Berea Recovery Walk celebrates sober living, embracing challenges ahead

PETER CHAWAGA
CORRESPONDENT

BEREA — After five years of sobriety following a dependence on prescription pain medication, Kimberly Kirby sat at her kitchen island and realized that if something didn't change for her soon, she was going to relapse.

Then her phone rang with an opportunity that not only saved her but led to countless other moments of hope for women facing the same struggle in Berea.

On the other end of the line was a landlord who helped Kirby secure her first sober living home, Ashley's Place, which hosts women as they recover from drug addiction and transition back into the community. That kind of residential treatment center had been key in Kirby's own sobriety and she had vowed to open a facility of her own when she transitioned out.

Following that fateful phone call, she now operates three sober living homes throughout Berea. Last Saturday, November 7, the eve of her ninth year of sobriety, Kirby hosted an inaugural "recovery walk" at Berea Community High School to celebrate the progress of her residents and draw attention to the ongoing need for support.

"Addiction is — I mean, it's taking people out. It doesn't discriminate, you know?" Kirby told the Register as participants gathered to join her before the morning walk. "That's the scary part."



Kimberly Kirby leads participants in the recovery walk in a moment of silence to honor victims of addiction. | PETER CHAWAGA



Jessica Rose Davenport, left, and Kimberly Kirby, right, organized Berea's inaugural recovery walk to raise awareness about the need for addiction recovery services. | PETER CHAWAGA

Roughly 15 women, many of whom had lived in or were current residents of one of Kirby's facilities, joined her and co-organizer Jessica Rose Davenport for the walk around the school. Kirby noted that the need for more recovery services in the area is stark, as she tries to convince the City of Berea to embrace her latest facility, Hannah's House, on Chestnut Street.

"When we opened Hannah's House up here, the City of Berea did not want us there," Kirby said. "And they made me file for a conditional-use permit, they denied it... I was not taking no for an answer, so I got on the phone, and I called the urban league of cities, the ACLU, the disability discrimination board, all of that stuff. So we have submitted a reasonable accommodation to the city and I guess they're still toying with it."

Kirby added that her hope was that Saturday's walk would encourage local decision makers to embrace her facility and encourage more support systems like it. Tabitha Boyd, a recovering methamphetamine addict who moved to Berea for a fresh start in one of Kirby's facilities, praised the city's natural surroundings and implored the local government to embrace sober living homes like Hannah's House.

"People judge so much on addicts and people in recovery, and, you know, they do so much damage, a lot of us do, but when you give them the opportunity to turn their life around and get sober, they can add so much more to the community than you would ever imagine," Boyd said as she prepared for the walk. "Like, they can do twice the good as the bad that we've done."

With a job at Hitachi Astemo Americas' manufacturing facility and plans to volunteer at Kirby's facilities, Boyd embraced a warm, sunny morning and the chance to spread awareness about the challenges and opportunities in addiction recovery.

"God, somebody, led me here," she said. "Like, they really did."

Shortly afterward, Boyd, Kirby, Davenport and their supporters held a moment of silence for those who had died from their addictions, said a prayer and began walking toward the rising sun.

Grandma's jewelry may be lost, but her love isn't



ANNIE'S MAILBOX
BY ANNIE LANE

Dear Annie: My 15-year-old daughter was given a piece of sentimental jewelry on the day of her grandmother's funeral. It had belonged to her grandmother, and the gesture was meant to be a beautiful way for my daughter to carry a piece of her with her.

At the time, my daughter seemed touched. She wore it a few times, and I remember feeling comforted seeing it on her, as if this small object helped connect the generations during a very sad time.

Now, only a few months later, I fear the jewelry has been lost. We have searched drawers, jewelry boxes, backpacks, coat pockets, bathroom counters and all the usual teenage "black holes," but so far, nothing has turned up.

I feel awful. Part of me is sad about the loss itself, and part of me is anxious about what it represents. I worry that other family members may ask about it someday, or notice she is not wearing it. They may never bring it up, but I know it is missing, and the guilt is weighing on me.

My daughter feels bad, too, but she is 15, and I do not want to make her feel as if she has failed her grandmother's memory. At the same time, I want her to understand the importance of caring for meaningful things.

How do I handle this with compassion, honesty and perspective, especially if the family asks where the jewelry is? — Missing More than My Jewelry

Dear Missing: The jewelry matters because it was a symbol of love. But the necklace is not the love itself. At 15, even meaningful things can disappear into a backpack, a bathroom drawer or that mysterious teenage cave known as "my room."

Keep looking, but do not turn grief into guilt.

Tell your daughter gently: "I know this meant something special. Let's keep searching, and next time, we'll make a safer place for sentimental things."

If family asks what happened, be honest and calm: "She wore it and treasured it, but sadly it seems to be misplaced. We are still hoping it turns up."

In the meantime, offer your daughter grace. No shame. No trial. She does not need a lecture nearly as much as she needs the reassurance that one mistake does not define her character. She is already learning that some things are precious. The most precious thing her grandmother left her is not the jewelry. It is the love that still stays.

And don't give up hope just yet. Lost items have a funny way of reappearing months or even years later in the least expected places.

"Out of Bounds: Estrangement, Boundaries and the Search for Forgiveness" is out now! Annie Lane's third anthology is for anyone who has lived with anger, estrangement or the deep ache of being wronged — because forgiveness isn't for them. It's for you. Visit http://www.creatorspublishing.com for more information. Follow Annie Lane on Instagram at @dearannieofficial. Send your questions for Annie Lane to dearannie@creators.com.

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