

Continuously Consciously Choosing: Relationships in Recovery

Recovery 2.0 Interviews Robert Jameson

Tommy: Welcome to the fall 2013 edition of the Recovery 2.0 Beyond Addiction Conference. My name is Tommy Rosen. I'm your host and it is indeed a pleasure for me to interview Robert Jameson. Let's do that again. I'm your host Tommy Rosen and it is indeed a pleasure for me to interview Robert Jameson. Robert is a licensed marriage family therapist with nearly three decades of experience helping individuals and couples navigate all the trials of life. He's been himself in recovery for 27 years. He's the author of the CD Ani Hu Empathy with God. It's an hour long meditation with chanting to drop people in to that deep place of being with their true self. And he wrote The Keys to Joy-Filled Living which provides a treasure trove of information that Robert has learned in his 27 years of work with others. Robert, thank you so much for taking the time to share your wisdom and experience with the Recovery 2.0 audience. Welcome.

Robert: Well, thank you, Tommy. It's great to be here and it's great to see you as well.

Tommy: Robert, I'm going to let people in on a secret between us that you are one of the angels in my life and have been for I guess maybe I met you maybe 10 or 11 years ago.

Robert: Sounds about right.

Tommy: Yes and I speak for my wife, Kia, as well. You've counseled us through our marriage really for the last 10 years and have provided us with so much critical and key information which allowed us to get through hurdles that I'm not sure we would have gotten through without your support.

Robert: That touches me deeply. It's been a joy to share and loving with you guys. So thank you.

Tommy: Thank you. So we go through life, Kia and I, and we encounter a lot of different people and they will make the mistake of putting our relationship up on a pedestal. And they will forget for a moment because we share a lot of love with each other...

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: And we are very affectionate with each other and after 10 years of marriage and 13 years of being together, people I think find that very peculiar.

Robert: Yeah. Yeah. Well, it's the nicest thing and the work that you guys have done and the loving within yourselves and within each other.

Tommy: Yes. Well, thank you. When people say to us and I want to start with our interview here, people will say to us, "You know, to what do you attribute this?" and your name is always going to come up for us and we cite a couple of different little tools, little gifts that you've given us. I want to start with a discussion of this wonderful phrase "continuously consciously choosing."

Robert: Oh yes, yes.

Tommy: Which has been a profound teaching for us. Really, really profound and I think we can—we'll relate everything we talk about right back to recovery from addiction but I want to sort of start there and let's see where this conversation goes.

Robert: Okay. Yeah it is one of those things, you know, of course they don't teach us how to have a healthy loving long-term relationship in high school so a lot of times we learn through trial and error. And one thing that often are shown to the media is that we fall in love and then behind that is the implication that we're always in love. But it's not the case. What I discovered is that in order for us to have that healthy, loving, long-term relationship, we have to continuously consciously choose to fall in love. It's a conscious choice. If we look at falling in love from a non-romantic point of view, let's say I look at that woman and my self-talk is "Oh God, she's so beautiful. She's so smart. I love her. Oh she's so amazing." So I really program the computer to fall in love with her. And then I do. Of course, I'm with her for a while and then I say, "She's doing that again. How many times, that stupid bitch. I hate her." Right. And then I program the computer to fall out of love with her. And then I do. So in that healthy, loving, long-term relationship, we have to—and I use those words very often—but we have to continuously consciously choose to fall in love. We keep choosing to fall in love and that keeps that relationship very alive and vibrant and exciting which I'm really happy you and Kia are doing that.

Tommy: Yes and with regards to, I mean, quite frankly, it sounds a lot like the act of an individual continuously consciously choosing to remain or decide to remain in recovery.

Robert: Absolutely. It's very the same thing. It's kind of like the program is addicting at the time and really what we're choosing—what are we choosing at the time or are we choosing our sobriety and we're also choosing to feel because in my mind the advantage of being clean and sober so I get to feel. Sometimes we don't like our feelings but that is a conscious choice to feel. And in order to feel, I do need to be clean and sober and it is an ongoing choice. Like you said, I've been on recovery for 27 years and it doesn't come in my head "I want to use like I did in the earlier days" but every once in a while, it's like, "Hmm, it's a hot day. A Dos Equis sounds

pretty good.” So there is a conscious choice, “I’m feeling good. Why do I want to numb this out?” I don’t want to continue to be alive and awake in my life. So that would be the conscious choice.

Tommy: Now when a person acts out in any addictive way, so drugs, alcohol, food, sex, money, relationships, gambling, whatever the thing is, are they automatically lowering their level of awareness by engaging in an addictive behavior?

Robert: I look at addiction in an interesting way in that an addiction is there’s a place here—let’s say I’ve been doing it on the screen, so on this side of this wall here, it’s an invisible wall, I have consciousness and feeling. When I cross over to this side, I don’t have consciousness and feeling. All I’m focused on is my drug of choice. Now that could be drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, whatever it is, it doesn’t really matter. That’s what I’m focused on so I’ve entered in to a bubble and I don’t feel any more. I’m going for that. Don’t get in my way. I’ll walk over you. Right. Then at some point, I have the drug, I have the experience. At some point, I’ll pop out of the bubble again and I’ll feel, sometimes with great remorse from what I just said or did. And the feelings again I don’t like. So guess what, I have to pop back in to the bubble for my drug of choice. So in that bubble, I’m not thinking or feeling. Now is that a lower vibration? Well, if we back up a bit, as humans I think we need bubbles. Now there are certain bubbles that takes us up, certain bubbles that take us down. I enjoy meditation and I enjoy nature and those are maybe my addiction today but those addictions take me up. They probably are the higher vibration than me going in to a club and putting in some alcohol or drug. But if you look at the bubble concept, so what do I want to be addicted to? In some way, if I change the word to addiction, it really is called a discipline. I’m disciplined. I have strong discipline to do my spiritual practice or I have a strong discipline to go drug or high.

Tommy: That’s interesting. You could probably intersperse the word discipline with devotion.

Robert: Absolutely. Yes.

Tommy: I’m devoted, you know, what are you going to be devoted to in your life?

Robert: Yes and in that devotion, is that going to take me up or take me down? Now usually you know the bad news/good news is drugs and alcohol work. I mean they do numb us out and we have a good time. I mean that’s why we do it.

Tommy: Right.

Robert: The sad news is it has a diminishing return and then now my new master is taking me down versus taking me up.

Tommy: Right. I talk a lot about—I have a definition of addiction that might be different from yours. I'd like to gauge yours. Mine is any behavior you continue to do despite the fact it brings negative consequences in to your life. So I wouldn't consider necessarily your meditation practice, I wouldn't put it under my definition of addiction. How would you look at addiction?

Robert: I would agree with you with that. By the way, I just put that out to place in there because I realized that as humans, we're all looking for a bubble.

Tommy: Yeah.

Robert: And it's seen as a negative thing because it's usually associated with a negative behavior. Truth is it's a human behavior.

Tommy: Right.

Robert: It's my choice point. Am I going to choose something that's going to serve me or hurt me?

Tommy: Now I want to get back to couples a little bit.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: Would you say that in 27 years of practice, you've seen a lot of couples come to your office?

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: And some of those couples I imagine are coming to see you because they want to get out of a relationship?

Robert: Uh-hmm.

Tommy: Or are they people trying to figure out how to get in to their relationship or...?

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: ... or get on the same page?

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: So a lot of different scenarios. I imagine many couples come to you and you would or they would call themselves or you would look at them and say, “Oh they are struggling with addiction.”

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: Would you say that most people that make it to your office are struggling with addiction on some level or another? Or put another way...

Robert: That’s an interesting...

Tommy: Would you say that most people in the world are struggling with addiction in one way or another?

Robert: I would probably, yeah, I probably would have to suggest that’s probably true and I’m throwing it in food with that. I’m throwing in television with that. So yes. Because again—I remember years ago, Bradshaw said 98% of the families out there are dysfunctional. People go, “Oh my God.” But when you really start to look at it, normal isn’t healthy. And so a lot of couples are coming in with some addictive pattern. Now I’m using it as they’re doing things in their relationship that is creating pain and yet they’re incapable of doing it differently. In fact, I was just seeing a couple here this morning and they were fighting, getting in to negative pattern and so it’s like I ask them, “Is that taking you to a loving and intimate place the way you’re going about that?” The answer of course is no. But they were actually incapable of changing that until—you often hear me say first step to change is awareness. You can’t change anything until I’m aware. So part of my job is to bring that point of awareness that the pattern that you’re doing is taking you in a painful direction versus the loving direction. Then it’s like, “Okay, thank you for showing that. But how do I do it differently?” And again, that would be part of the fun of this work but...

Tommy: Yes. And I’m thinking now you’re making me—you’re reminding me of another gift that you’ve given us which is—and I think obviously for me, I’m a Gemini, right? I like to communicate and that’s one of my strengths.

Robert: Yes. Yes.

Tommy: You’ve helped us to communicate in a way to each other that maybe wasn’t self evident. So I think a lot of people both individuals who are struggling with addiction have a miscommunication going on with themselves.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: And then people, couples, let's just say they're in recovery or they're struggling in some way are in a communication or miscommunication, like that's a major, major problem.

Robert: It is huge.

Tommy: So one part of the path of recovery is going to be the clean up your conversation with yourself and also with the people around you.

Robert: Yes. It's kind of like there's two levels. One is how do I change myself in a healthy loving way and how do I make a request the change of you in a healthy loving way and again most people don't know how to do that. And so they do it in a destructive way. Most of us as humans, whatever you or anyone does, we're moving away from pain towards pleasure. As crazy behavior that we look out there, if you track it and you talk to them, they're doing it to avoid pain and experience pleasure. So in most of us, most societies and religions use pain as a tool to motivate you not to do a behavior. It's effective but it has tremendous, tremendous returns because it creates auto neurosis, that harsh critical pair that yells and screams, "You're so bad. You're no good. You're no good." And then we do that to ourselves. So how I talk to myself and my harsh and cruel and critical to myself, if I am which most people are because that's how they've been trained and their parents were trained in there, so it's a generational thing that's been passed down through time, to highlight that, you refer the statement "going to beat the hell out of the child." So if you listen to that, if I beat the hell out of you, what's left is heaven. And that was the concept. Spare the rod, spoil the child because they had to beat the hell out of the child. There's something inherently wrong. Thank God, we're shifting that and we're realizing, no, there's no bad and that we just need to love and nurture this gift of God, this beautiful thing and this thing blossoms." But you have to understand that's a revolutionary transformational shift of consciousness. The same thing in terms of relationships, how do we love and nurture the beauty in each other and then within ourselves. So if I go back, if I have been trained by a parent who believes I need to beat the hell out of me, the way I'm going to talk to myself is "I'm going to beat the hell out of me." That of course is not—I mean it's effective in some mode but again it has that diminishing returns. Part of what we need to learn is how do I change my behavior in a loving and nurturing way and then how do I change your relationship in a healthy loving way, whether you're my partner or my co-worker or globally.

Tommy: Sure. Love it. Well, I'm thinking now, you're making me think about my father. I write a bit about my dad and I speak a fair amount about my father and...

Robert: Dad, right.

Tommy: Yeah, oh absolutely. My mother as well and she'll come up later on I'm sure but I've written a blog called—and it's very similar to a blog you sent me about thoughts in your head and how they get there.

Robert: Oh yes. That's good. Yes.

Tommy: So I wrote a blog about basically a curse that my father used to say to me. And I think that this was brought to light actually in your office with Kia. He used to say to me, "When you're 40 years old, you won't have a pot to piss in."

Robert: Yeah, I remember.

Tommy: And that was like—you know, his way of expressing his concern that my financial life wouldn't work itself out and then I would have to deal with some of the challenges and the pains that he had around that issue.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: He really meant to love me and support me and lift me up but those words as negative words really stuck with me as a curse.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: Now I didn't realize it until sort of around 40 years old when I started...

Robert: Where's the pot?

Tommy: Right. Here's the pot that I can piss in because—I started thinking like the truth was that I have had a very different life than my dad. And I had had abundance in many ways. And even if there was some challenges around finances at various periods of my life, I was doing much better than he had been fearful of me doing when I turned 40 years old.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: Nonetheless, those words stuck with me, challenged me and I feel like they diminished my sense of self worth to some extent.

Robert: Oh how can they not?

Tommy: Right. So I'm seeing obviously as an adult, one has to take responsibility for that. I can't blame my father any longer for those words that there's going to have to be a process of healing from that curse.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: For people who are watching this, and I'm talking about you people in recovery out there who have struggled with your own curses, whether they're put there by your own words in your head, or put there by somebody else, Robert, what can we do to change the curses that had been told to us? How can we turn them in to blessings or affirmations?

Robert: Well, I'm glad you're bringing the curse thing up. It is really huge. And it's kind of like another word I often use is the vow. We often will make a vow, "I will never" or "I will always" and sometimes we make it ourselves. Sometimes, a parent will put it on us. "You're stupid or you don't know how to manage money," and so the first step to change is always going to be awareness. So now you're away okay, my dad put this thing. He's saying his intent was to motivate you to make a lot of money so you'd be secure. That was his intent. Thank you, dad. However, his method of doing that was create fear in your belly but what it really did is it lowered your self esteem. So first step to change will be awareness. So okay, so there's awareness. I don't need to judge you. I might need to go to his intent. Okay, thanks, dad, for that. Then how do I—next question is well, how do I—first, I might need to rescind or cancel that. I no longer a poverty consciousness. I know how to manage money. And then working with affirmations is a powerful tool by the way. I know you know a lot about it and stuff and I find one of the more powerful languaging that I have people use is that I am choosing word. So I am choosing to be abundant. I am choosing to manage money. I am choosing to be free. I am choosing to love myself. I am choosing whatever. I am choosing—I like it. A lot of people use I'm worthy or just I am, that's not quite enough if you really track it because I could be worthy of making money but I'm not doing anything about it. I might want a lot of money. That's a mental concept but I'm choosing to be abundant, that takes me in to the world to do whatever it takes to manifest what it is I'm choosing. I am choosing to love myself is kind of the same process. So I would have people just start to work with I am choosing statement that counters sometimes 180 of that curse and sometimes it might have more than that. And then put it on the refrigerator, put it in their bathroom mirror. I sometimes, this may sound strange to you, put on the windshield of your car, so right across the windshield as you're driving down the road. Because when we're driving, we drop at the [awful] state, we're real susceptible to subliminal programming. Sun comes in. [0:20:58]. Now it's really powerful. Another good place is the bottom of your TV screen because you know again 30 seconds gets us all go out and buy some kind of junk food.

Tommy: Right.

Robert: Why not program ourselves? Right on the bottom of the TV screen, "I am choosing dadadadada." And as you're watching, you're going to drop in an [awful] state, you won't see it what is going in. I mean we can start to passively program yourself to the direction you want to go.

Tommy: I love it. I love the concept of passive programming. That's going to be really helpful for the procrastinators among us.

Robert: Yes. Yes. And the computer screen by the way will be another good [0:21:37] screens but other than that. It's very powerful.

Tommy: Now the same concept I'm going to apply to couples...

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: Which is this concept of curses but how about the unspoken ones? For example, so I grew up and here's what I learned if the sum total of my understanding of relationship between man and woman, father and mother for me, if it was I learned from my mother and father, it would be like this, just objectively. Two people meet. They fall in love. They have children. They become disappointed with each other. They hurt each other in variety of ways very badly. They really play in to each other's vulnerabilities.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: They separate. They never heal from it. And they carry bitterness, the bitterness of loss and betrayal. And then they die.

Robert: That's good.

Tommy: If my lesson from this world is going to come from my parents, that's what that pretty much was. They were never able to reconcile their differences and they carried it all the way until they both died. And you could say if you track it as you say, you look at the illnesses that they died from, and you would see that there's a connection which goes all the way back to that heartbreak that they felt there and in another places in their life. So there's a curse there. You could say, okay, children have grown up in this challenging situation watching their parents not necessarily exhibit love and compassion and forgiveness and these kinds of traits, but rather bitterness and anger and gripping and holding on to. That's like a curse.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: Unspoken.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: And a lot of people in recovery are dealing with these very challenging family dynamics where they've seen not the best circumstances.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: How can we begin to—I know it’s going to come down to awareness.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: But I think this is such a critical piece of recovery and a critical piece of getting in to relationship with another person, whether that be man to woman, woman to man, man to man, woman to woman, whatever your deal is.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: Your significant other is going to be on the receiving end of the collective sort of blessings and curses that you’ve gathered.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: True?

Robert: Absolutely.

Tommy: Okay. So what are we going to do here? What do I do?

Robert: That’s a beautiful question. Let’s see if I can kind of get it down. First, I want to give a concept that would give us a framework with which we can start to do a shift. And so the concept will be something I call a mirror concept. There’s two levels of it.

Tommy: What’s it called?

Robert: The mirror.

Tommy: The mirror concept.

Robert: Yeah. M-I-R-R-O-R.

Tommy: Okay.

Robert: Okay. There’s surface level. There’s deep level. On the surface level, it goes like this, “What I like about you is what I like about me. What I don’t like about you I don’t like about me. It seems pretty obvious except when we were fighting, it doesn’t count. [0:25:07].” Well, that’s the mirror concept, right? But then there’s a deeper level of the mirror concept which is “The relationship I have with you is a mirror of the relationship I have with myself. So if I have a hard, cruel, critical relationship with me, I’m going to have a harsh, cruel, critical relationship with you. If I have a loving, nurturing relationship with me, I’m going to have a

loving, nurturing relationship with you.” Because if you want to be harsh, cruel and critical, I’ll say, “I’m sorry, I won’t let you in because this relationship is too precious.” This is your soul mate by the way. This is the one you’ve been looking for. This is the one you’ll be with until death do you part. All these others out here are just reflections or projections of this inner relationship.

Tommy: Well, I got to stop you there because that’s an incredible concept which redefines soul mate.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: So please just hit on that for a moment then continue. So the soul mate, my soul mate is me and my soul.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: Oh, I just love it. I just love it.

Robert: Yes. Yes.

Tommy: Okay.

Robert: And all of a sudden, it starts to fall in place, doesn’t it?

Tommy: Yes.

Robert: That’s who we’re looking for. This one here.

Tommy: So the lover or the other is a reflection, could be a reflection of this.

Robert: The relationship you have with your partner is a relationship you have with yourself. Now let me take another step because it’s like, where did this relationship come from? Let’s say I have a harsh, cruel, critical relationship with me which most of us do until we do our work. Well, where did this come from? If you go back in time, you see this little baby boy and mom and dad outside loving and disciplining that little child. At some point, they’re gone but they are inside of us. We have inner mother and inner father. And so they’re talking to me. I’m loving and disciplining myself the way my mother and father loved and disciplined me. So if I love you, I’m going to love and discipline you the way my mother and father loved and disciplined me. Got it?

Tommy: Got it.

Robert: So Bradshaw, John Bradshaw did some good work, by the way. He would say that we need to repair the inner child which we do but from my perspective, we really do because we repair the inner mother and the inner father which in turn repairs the inner child. So until I have this loving, nurturing relationship with myself, and then the way I discipline myself is loving and nurturing and the way I love and discipline you is the same. Now we have this love fest back and forth here and here but it comes from healing the inner child. And you know what, a lot of people in recovery have had horrific early childhood parenting and part of that work is getting a hold of that. How do I heal that inner mother and that inner father? It's not to blame them. Because I know they did it because they love me. They love me so much, right? That's why they did it. And then again, if I love you, I'm going to do again repeating myself, I'm going to love you the way they love me which is horrific.

Tommy: Right. Right.

Robert: Therefore we divorced.

Tommy: Right. Right. You know, I can tell you that on the point of compassion for our parents, I can tell you that I would not have wanted either of my parent's childhoods.

Robert: No.

Tommy: So I know that addictions and behaviors and actions, they're not coming from nowhere.

Robert: Right.

Tommy: There are reasons why people behave the way that they do and getting to a deeper level of compassion and forgiveness with people is really to see that wow, you know, they've been through a great battle also.

Robert: They have. You know, compassion is one of those neat words. I love the word compassion. If you break it down, it's common passion. And if you look up the word passion, it means to suffer. So I can have compassion because I have suffered. And as I have suffered, then I have compassion for others. So it's an interesting place when you start to look at it and people who don't have compassion usually haven't experience that deep level of suffering.

Tommy: Common suffering.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: Amazing. I've not heard that. I love that.

Robert: Yeah.

Tommy: Thank you.

Robert: You're welcome.

Tommy: Another, just off the top, another gift that you've given Kia and I over the years was a beautiful concept of praying at the same altar.

Robert: Oh yes.

Tommy: Praying at the same altar. That's a very powerful statement and I don't get the sense that you meant it religiously.

Robert: No, not necessarily. There's a double meaning I'm sure with my suggestion but...

Tommy: Right.

Robert: I know spirit is important for you guys.

Tommy: Yeah. Can you speak a bit about what that would mean when you would say to a couple the importance of looking at whether you pray at the same altar or not? In other words, does that mean that if you have one person who's a practicing Christian and another person who's a practicing Jew or whatever strange combination of religious backgrounds or spiritual backgrounds are coming together, that they can't have a loving, wonderful marriage?

Robert: No. So let me change the languaging a bit.

Tommy: Sure.

Robert: I'll expand it.

Tommy: Please.

Robert: And I'm going to come in sideways to give you a concept which will answer that. And so what I'm going to look at is the issue of control. And sometimes couples will come in and they're fighting and so what I'll have them do is I'll have them stand up and grab hands and say, "Okay, you go that direction and you go that direction." And there's a spike going on, right? And so okay, okay, stop. And sometimes couples really want to show who's being in control, right? But then I have them stand next to each other, holding hands, facing the same direction and I instruct them to walk over here basically the same speed. So then they do. They walk that direction which is all of a sudden a nice thing. Okay, so now what I discovered is

that it's not an issue of control. We all want to be in control all the time. It's an issue of direction. If we're going in different directions, we have a problem. If we're going the same direction basically at the same time, we don't have a problem. If you're running and I'm walking, we would. So there, the same direction is the same altar. So why are we on the planet? What's your mission statement? Why are you alive? So maybe I'm a born again Christian. You're an orthodox Jew but we still want to go to God together. Our languaging might be a little different from here to there but if we're going on the same direction, you know, it's still the same altar. Now some people would probably fight with that by the way but in terms of the languaging, it's got to be exactly the same. But Shakespeare said, "A rose by the other name is still rose." I don't care what we call God.

Tommy: Yeah. Now, Robert can you speak a little bit, just give a little background on your own recovery like I'm not sure I've ever actually heard the story of how you first got sober, what that was like. If you wouldn't mind showing some of that.

Robert: Sure. No, not at all. Well both my parents were alcoholics, by the way. So I learned that if you're happy, you drink. If you're sad, you drink. If it's Sunday, it's a drink. If it's Saturday, it's a drink. If it's a holiday, it's a drink. Whatever it is, that's what you do. And so I think probably my first drink was probably when I was about seven years old. I was drinking out of a cup of beer. And there's always parties and there's always booze and beer leftover and I was always tipping it, you know, because it felt good. And so that was my life. And my parents were perfect alcoholics by the way. If anything, they didn't go to jail and that's not by in terms of all the other levels, they did it. My mom died at 52. She went across the hallway and drank some vodka and did not wake up. So she did a good job. So was what I was raised in. But I was also during my teenage years, I remember growing up, my high school graduation or the senior party, I got really bummed and I don't remember. That was probably my first really black out experience and then I was in the coast guard and I was down in the war rooms drinking when I was in the age of 18. And I certainly did New Orleans well. Then somewhere in there marijuana showed up. And I realized that I liked that much better than alcohol. In fact, I had an aversion to alcohol because I saw how painful and the beatings and the insanity and I didn't want that. So I thought pot is cool. And so that really became my drug of choice and I shifted more from the alcohol to the marijuana. And I did a good job of that and I remember probably my bottom, I actually got into yoga meditation at a very early age and marijuana supported that because I can meditate better and really find the face of God and all that wonderful stuff. And what I ended up where I—actually, before I did this work, I was an English teacher and at that time in my life, I couldn't buy a job. I don't know why. I ended up, my parents were managing some part of the building and they had a storage room up on the top floor and that's where I had a bed and I had my meditation rug and about two changes of clothes. And so that was probably my bottom. Then I met a woman and she said—she was in to her spiritual practice [as I]—"I can't be with anyone who's smoking pot." I said, "Okay, well, you know, do I choose her or my pot? I chose my pot of course."

Tommy: I'm getting good at it. Why do that?

Robert: That was my best friend.

Tommy: That's right.

Robert: And then I remember I went to some psychic or something and he said, "Oh my god, you do hallucinogens or something. Oh it feels sticky and broken and your third eye is all clouded over." I said, "Oh, whoa, what do you mean?" And so I realized that maybe I need to do something different. And so because of her and him, I decided to get clean and sober. And that was probably the beginning of that nice veils. It's like almost day like oh, I can see more. I can feel more. And so that would be the shift.

Tommy: What was your—did you involve yourself in 12 step program meetings or did you go to a rehab to get some extra help? What was your method?

Robert: I didn't do the rehab actually even though that was kind of a low bottom. I was kind of a high bottom. My parents had—I had actually, I did an intervention on my parents to get them clean and sober and so I was very aware of AA and the program. So I did a little bit, not a whole lot I think later down the road, I did more but at those initial phases, I didn't do that much. Probably I'd say after about six or seven years, I did more with the program. I was always involved with it on the peripheral but that was being my...

Tommy: Well, it's interesting for me just because I'm not someone who I think could have gotten sober the way that you got sober. What would you attribute the—where do you find the strength from to change so drastically?

Robert: Well, remember you said that we move away from pain towards pleasure? So I was in a lot of pain really. Even though I was meditating and all the right things, but I was searching and I couldn't find the answer. And so I wanted an answer so badly and it got clear to me that what I was doing wasn't working. And I needed to do something different and I saw my parents and I vowed, there's the vow, I'll never be like them. And so even though I was different drug of choice of course but I was. And so probably the pain not to be like them and then when I started to have the awakening like I said the [veils], and I started to feel good and somewhere in there, guess what? I got a job. So things started to work. In the program, they talk about the miracle started to just show up. And so the miracles were showing up and it's not that it wasn't that I didn't want to go back and get stoned again. That was a calling. But I knew I didn't want to go back to the pain.

Tommy: Amazing. Did you have an angel in human form?

Robert: I would probably say that woman who said, “I’m not going to be with you unless you’re sober or unless you’re off drugs.”

Tommy: Yeah.

Robert: I can’t be with you because it doesn’t match my spiritual program.

Tommy: Obviously, you got enough momentum to stay on that path and now here we are 27 years later.

Robert: Yeah.

Tommy: And it’s funny hearing your story. There’s so much that’s come up in our discussion over the years about 12 steps and obviously I have such a huge reverence for the 12 steps even though I recognize it as in some ways an incomplete program. It’s enough of a program to lift anyone up out of a cute addiction.

Robert: Absolutely.

Tommy: I love that. As it did for me.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: Well, amazing. Well, I’m so glad that you’re here, Robert.

Robert: Thank you. Yeah. I have to say that I don’t think my wife would mind but my wife is also sober. So we have a sober relationship as well.

Tommy: Okay.

Robert: And so we share the program with that as well which is really quite beautiful. I’m really happy to be able to—we often say, that’s so nice. We get to be sober together. We get to be awake. It’s a gift.

Tommy: Robert, I want to talk to you about Keys to a Joyful-Filled Living.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: ... which is the book that you wrote and I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about the inspiration and what it’s born out of what you’ve expressed.

Robert: Okay. Great. Well, you know, years ago, when I was doing therapy with people, I would sometimes cite about depression or anxiety or all kinds of stuff and then send them out and then create what I talk about. So I started writing on little hand outs. So I talk about some subject and that. I'd give it to them and I help them remember the process. So it would carry on beyond just that hour. And then what happened is people kept saying, "You know, I got a folder full of your stuff." And they've come to me and said, "God, you got to write a book on this stuff." I did. I had a file folder here, lots of stuff. And so finally, I said, "Okay, I'm going to—I'll do that." So I sat down and organize it in some kind of logical order and then expand on those concepts and that was the birth of the Keys to Joy-Filled Living.

Tommy: And how have you structured the book. Is it a prescriptive things that you can do, a program that you can follow? How have you structured it?

Robert: Well, I want to do it in a couple of ways. One is you can start from the beginning and it does build, if there's information and then kind of exercise or experience so it becomes more—I often tell people "Don't believe everything I tell you. Check it out." And so even in the book, I suggest that don't believe this but work it for a bit. If it works for you, great. Use it. If it doesn't, you have to tune it up. So it builds on that beginning level then it kind of goes to a more deeper places I'd say. So it has that but also people would say, "Well, I'm just curious about depression. What is that?" So they can go in and look at the depression or relationships. How do I end the relationship in a healthy loving ways? So they can go in and just look at that. And then some people, brought in [her] book. I love this. I wish I had taken a picture of it. It was all full and over, bent up and torn up and little yellow spots all over the place. It was like ma, this woman really worked this book. And now it's so exciting to see. And so it can be that way too. And it's something that, I don't know by you, but I often forget what I know and so people can kind of go back and look at it again. "Oh yeah, yeah." I forgot that piece. So it has a lot of ways to playing with it.

Tommy: Thank you. Well, you just hit on something. It's so personal to me right not that I have to repeat it. We sometimes forget what we know.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: Oh my God, I'm in the middle of trying, not trying, I'm writing my book and I'm handing it in pretty soon.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: And I get reminded of things that as I say, "Oh, oh. I was supposed to write that. I was supposed to write that."

Robert: Yeah. Yeah. Exactly. And because it's gone. The interesting thing years ago they said you know the bliss is in the now so we're supposed to be present which is true but what they didn't tell us that when we're really in the moment, there's no past. I don't remember what I did yesterday. I have to go back and work on that a lot and so then all of a sudden like you said like you write in your book, and oh yeah, that piece, and if you don't write it down, it's gone.

Tommy: Got you. Now interestingly, if we could quickly speak to one moment and then we're going to end our time together but this thing about memory is actually an [inching] topic and since we're in it for a moment, with regards to addiction, somehow it would appear that we have an incredibly selective memory and especially in early recovery like they talk about in the big book of Alcoholics Anonymous for example, they talk about a mental fog.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: ... that settles in. You literally forget why was it I'm not supposed to drink? Why was it I'm not supposed to take this drug or like why was it I'm not supposed to act out this way or that way? It's literally almost like you can't access those memory banks for some reason. Can you speak to that for a moment?

Robert: Yeah. There's a thing that actually I do address in my book that's called—I call it the law of reversibility. It's an interesting thing that anytime we begin or end a process, it kind of shows up and it shows up real big time in terms of an addiction. So I'll give you the numbers and I'll go back and explain it and it will help explain why that shows up and then how to work with it. So the numbers are like here let's say I'm going to quit smoking cigarettes today. Let's just do that because it's kind of more gentle. It's not an easy thing to do but it's more gentle in a lot of ways. So I gird up my loins. I'm going to quit. Then three days from here, man, I'm going to want to smoke a cigarette so bad and all kinds of stuff and I'll say, get through day 3, it will lighten up. It won't go away, come away. One week from here, again, same thing happens. Then I have three days and one week, three weeks, three months, six months, one year, three years, six years. It cycles around in those times where I would want to use my drug of choice so bad and life would be screwed. I need, you know... So in my mind, spirit has a weird sense of humor. It comes in and ask the question, "Are you sure? Are you sure? Are you sure you learned what you needed to learn?" Come on, check it out again. Come on, it's okay." It comes in and so people are aware that's the timeline that's going to be sitting on them really hard and spirit is asking them "Are you sure?" And the answer is of course yes, I learned what I needed to learn from that. And so that's the fog that comes over and it is very intense. You can almost set your clock to it.

Tommy: So in the law of reversibility, you're being given an opportunity to reverse a stance that you've taken.

Robert: Yes. Yes.

Tommy: And you're saying the words you're using is that's coming from spirit, so you're saying it's out of the kindness of the universe's heart that you're being given a chance to go back.

Robert: Yeah. It's called free choice.

Tommy: Free choice.

Robert: Yeah because you know as you and I go through time, we have a choice. Each moment to say, "oh no" or "oh boy." I'm going to be sober or I'm going to use. I'd like to say I'm going to think positive and I'm going to think negative. It doesn't matter. I used to think that okay, from this point forward, I'm going to be positive. Yeah, five minutes later, I was in the shitter, right? It's like what happened? I thought I made that decision. I know. But I'm back in the same place. So that's where it's a continuously consciously choosing to be sober, to stay positive, to stay on focus.

Tommy: Yes. And so what—I'm trying to relate this back to the person who say is a chronic relapse.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: Every time the law of reversibility comes up, they take the chance to go back and learn more in the school of hard knocks.

Robert: They do.

Tommy: And so we don't want them to do that. So what's the answer to that?

Robert: Well the first step to change is always going to be awareness. If I'm aware that day 3 is going to be really hard. One week, three weeks, and we get chips out for newcomers and we give a 30-day chip and then 60, so it's not surprising to build that, you know, he had it down unconsciously giving those chips out almost at those points of the law of reversibility you notice. Kind of magical. But if I know it's coming in, then I'd say, okay, I just need to prepare myself. I might need to do a lot of meetings. I need to hang out with those people who are sober. I need to maybe talk to my sponsor more often. I need to do more of inventory. I just need to prepare because I know it's showing up. So being aware that it would help those people who are relapsing. Like you said, "Why am I not drinking? Everyone else seems to be able to do it. Why can't I?" We do forget.

Tommy: Amazing. Well, I certainly have done my fair share of forgetting over the years and I like to think that as a sincere work in progress, as a law of reversibility keeps coming up in my life, I'm hopefully making the right choices.

Robert: Yes. Yes.

Tommy: I wish that for everybody else as well. Yeah. So Robert, thank you so much for your time and for lending your voice to Recovery 2.0. How can people connect with you be that online or—we want to find out, are you offering retreats or workshops or if somebody wants to consult with you one on one, how do they do that?

Robert: Well, probably the fastest they can go on to my website which is the name of the book thekeystojoyfilledliving.com. And they can access me there. They can email me there. My phone number is on there too and I'm not doing any workshops right now but I'm working with people individually or if they just want to I do like a post on my blogs. Sometimes people respond to that. If they have questions, I'd be more than happy to respond back. So I'm pretty open.

Tommy: Thank you and that's thekeystojoyfilledliving.com.

Robert: Yes.

Tommy: Alright. Well, I know people are going to be coming after you. I know I'm going to be coming after you for your services. Thank you, Robert. I love you so much.

Robert: Thank you and I'm so glad you're doing this work and our hearts go out to all the people who are in recovery. God bless them with miracles.

Tommy: Thank you.