

Holiday Special: Spotlight on Recovery

Introduction

Laura Griffith is in long-term recovery from addiction and the founder and Executive Director of [Recover Wyoming](#). After a 12-year struggle with alcoholism, Laura found recovery during a six-month stay in residential treatment. Shortly after completing treatment, she was offered employment at the Wyoming Department of Health, Behavioral Health Division, where she eventually became the manager for all state-funded substance use disorder and mental health treatment contracts. Laura's vision of recovery support services in her state was, in part, developed through the [Partners for Recovery/Addiction Technology Transfer Center's Leadership Institute's](#) Mission Possible: A.C.T.S. for Self Leadership Program.

Recover Wyoming is a charter member of the [Association of Recovery Community Organizations](#) and Laura is currently a member of the [Faces and Voices of Recovery](#) Board, and is a member of the [Central Rockies ATTC](#) Advisory Committee.

Recover Wyoming created the state's only [Recovery Coach Program](#) and has 12 active coaches, including two family member coaches. One of them is Laura's sister, Lynn, who helped launch Laura's recovery journey. (You'll find out how in the article that follows.) Together, these women guide the development of programs at Recover Wyoming utilizing their close relationship and unique journeys to recovery. They share their story with counseling classes at the University of Wyoming and treatment center family programs.

Laura holds a B.S in Communication and a M.A. in Adult Education from the University of and an M.P.A. from the University of Wyoming.

KEEPING YOUR RECOVERY CANDLE BRIGHT

Laura Griffith
Recover Wyoming

'Tis the season for lighting candles: red, black and green for Kwanzaa, menorah-held ones for Hanukkah's "Festival of Light," candles in an advent wreath for Christmas.

My childhood memories of holiday scenes are enveloped in light; my sisters and I wrapping gifts, squinting at the lights on the tree and warming our toes at the fireplace. Later, the memories fade into shadows—holidays lost to the haze and destruction of addiction. One memory is especially dark. I had been invited to my sister's home to spend Christmas day with my family. "But not if you drink," my sister said. I said I wouldn't, but couldn't keep the promise. In anger and sadness, my sister escorted me out her front door. The day disintegrated

into a blackout drive on a Wyoming highway and a DUI. I woke up the day after Christmas in an unfamiliar jail.

Today, the light of recovery burns brightly in my soul with the fire of gratitude, willingness, and joy. I am a woman in long-term recovery, with 10 years of rekindled holiday magic on my recovery resume.

The holidays can sometimes offer challenges to those of us in recovery. I'd like to offer a few tips as well as a perspective of recovery during this season of light.

Light the flame

Think of your recovery as a lighted candle, a special flame inside. It is your charge during the holidays, as well as every other day of the year, to keep it lit.

I encourage you to think of the flame of your recovery as strong, fueled by your determination and hard work. It is fed by the wax of every hard-fought lesson you have learned along your recovery path. Each lesson is a testament to your innate capacity to move forward.

Remember this, always: nobody but *you* can snuff out your flame, and you can only extinguish it by using or drinking.

Feed the flame

'Tis the season for re-inventing the holidays in a way that suits the new you—the you in recovery. It's the perfect time for discovering new places, new people, new things to do. With a positive mindset, the holidays can be a time of opportunity, and a time when you solidify your new life in sobriety. Maybe it's time to create some new traditions such as gathering with your twelve-step family for an all-day movie marathon, or recruiting some co-workers for a Zumba session.

It's all about awareness. Pay attention to what causes your flame to burn brighter, and what might make it flicker. If being out in the hubbub of the season lights you up, then go. Be among the people in a mall, a place of worship, or maybe at a meeting with others in recovery. If a silent night soothes you, then curl up with a fleece blanket, sip some hot cide, and create a gratitude list.

This can also be a time of discovery of your personal faith. Are there books or traditions you would like to explore? If you don't have a faith community, this may be the time to try out a faith practice. Meditation, yoga, or even a massage may ignite your spirit.

Experiment joyously, but if you feel your flame sputtering, have a plan set up in advance. Your plan might include: calling a recovery coach, friend or other ally; stepping away from an environment or event that feels uncomfortable; and getting thyself to a meeting.

Don't forget: sustaining the flame of your recovery candle is your main obligation—everything else, even family, comes after. Say an exuberant *Yes!* when it serves you, but don't hesitate to say *Thanks, but no thanks*, when it seems a wiser move. Give yourself permission to make choices that build your recovery.

Spread the light

Above all, 'tis the season for sharing. December 21 is the shortest day of the year, with the longest night. The world craves your light always, but especially at this time of year.

What is there to lose by sharing? Absolutely nothing. As Buddha said, "Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared."

There are limitless opportunities to spread the light. Get involved in Recovery Community Organization social activities and invite persons new to recovery to come with you. Serve at a homeless shelter or participate in planning future recovery advocacy efforts. Shovel your neighbor's sidewalk or offer to walk his schnauzer. Look around and the opportunities to serve will appear.

Be a role model to others by displaying the fire of freedom from substance use. This, perhaps more than anything else you do during the holidays, will set your candle blazing. Your recovery candle, joined with others in the Recovery Movement, will help ignite the candles of those who are seeking recovery.

And what could be better than spreading the light?