultimatum in the basement: "I'm not gonna sit around and watch you kill yourself" — the moment that sent Jen to treatment
- **[00:43:00]** The 150-foot cross shining through her kitchen window at the base of The Grotto; Gregorian chants drifting into her yard; her first sober house
- **[00:47:00]** First AA meeting: the smoking meeting at the Grotto, the priest who ignored her, and the room full of people she didn't believe
- **[00:49:00]** James at the gay meeting: "Will I see you tomorrow?" — the five words that kept both Jen and Julie coming back
- **[00:53:00]** Sixty days sober, furious, and "coming around those corners hot" — the parking spot at the rock shop that changed everything

- **[00:56:00]** Julie's Friday night meltdown that brought Tammy into the meeting — the woman who would become Jen's sponsor for 26 years
- **[01:01:00]** Tammy's story; the Linda Neely connection that stunned Julie; and the loss that still reverberates: "Two years ago on Wednesday, Tammy died"
- **[01:10:00]** Driving Fred to Yreka, California for his amends; finding an AA meeting through the Yellow Pages on a payphone
- **[01:15:00]** "Once the drugs and alcohol got set down, I was still left with the obsession" — replacing substances with more, and the slow work of building a different life
- **[01:17:00]** Dad dying of cancer when Jen was 18 months sober; everything shifting; the whiskey waved in her face — and the family she never told she'd stopped drinking

"We'd moved into a different house, and it was finally a house I hadn't used in. That's just what I wanted — a house I hadn't used in." — Jen L.

Websites Discussed

- The Grotto — National Sanctuary of Our Sorrowful Mother, Portland, OR
- Chemeketa Community College — Salem, OR
- East County Alano Club — Gresham, OR
- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Real Recovery Podcast

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