

## Annual Dinner Keynote Address

Service recipient Jeff Oakes was invited to be the guest speaker at the agency's board dinner in April. His remarks were quite moving and brought many to tears. We wanted to share his recovery story with you:



My name is Jeff Oakes and I am a grateful recovering addict. While attending St. Joseph's rehab center in Saranac Lake, NY in 2009, I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. This was not my first attempt at rehab, but it became the turning point of my long road to recovery.

Upon release from St. Joe's, I chose to go to Grace House here in Auburn because it was the closest to my mom and dad. Grace House proved to be a significant challenge for me. It was hard to conform to the structured living but I did it. Upon my release from Grace House five months later, I moved into my own supported apartment in Auburn.

One day, I was walking down the street on my way to a meeting when a man asked me for a light. Forty-five minutes later, I was getting high again. I was falling into a tailspin fast and hard.

After hitting bottom again and again, I finally committed burglary to get any money I could to support my addiction. This was the first time I stole money from someone other than my parents to support my habit. It is something I never dreamed I would ever do.



At this point, Unity House personnel were bringing my meds to me every day. One morning, there was a knock on the door. I opened it expecting someone from Unity House, but to my surprise, it was two guys wearing trench coats: cops. If they had come five minutes later, I would have been on my way to Syracuse with my \$150 monthly check in hand to buy drugs. The universe only knows where I would have ended up – probably dead.

I was arrested and brought to Cayuga County jail. I begged my lawyer to get me into the drug court program. At my arraignment, I found out I was possibly facing 13 years in prison for burglary. At that moment, I was given the "gift of desperation," as we say in Narcotics Anonymous [Jeff had exhausted all his options and there was nothing left but to surrender].

I ended up sentenced with a 6/5 split, which is six months in jail and five years probation. At this point, my parents went to see Meg at Unity House, who they had established a relationship with, and begged her to let me back into the program.

With the help of Meg, Mary Jo, and Amy at Unity House, upon my release from jail, I was able to return to the Case mansion. I also was granted drug court and from that day on, my life truly began.

Life at the mansion was a relief in a lot of ways. I felt safe there. Lisa and Raven gave me comfort for countless hours, showing me there was a new way to live. I faithfully attended NA meetings, got a sponsor, and started working on the 12 Steps, which I am still doing today. Eventually, I was given my own apartment again and have been clean now for over five years!

I could not have done this without the support of my parents, JoAnn and Marty Oakes, who never gave up on me. Also the support of NA, my support network, and NA's 12 Step program. I am now a sponsor for 14 people and a presenter for "In Our Own Voice" for NAMI [National Alliance for Mental Illness].

I now feel I am living the dream! I want to give a special thanks to Unity House, for all they have done for me and for asking me to share my story with you. Thank you!