

**Interview with Alex Myhaver  
[at AMHI in 2002]**

**September 9, 2003**

*Interviewer: Karen Evans*

*KE:* We are going to first start by what your experiences while you were in AMHI and then we will go onto what is recovery like today. But let's first start with why did you go to AMHI?

*AM:* I went to AMHI for a couple of reasons. For one, I was found incompetent to stand trial in Portland here for some charges. There had been some charges of criminal trespassing brought against me by the State of Maine. Actually it was the University of Southern Maine. The State of Maine followed through on this. I wasn't showing up in court. I am a graduate of the University of Southern Maine. People that knew me knew that I was acting very delusional. I had spent a couple of years, three years off my medication and I thought I was the new world leader. That is really it in a sense. I was very grandiose and delusional. I was sending a lot of mail to people describing a lot of horrific events. There wasn't a lot of actuality to a lot of these things. I was really somebody looking for special help and attention. Everything seemed real to me.

I was arrested on January 17, 2002 and taken to the Cumberland County Jail; it was late Thursday night. I hadn't been showing up in court prior. I was arrested; there was a little bit of a dispute when I had entered the YMCA. They called the police; I had been getting mail anyway from the court saying that if I didn't show up that I was going to be arrested. They took this opportunity to arrest me. When I was in jail they encouraged me to take medication. I continued to refuse. I was convinced that I was a member of the FBI and the CIA. I stated that to everybody all of the time. I was really convinced and I was very delusional. I wasn't taking good care of myself. The jail wasn't the best place for me because I wasn't getting any help and I didn't consider myself a criminal in that the charges brought against me were outstanding trespass charges from the University of Southern Maine, which it showed at one point I had violated them. I hadn't violated them recently at that point, but I was blue papered anyway to AMHI.

I kept refusing to take my medication. What they told me when I got there was that I was found incompetent to stand trial. When I was in jail they took me to court a few times. I would just tell the judge. He was saying some people want to review you, they want to observe you, and they realize you need to take medication. I would tell them they are going against the Supreme Court. In my understanding of things I was the new world leader and there was a whole society of these larger figures including Colin Powell and Jimmy Carter, the former President who won the Noble Peace Prize who were in my favor. This was all part of what I perceived. But it was so real to me. So I really wasn't competent to understand the current situation.

Everybody out there in the community who knew me wanted so badly for me to get help. They didn't want to leave me out there. I had done some amazing things in the community before and I had never been actively psychotic like that. Prior I had taken medication. It was more of a situation where I went to the doctor and a psychiatrist and had a voluntary hospitalization in JBI

in '93. But AMHI was involuntary. So people wanted me to get to AMHI because they knew I wouldn't take my medication. They wanted me to be confronted. It was a very terrifying time because I couldn't understand why people didn't understand my perception. So I was blue papered there for being found incompetent to stand trial. Also, I mean, I know that people wanted to see me better. On April 9, 2002, it was a Tuesday and I was taken to AMHI. I told them that I worked for the CIA and FBI, etc. I think those are the reasons.

*KE:* Okay, thank you. When you think about AMHI, what memories come to your mind?

*AM:* Actually one right off is May 28<sup>th</sup>. I am saving these days because someday I will write a book. May 28, 2002, Tuesday morning, when they came into my room—and they prior told me they were going to—they got the court order for me to be on medication. They were going to do it and I kept saying they couldn't do that. On May 28, 2002, Tuesday, Dr. Cox, my psychiatrist, led a group of people like bodyguards and a whole lot of staff into my room and they surrounded me and they explained that they were going to force me on medication. I was like “no”, but I didn't put up a physical fight with them. I just kind of argued one last argument. They took me out to the hall, out of my room, I was still in my pajamas, and they had a door open with a mat and it was like “we can go in there”. They said that if I fought with them they would take me in there and inject me. There was somebody, one of the RN's or nurse at some level, she asked me, she said “Alex would you take this?” and it was a pill and I just said “yes”. I took it and even though at the time it felt like I was losing part of my soul, “it saved my life.” That did save my life and I have taken my medication every single time since. That memory stands out and it will always stand out. As time has transferred, I have grown to really appreciate Dr. Cox.

Being locked up, I remember one time one of the doctors asked me and the social workers, and I told them worked for the FBI and CIA. They said, “if you work for the FBI why are you locked up in a mental institute?” It was a very rough experience at the time. But I must say it, I am glad I went through it, because I was confronted and as I continue to take my medication, I've started seeing a clearer perception of my life.

The other thing that sticks out to me is I loved the staff. They really did care. You hear a lot of horror stories about AMHI, but the staff really did care. As I continued to start paying attention to them, they really seemed to take a liking to me. I remember after I had taken my medication for a while and, being found competent to stand trial again, Dr. Cox one day told me, “I never want to see you back in here.” That is motivation for me every day because I don't want to be confined in a mental institute. AMHI is a tough place, but it was a lot of help and a lot of support. In retrospect, it is what I believe that I needed.

*KE:* Are there any other memories you would like to share with us?

*AM:* That is the most traumatic. But there are some wonderful memories. One o'clock every Tuesday I used to take part in a stress group with a nurse. We called her Nurse Kay. That was very powerful. I took part in that group before I was taking my medication and after it because I found support in there. She did a great job in supporting us regardless of how our perceptions might have been off or not. Being really supportive to us as human beings with needs and I remember when I would talk to Nurse Kay before and after that she used to say to me, you can

have a spiritual journey, like a journey of a hero. She used to say that phrase to me a “psychic journey of a hero”, because I used to talk to her about my interest in psychology. She knew that I was spiritual and gifted and also very intelligent. I used to have a lot of talks with her and she encouraged me through my recovery. I remember in that stress group there would be other members in there and we could all talk about life and stress. Sometimes we just talked illusions; other things very real to the point and I realized when I was in there that I loved these people.

*KE:* I am going to try to put together the time frames. You told us when you were there, but how long were you there and was this your only time there, or were you there more than once?

*AM:* Okay, I can answer that and I have thought about it as well before. I was only at AMHI once, one experience. I was at AMHI for five months and ten days, maybe eleven days. April 9, 2002, Tuesday morning until September 19, 2002, Thursday. I was okay to leave AMHI probably early September. However, they were setting up arrangements for me to have a place to go. I got accepted into a few programs with Shalom House and the first one was three months transitional housing. It was a situation on Forest Avenue. It was just, the reason it took me until the 19<sup>th</sup>, and it was just coordination for me to be able to move in. So yeah, I think it was five months and ten days.

*KE:* What was life like at AMHI? Now you shared about the meditation circle, but what was the structure of your day? Can you remember that?

*AM:* Very clear. It is almost two terms, because the structure of our life from April 9 to May 28 was different from May 28 to September 19, because I wasn't taking medication for a long time. The first term at AMHI my day was getting up everyday and plotting and finding ways how I was going to prove to AMHI that I did not need medication. I was going to convince them of this every day. I woke up in the morning, got breakfast, and they would talk to me about taking medication. I would refuse and I would tell them my reasons. There is a Supreme Court decision in my favor. It has already been on the books that I, Alex Myhaver, don't need to take my medication and that Jimmy Carter was the judge and all of this real grand stuff. I would explain that to them every day. I really worked with Colin Powell. I was active military. I am using my karate and they will be confronted. I would refuse medications; then they would meet with me two or three times a day about this.

I would take part in one group and that was in the stress group that I was in at one o'clock on Tuesday. My time there was pretty scary, because I was really alone. The other patients there would talk to me and they got to know me and were friends with me, but they thought I was pretty delusional too. They occasionally confronted, other times didn't. So life was very scary then because every couple of hours I had a confrontation. I had a trial to prepare for; “it was to me.” It was very traumatic and my structure was basically to argue with AMHI two or three times a day about why I didn't need to take medication. It was very stressful, because this went on for a couple of months.

The structure of life after I was confronted and forced the medications—after May 28, Tuesday—was much better. It was me getting up every morning, having breakfast, taking my medications, getting my blood pressure checked, then going and meeting with a social worker,

and going to the gym. It went on, the more groups I got involved in. Going to a bible study class would be something that happened, still going to the stress group, talking a lot more about my situation, and slowly realizing that I had been delusional, “my perception has been off”. It took a while, but continued.

I actually started meeting with a dietician because I have Crohn’s Disease. They had offered for me to work with the dietician before and I didn’t want any part of it. Then I started meeting with the dietician regularly. We planned a meal schedule for me that was like four to six meals a day, which is much better for my system, smaller meals. So I was frequently eating between groups, going out and taking the breaks with the others and walking. I don’t smoke; the majority of the people there smoke. That was difficult, but I put up with it. I just walked and they just kind of sat around and smoked. But I talked to people and they got me things to read. I went to the library to get some books. I eventually got a pass to go to the gym, so I was going to the gym after breakfast and taking meds every morning and then I got involved in a meditation and relaxation class. Yoga was on one day and the relaxation class was the other.

So suddenly my day was filling with structure. Then I started getting involved with something they call DBT. It was really about getting ourselves in the here and now. We talked and I also started getting involved in yet another group, so like everyday I was involved in something where on that day we just talked about our feelings and our current situation. You wrote these thoughts. I was really becoming involved.

My team meetings with my doctors, started going really well. They weren’t even needing to meet with me as much. They just kept getting better. I started to get to know my social worker. He is a really great guy. I started being able to go outside, play horseshoes, go for walks. It got better and I realized I don’t want to be in here; we all want to get out of here. But there was structure in my life and I also got to know the other members that were in there. I was on the forensic unit. I got to know a lot of them and made some friendships for that time. So a lot of structure, a lot of things focused on recovery, and the big thing was taking medication.

*KE:* You talk a lot about positive experiences. Did you have any negative experiences with people that were there while you were there?

*AM:* I mean at first, for the longest time at AMHI, Dr. Cox, my psychiatrist, was my biggest enemy because she was really advocating for me to take medication and really confronting me that I was grandiose and delusional and that I do have a mental illness. That was extremely traumatic. They confronted that because I had my own perception and that went on all of the time. I hated Dr. Cox at a level; I really did before I was on medication because she was really pushing to get a court order to force me on medication. She was telling me that this judge could still find me incompetent. I just felt like they were all part of this big scam and that was tough.

Once I got back on medication and after being on it for a month or two, I was realizing that Dr. Cox’s perspective. She was pretty clear. She could have been a lot worse to me and she was very good with me about staying on a low dose. I left AMHI on one milligram of Risperidol for schizophrenia. I am still on that today and that was the only medication for my mental health I was on. Then Dr. Davis had prescribed Azicol for me for my Crohn’s Disease because I had an

inflammation there and I actually requested it at that point. So that is what I left there with, and Dr. Cox really listened to me compassionately and talked to providers that I wanted her to talk to about my condition. “They would vouch for me, saying “yes, he is a member of the FBI.” At that point I had this delusion that all of my providers really wanted to me to work undercover.

After being out of AMHI and reconnecting with my doctors, they would talk to me a little bit and say “that doctor was wonderful.” She would really call and she would be very compassionate and very concerned and I really have a lot of respect for her. But before I was on medication she was an enemy and she was the one that I had a bad experience with, or an experience. I cannot single one out; it was just an ongoing bad experience because she was continually wanting to get me to take medication and confronting me that I do have a mental illness, and I could not see that. I didn’t have the perception I have while I am on medication.

*KE:* So who helped you the most? Would it be this Dr. Cox or was there someone else that you could say?

*AM:* See there were a lot of staff that helped me so much. But Nurse Kay, probably helped me the most because when I was off medication, when I was on medication, she, her, whatever role she had, she was able to meet my perspective for what it was and not really try to change that. “Oh you are a doctor,” I would say yeah, she would just kind of go along with it. Not like say yes, yes, but enough to get me talking about my interests, stuff like that. Nurse Kay was always compassionate and receptive to my perception and when I was back on medication even more so. She talked to me. She just really made my day on my worst days. She made it bearable. Then when I started getting better, I now had hope to go out there in the world.

*KE:* You talked a lot about your relationship with the staff and I am wondering was there a sense of community with the peers there? At any point did you sense that sense of community at AMHI? What was your relationship with your peers?

*AM:* At first, my relationship with my peers was very limited, and I didn’t want to have anything to do with any of them. They all had mental illness, I didn’t; that was my thought. I am not going to give in and take medication. Really what they need is to be taken off of their medication and have holistic healing. So, I made small talk with them, they made small talk with me, and we stood each other.

Once I got back on medication and started getting involved in groups, I really noticed the community and it was like now I have a mental illness. We would all talk about our issues and mental illness and identify. We would laugh at one another and we got over some things and people in a relationship, I noticed the community with the relationship, with staff, with the other patients because especially with the CNAs a lot of young women, a few men, that would come in and just be hands on with us through the morning, through the afternoon shift, the morning shift, and they would watch some football with us. They talked to us; they celebrated my birthday. It was the first time that I had celebrated my birthday with anybody in three years, because the three years before when I was off medication, I isolated and totally broke off connections with my family. That was the first time I did that in my life. But at AMHI I celebrated my birthday, they celebrated other people’s birthdays. There was a sense of community. We laughed together.

They talked to us about hope, recovery, things they didn't like that we did, and things they rewarded us for appropriately when we didn't think they appreciated us.

*KE:* What was the interaction with the staff that was best?

*AM:* What I saw was when basically I was around. I don't think it was too much different than anywhere else where people taught. They seem to have a rapport and get along, but they have, you can tell there are times when there is stress. I didn't focus too much on it, but yet they seem to work well because they communicate. Yeah, like I am taking Alex for lunch. I am going to take so and so. There is a lot of communication I think.

*KE:* You talked a lot about the treatment you received there. You went in a little bit about the activities. Were there any other activities that you would like to mention that you were involved in?

*AM:* I can't think of it now—going to the gym, yoga, relaxation exercise. You know, those are basically the things that I did. I got to things once I received privileges, whatever level they were, I can't even remember. You put in for a level two class and they granted it and I used to go out for a walk with two of the staff. We would take ourselves out for a walk. That was always great because again I was dying to get better. They were not talking about this mental illness 24/7. They were like, you got a college degree; what are you interested in? I used to go for the walks and one of the guys was Jim and he hadn't been college, but he had a lot of experience working and he was thinking about going into psychology and I got to talk to him about academic psychology. We would go on pretty long walks and with staff supervision you could always talk. We would talk; we would look at the air. It was always hope when I got outside at that place in the fresh air. It was like it was fun, that part was. Yeah, they were good to us.

*KE:* While staying at AMHI, how were you affected? Did your family and your friends keep contact with you? Were you feeling isolated or did you keep up your connections?

*AM:* I will tell you the first, the second day I was there my mother had called. She talked to me and listened to me. I really didn't want anything to do with family. After that phone call, she had given me her number, but I didn't make any contacts with anybody for the longest time because I just thought that they were all part of the scheme and that I had gone undercover and they were all wrong. I was very isolated and agitated. But after being on meds for a while, one day I can't remember if I was talking to which particular staff, but I called my mother and that was when the relationship started to heal because we started talking about a lot of things. I was talking to her about problems again. At one point a friend I had taken to her prom—and she was in high school and I had just graduated—called my mother and wondering how I was doing. She called me. Then I started contact there.

A lot of people in the community knew I was in AMHI and from what I understand they were all praying for me. Then my brother called me, my sister called me, another brother called me, and I started talking to them again. They were all happy to hear that I was doing better. They definitely wanted to hear my story and things got better. When I came out of AMHI eventually everyone was extremely receptive to me and they have been ever since.

*KE:* I want to talk about when you left AMHI. What happened? You talked a little bit about the transitional housing you were in, can you elaborate on that a little bit more.

*AM:* Absolutely. September 19<sup>th</sup>, Thursday, 2002, I remember Sharon was the name of the worker who took me to Shalom House on Forest Avenue. It was up to three months transitional stay and I was nervous, but glad I had a place to stay, but knew there would be support there. I got there and remember meeting the woman Theresa and when I got there, at first it was a little bit intense only because they do their kind of initial talk to you and find out who you are and maybe lay down the laws a little bit. But that wasn't bad. It was just like, I just felt like putting my things down and you know, but it soon became that. So I went to Forest Avenue, the staff there was great. I mean amazing. They really encouraged me to be myself and to work on my recovery and to do things, but not to put too much pressure on myself. I only stayed there for a month and a half or two months, because there was an opening where I live now on Park Street, which is near Shalom House, but it is up to a two-year stay. But when I was there I got involved in an art class, recovery class at Shalom House.

I got involved in a men's group here at Amistad that talks about recovery. I was able to start exercising again, going outside. There was freedom. I could walk outside without having to go through any kind of security and just go for walks. I still had some pending law issues while I was in AMHI, but they seemed to get better. We were working on that. My attorney had been working very hard the whole time. Neal Duffett is my attorney. So like after a week or two being out of AMHI I met with my attorneys who had already been working with the court. Basically I had to do. I didn't have to serve any more time in jail or anything. It was just to continue to follow the recommendations of Dr. Christie.

When I first got out of AMHI and went to Shalom House in Portland, the focus became recovery and I was able to focus on getting my basic needs met, which is something when I was off my medication I didn't do well. The focus was on seeing Dr. Christie my psychiatrist again, getting my legal situation straightened out, all which turned out really well. I am now cleared to go back to the USM. As a matter of fact, I was there last night; I am taking a class. All of the charges against me were dismissed, which was quite a long process. But when I first got out of AMHI, it was really that I was able to start to focus on a recovery and doing things everyday that I wanted to do for myself.

I had to find out about getting my Social Security reinstated. The second day I was there I went down to the Social Security office and they told me I needed a payee. So I went about getting a payee, which happened within a couple of weeks and so at first it was a transition. I had a lot of support from Support Recovery; David Dearborn was my case manager. He was the liaison for Catholic Charities Support Recovery. I was able to get a lot of my belongings that they stored in the place I used to live at the Y and just got back some of my personal belongings, got focused on getting my basic needs met, and having hope for the future.

So I had a lot of support when I came out of AMHI. My family—I was able to reconnect with them. The first morning me and my mother got together. We went to church together. I broke down and cried so much, but it was good tears. It was like a very healing time, very forgiving. My family was all glad to talk to me. I was talking to them about the fact that I do have a mental

illness, coming to terms with it. It was very positive and it has been that way since. So I was able to get a lot of support.

*KE:* Do you have anything else you would like to say about your stay at AMHI or do you want to go onto the sections about recovery?

*AM:* Just real quick in that I think if I looked at my timeline in life later on, you know, the places that I go and visit, for some reason “I needed to be there.” As hard as it was at first, I don’t regret it and I am actually thankful for all of the staff there.

*KE:* Well let’s go onto your experiences and thoughts today. I think I am going to start out by asking how are you doing and what are you doing?

*AM:* Yeah absolutely. I am actually doing great now. I am really doing good. I have a lot of stability that I am building back in my life. I am finding I have the skills and resources still that I was building up in college. What I am working on here at Amistad it is like a resource guide, but we are calling it an informational tool kit. What it is, it is going to be a book that I will be author of, directed towards people with disabilities or long term illnesses in the Greater Portland area and the housing choices and options they have available to them. We are looking at like, so like subsidies, and any kind of help people can get besides just going out and trying to rent an apartment. It is an exciting project. There are three parts to it. One of them is the directory, which is going to list the agencies, like Shalom House, like Ingraham, many more agencies and within that all of the resources and housing options each agency has and the contact. So one section is going to be like a directory. Then there are two other parts. One of them is a part that describes all of the housing laws, the rights and fair housing laws, the rights and obligations of tenants and the landlord, how to identify discrimination, how to go about looking for housing, how to fill out a rental application, and how to set up your apartment up with heat and electricity. Another part is how to manage living independently; how to manage your own apartment, so that talks about how to resolve disputes with landlords; how to resolve disputes with tenants, how to maintain an apartment, and how to manage stress living on your own independently. A lot of things like that going into that section.

It has been an exciting project that I have been working on since May and it is with limited grant money. I will be done in November, but it is going to be a book hopefully 60 to 70 pages that is going to be something that will be an asset to the community and a good resource for people, whether for case managers, consumers. Hopefully, it can help people look for housing a little bit more organized and with a little bit less confusion and give more direction. Hopefully, the reading will be something that will be fun too. So it is an exciting project and I have worked very hard on it. I think it is going to be a pleasant surprise out there in the community when it is done. So yeah that is exciting.

Also, I have been accepted into a program at the University of Southern Maine. I have my degree in psychology, but this is a fitness instruction certification program with Lifeline. That is a two-year, part-time program. You can take longer or do it faster, but it is a program that will certify me as a fitness instructor, open my opportunity to get an entry-level fitness job. I am very interested in physical fitness. It is something I really value; it is exciting to me. I had my first

class last night, and the class that I am taking is Nutrition for Health and Fitness. It was interesting and it was fun and it was at a pace that is good for me from what I have been through. If I just started out with high intense college course again, it might, well I don't want to go there quite yet. I got my degree and I did that at one time and at some point I am thinking of taking some master courses, but just to get started in that academic mode again, studying, I think this program will be very good for me. That is another thing that is exciting going on.

I also have very good relationships with the people I live with. I live at the Shalom House at Park Street. It is a transitional housing program that I can stay for up to two years. I am looking at hopefully staying a year and a half. I have been there like nine or ten months now and I guess I think ten months. It is a very good program. I get along very well with the other residents. We do things together. I have gotten a lot of support there that I need to recover and I think that I am going to be able to take that forward with me as I become more independent. So that has been a great thing in my life.

Another thing is I go to the gym—they have a lifestyle fitness center on Warren Avenue. I go regularly and I have been since November 2002. That is what I really am passionate about, going to the gym and working out. It is good fuel for my life and you know it makes me feel better. I meditate as well. I have a very holistic diet. I have Crohn's Disease along with paranoid schizophrenia. So eating a healthy diet is really important. I try to drink herb teas and stuff like that I am doing every day. I am involved in the church I go to. I am not involved like I used to be, but I go to Cathedral Church. I go every Sunday and the community there is very accepting of me. It is good to be back with that. So I have a pretty balanced life right now.

*KE:* In your experiences, did you ever encounter discrimination or stigma? If yes, please describe.

*AM:* Well discrimination before I went into AMHI, I felt that at times. People recognize me as kind of a homeless person because for a period I was and I had a room at the Y for a couple of years. Sometimes when I was in certain places and I wouldn't really be causing a problem. The police would just come up to me, you know, they would ask me to leave places or just to move along and I really wouldn't be causing a problem. I don't know, at times it felt like discrimination. But it wasn't like terrible discrimination. I was pretty upset at times and I am sure I was discriminated against in ways, but at other levels, I think it was more of a perceptual thing. People were just doing their jobs.

Since I have been out of AMHI I haven't noticed any discrimination or felt really stigmatized that struck any kind of nerve that just really angered me. One of the great things that I have done since I have been out of AMHI is overcome a lot of that stigma and a lot of that has to do with joining the recovery classes at Amistad and taking such an active role in my recovery that I am comfortable with my illness and taking medications. That has been very positive.

*KE:* That is sort of what I want to talk about next. I want to know what recovery means to you and what was your recovery process like?

AM: Okay, recovery to me is something very personal and intimate and it is a real gift that I think it takes opening up to and allowing it to happen. Recovery is growth; it is growth and accepting. My recovery process has been steady. Since I got back on my medication, things slowly started getting better. I was getting along with everybody at AMHI, including Dr. Cox. I came out of AMHI into Shalom's House on Forest Avenue for a couple of months, a month and a half and then I joined an art class, a recovery class here. People were very accepting of me. I started to find a sense of humor in my recovery, so I can joke about my time working for the CIA and they weren't paying me and working for Colin Powell, you know. I find that one of the things in my recovery is I found a lot of humor. But my recovery has been consistent and it has gone from just getting my basic needs back to now thriving in the community again and taking on a job, working on a very big and important project.

Getting accepted into program in something that I am passionate about, physical health and physical fitness, opening up to new friends, doing a lot of things that I enjoy, having fun. Recovery is there and I reminded myself this last week, "I am still in recovery", because I think there is a tendency for us to want to be, we want to be further along. But for me I want to be self-sufficient, totally. I want, I want that stuff, but I am not there today and the steps that I am taking are very important. One of the biggest parts that I haven't talked about in my recovery is I do a lot of work with the Department of Vocational Services with Maine Medical Center, the vocational planning and career planning and job development stuff. That has been a very powerful part of my recovery, because I am now seeing that I am going to become self-sufficient. I am going to do some of the things I want to do and achieve some of my dreams, maybe all of them. But I don't have to do it all today.

What I am doing now is sufficient and I have to honor myself, honor this time and accept it. I think of recovery not just with mental health, but with my Crohn's Disease, which is a physical problem that I had before. Recovery is a process that I feel only works for me if I have some kind of something methodical and organized to center it around.

I love to use my intuition and I love to use some emotional healing, but I think it is really important for recovery to have some kind of organization to it. In the recovery class at Amistad we talked about different issues—just what is recovery to managing symptoms, how males are influenced by culture to be the men we are today, achievements influence on us and all of these different things, wellness recovery action plans, and working on them. Mary Ellen Copeland has developed those. We worked on developing one, putting together a WRAP tool kit—the things that we need to do to take care of ourselves. So I get to do those things at home and share them with others.

So my recovery has been a very supportive recovery, and it has been a very consistent recovery and I am now starting to achieve stability. My recovery is taking the part now that I am recovering my life skills, I am a summa cum laude graduate. I graduated with highest honors, I received the outstanding senior award in 1999 from the University of Southern Maine. For a while there I thought maybe that was just some fluke in my life, but now as I am working, taking on a job, using my skills, that is a positive. Now recovery is taking on, I am getting my life back, my power. Taking my power back, going forward and I am going to be able to normalize, which I think is important. I think being with others, whether they have a mental illness or not, is very

important and it is healthy. So that is definitely one of my goals. So recovery is consistent, stable, and I am aware of it. Take some time, get going and all of the sudden “oh yeah, it is okay, I am still in recovery.” I slept a little bit late today; I didn’t meet that goal. But give myself time and even later on maybe if I just ever find myself out of this stage of recovery, I will still be recovering.

*KE:* What was your hardest obstacle or challenge to overcome in that recovery process?

*AM:* Well my hardest obstacle really is a lot of what I have been talking about. When I started getting better at AMHI, I realized oh my God I am 30; I will be 31. I became 31 at AMHI. Before I was ill, when I was 27, they were writing newspaper articles about me in the Portland Press Herald. Bill Nemitz wrote how amazing I did at USM as an undergraduate, great undergraduate research, presented at professional conferences, and now I am 31, I have spent a couple of months in the Cumberland County Jail and five months and ten days at AMHI. I haven’t worked in three years. I really don’t work for the FBI and that is reality. I thought I would have money. I was receiving SSDI, which I have to get reinstated and so very, very traumatic. So I felt responsibility and my hardest obstacle overcoming the feeling that I have to get it all done today and that I will be okay. I now feel as I have moved on, coming up on a year being out of AMHI. September 19 will be my year anniversary. I have big plans to go out with my mother and a good friend that day for lunch. But it is simply getting myself to realize that I will be okay and if I take a huge step forward I can do that, but that doesn’t mean like, well, it is like I can decide to do something, but that doesn’t mean that I am not going to be able to do something else.

I felt a lot of pressure in AMHI when I started getting better and as I came out to take care of my life and how am I going to ever become self-sufficient, independent, do something that is fulfilling, worthwhile. I really worked a lot with vocational work and it has been the obstacle to get my perception back to not feeling like I have to have it all in control today. As I continue to take on small parts, and that I am powering myself, and oh I will be all right. It is going to take me a little bit longer than I originally thought when I was 26. I thought I would be a Ph.D. probably by this year or next year. I don’t even want to become a Ph.D. right now.

But just a side point, but it is going to take me a little bit longer to get where I need to go, where I feel like I will be safe now or after, but to continue to grow and take the steps I need for independence. So overcoming a lot of that anxiety has really been the hardest obstacle, because I tend to get very driven and sensitive.

*KE:* Are you aware that we are in the process of building a new psychiatric hospital up in Augusta to replace AMHI? It is called River View Psychiatric Center. My next question pertains to that.

*AM:* I am because that was going up when I was in AMHI. I thought they were going to build a football stadium.

*KE:* My question is what are your hopes or advice that you would give to the staff at the new River View Psychiatric Center?

*AM:* Continue to be respectful and even be more respectful to patients with mental illness and their perceptions to their reality, even if it might be incorrect to what we normally think of reality. Perceptions are very important to the individual who holds them. I think as part of recovery they will always be important because some of that is true at some levels, and even if it is not it is still meaningful. So there is a tendency to get people stabilized, which makes sense to get people better, so they can take care of their lives again. But I think it is important to honor what people ask and their perceptions and their general well being, or general treatment.

*KE:* Thank you very much Alex for the interview.