

A CLOSER LOOK AT

The Refuge

a Healing Place



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My escape to seek Refuge from a self-imposed confinement of my living hell began on March 28, 2010. I had given out a cry for help and now Refuge was coming for a seemingly endless nightmare that had been following me for years. I was 3 ½ years sober from drugs and alcohol but suffering from a grappling eating disorder, PTSD symptoms, complicated grief, and unresolved Trauma. I was suicidal. I was terrified. I was beyond exhausted, and I deeply hated myself. I felt the same God who had gotten me sober had now abandoned me because I was a terrible person who deserved pain and who did not deserve joy. This was my state of mind when I started my journey at The Refuge.

The Refuge is located in the middle of the Ocala National Forest in Central Florida. A nondescript sign, at the beginning of a long dirt road, marks the entrance; it gives no hint as to the depth of the space that waits beyond or the healing power of the land. We entered the unpaved road that seemed to go on forever. My body and spirit were so broken I could not take in the beautiful setting or the peaceful calm that settles in once you enter the hallowed grounds of The Refuge. The Refuge is on 53 acres of land, nature and wildlife are everywhere. It is very common to spend your days walking around with armadillos, turtles, sandhill cranes, visiting with the horses, and having an alligator sighting on the levy.

As I came to The Refuge sober and did not need to detox, I started groups immediately. The week is comprised of Yoga, Meditation, Community, Caseload Group, Trauma Group, Step Group, and Specialty Breakout Groups tailored for each individual. I also had individual therapy sessions, equine therapy, breathwork, psychodrama, art group, hypnotherapy, somatic experience, and ropes course. The work is very intensive, exhausting, painful, and sometimes terrifying. However, the therapist and staff are the most amazing group of people I have ever encountered. They are filled with such love and kindness that calling each of them God's angels would not be too far of a stretch. Additionally, my peers at The Refuge were also my healers and my heroes. Their bravery and strength would astound you.

This is exactly the type of environment I needed as I entered, what Judy Crane, The Director of The Refuge, calls 'The Black Dot' of treatment. At this point, I had been at The Refuge for about 1 ½ months. I

was working hard on assignments, unraveling the beginnings of some emotional wounds. Due to circumstances outside of my control, on this particular day, I squarely faced my deepest fears, my darkest pain. I finally faced the tremendous guilt, shame, and pain of the death of my father from five years before. I felt indirectly responsible for his death, and I carried those feelings of shame on top of the wounds from both childhood abuse and events that have happened since he died. By encountering the issue of his death, I was facing all my traumas at once, as everything was intertwined.

That day at The Refuge, you could hear me screaming in my therapist office as I disassociated. For the next two months, I walked around with that scream caught in my throat. I slept in my clothes with the lights on. I would rock back and forth in groups, shaking from head to toe. Sometimes I could not shower. Sometimes I could not get to groups. I devoured books to escape the pain. I walked with my head down. But, I was still loved. I was still held. I was still cared for. I was still watched over. I was still safe. This for me was the essence of the healing power of The Refuge.

Part of my therapy was to carry around a baby doll for three months. My therapist taped every negative message I told myself all over this baby doll that included, "I hate you", "You suck", "You're ugly", "You make me sick", "You're rotten", etc. The doll, with her arms sticking straight out, looked crucified. I was horrified. I was required to carry her everywhere, though I did not treat her very well. I would leave her, forget her, and soon she was filthy. This experience clearly demonstrated what my inner thoughts had been outwardly manifesting in my life for years: alcoholism, drug addiction, and eating disorders. I began to be painfully aware that I had deep soul wounds that I needed to fully grieve before I would fully heal. Nonetheless, a treatment team told me it was possible, that I was worth it, and that I would get to the other side of this darkness that surrounded me.

Today, my soul wounds are healed. It was possible; I am certainly worth it; I now live in the light. I feel extremely blessed and grateful to be a Refugee. Thank you, My Loving God, My #1 Angel Herbert Manny Kreiter, The Refuge, and All My Earth Angels. —Dayna K.