

RRP 105 — Mark S.

The Group Is My Higher Power: One Atheist's Path Through Addiction and Back

Presenters: Peter and Julie | **Release Date:** March 13, 2026 | **Episode:** 105 | **Runtime:** 1:00:27

Episode Summary

In this episode, Peter and Julie welcome Mark S., a long-time member of Extended Family — the online AA community where he and Julie first met. Mark's story spans more than five decades of addiction, survival, and hard-won sobriety. From a Pentecostal upbringing that condemned him for being gay, to the streets of Southern California in the 1970s, to a near-fatal suicide attempt that left him in a coma for three days, Mark's journey is unflinching and deeply human. Now more than two years sober and homebound with COPD, Mark has found his footing through service work, a sponsor with 42 years of sobriety, and a higher power he defines entirely on his own terms: the group of Alcoholics Anonymous itself. This is Episode 105 — the first episode of Season 3.

Key Points

- [00:01:40] Mark is welcomed as the first guest recorded remotely via Zoom — a first for the show.
- [00:03:21] Mark is introduced as Episode 105, the first guest of Season 3 of the Real Recovery Podcast.
- [00:04:06] Mark's first drink was in 1968 at a family wedding. He grew up in a strict Pentecostal household where alcohol was forbidden.
- [00:05:00] From a young age, Mark believed he was going to hell because he was attracted to other boys — a belief reinforced by his church and eventually his father.
- [00:07:00] Junior high rebellion: bullying, a 1.4 cumulative GPA, and early sexual activity driven by shame and self-loathing.
- [00:10:18] At 16, Mark's father discovered he was gay and kicked him out of the family home.
- [00:16:30] First contact with AA at approximately age 19–20, in Laguna Beach, California, around 1979–80. AA members came to his motel room, dumped his alcohol, and took him to a meeting.
- [00:22:25] After throwing a TV through a window while drunk, Mark ended up on Laguna Canyon Road, was hit by a car, and was hospitalized with partial paralysis of his face and body.
- [00:28:43] Moved to Oregon around 1984–85, fleeing the AIDS crisis in Southern California. Met his partner Greg, and they were together for 28 years.
- [00:33:31] Suicide attempt: after discovering his partner had been unfaithful, Mark took all his medications and slashed his wrists in the bathtub. He was in a coma for three days.
- [00:35:09] One month in hospital, then one month of rehab at Cedar Hills in Beaverton, Oregon.
- [00:35:41] Achieved four years of sobriety, then relapsed after smoking marijuana. Drank heavily until the start of COVID.
- [00:36:06] During COVID, a friend introduced Mark to Zoom AA meetings. He found Extended Family / Lunch Bunch AA Online, where he met Julie.
- [00:37:39] Final drink: June 14, 2023. Sobriety date: June 15, 2023. Now carries two years and eight months of sobriety.
- [00:38:21] Mark is currently homebound due to COPD and lives on disability. He hosts his own Zoom AA meeting and does significant service work.

- [00:43:32] Mark shares his understanding of a higher power: not a traditional God, but the group of Alcoholics Anonymous. “One person will let me down, but the group of Alcoholics Anonymous doesn’t let me down.”
- [00:46:34] Recent losses: Mark’s father died November 5, 2024. His mother died in early March 2026, just days before recording.
- [00:51:00] Conversation on family of choice in sobriety and in the LGBTQ+ community — parallels drawn by Peter, Julie, and Mark.
- [00:58:00] Closing reflections: Mark’s attitude toward death, service, and what it means to stay spiritually healthy in recovery.

Guest Quote

“My higher power is the group of Alcoholics Anonymous. Not one person — ‘cause one person will let me down — but the group of Alcoholics Anonymous. And the principals behind the group don’t let me down.”

— Mark S.

Websites Discussed

- Extended Family / Lunch Bunch AA Online: <https://sites.google.com/view/lbefaa>
- Cedar Hills Hospital (Behavioral Health, Beaverton, OR): <https://www.cedarhillshospital.com>
- Real Recovery Podcast: <https://www.realrecoverypodcast.com>

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Hashtags & Mentions

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