

Traveling down the victory road

Fourteen years ago, a small fair-haired boy arrived at Beech Brook for a stay in the intensive treatment unit. Just 11 at the time, he had already experienced a lifetime's worth of trauma, resulting in behaviors that had gotten him bounced from one place to another...each one adding another layer of loss, anger and hopelessness.

But here, the healing finally began. Kenneth found a lifeline in therapist Jean Homrighausen, better known to her clients as Miss H.

Thirteen years later, Kenneth still calls occasionally to touch base and let Miss H know how he's doing. And he'll always be grateful for the help he found at Beech Brook, which he believes saved his life.

"I was going down a dark path," he reflects. "Beech Brook rehabilitated me to become a functioning member of society. The staff was awesome. They taught me how to trust again."

He was pleased to be asked if we could share his story, as we had once before.

"Ultimately, I'm hoping this will help someone," he says emphatically. "I want to do anything I can do to help people."

Kenneth's is a success story, but at what cost in terms of personal suffering and a lost childhood?

His long journey to recovery reminds us of the importance of moving upstream to prevent the terrible impact of abuse and neglect. How different would his path have been if he had been born into a world where every child and family could thrive?

Read Kenneth's story on page 4.

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A Message from Tom Royer, President/CEO



*Tom Royer
President and CEO*

were doing every second of the day, pictures of their dogs, funny cat videos. And I figured if I really wanted to catch up with people from high school, well, I probably would have already.

I hesitantly – and with help – created a Facebook page and Twitter profile to promote Beech Brook’s brand and events and to enlist a larger audience to our cause. I was shocked when, in just a few days, scores of people found me, friended me and followed me... mostly family and friends to whom I had not spoken in years, then people I barely knew or remembered, and finally, some people I didn’t know at all. Eventually, colleagues in the field and other organizations climbed aboard.

I avoided Facebook and Twitter until 18 months ago.

I had many reasons for not getting with the times, but mostly I just thought it was stupid.

People posted about what they

It all felt exciting at first. It was nice to see what my friends from high school and college were up to. I posted comments and articles and received lots of “likes.” That was fun, too. Twitter was great because I was getting up-to-the-second news and rumors about the Browns, and you know I love that!

Overall, my experience has been a positive one.

Social media sites can be great and can increase our connectivity with family and friends. That’s especially important because most of us are not living in the tight, extended families common a generation ago.

But there are parts of social media that concern me, particularly the research regarding children and teens and their use of and addiction to it.

- Studies have shown that getting “liked” is a very strong positive reinforcement. Some people are checking social media sites more than 100 times a day!
- One study found that children spending more than three hours per day using social media are twice as likely to experience behavioral health issues such

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as sleep disorder, depression, addiction, 24/7 stress, isolation, insecurity, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) symptoms, and fear of missing out (FOMO).

- Social media can become a source of cyber bullying, not just at school, but 24 hours a day, and it's easy for others to join in.
- A University of Michigan study found that the more young adults use Facebook, the worse they feel moment-to-moment and the less satisfied they feel with their lives overall.
- Overuse of social media can negatively impact the ability to develop real life relationships.
- An Oxford University study argues that social networking has bad effects on children's intelligence and that the damage could be long-term and irrevocable.

But there is something else about social media that concerns me even more. We are living in a time where our society is becoming more polarized along political, gender, sexual orientation, race and religious lines, and social media, to me, seems to be a contributing (although not the only) factor.

Social media has given people a platform to spew hate speech and radical beliefs to other disaffected people, amplifying what are otherwise fringe opinions. A few have turned that hate into violence.

One of the first things I noticed when I joined Facebook was the volume of nasty rhetoric. I always thought that it came from politicians and the fringes of our society and, certainly, it is. But I was shocked to realize it was also coming from people I have known for 40 years. These were people I have known virtually my entire life, and they were posting things I have never heard them say in person.

This exaggerated categorization of other people and divisiveness is playing out every day, and not just through social media.

I call it "us" versus "them."

I'll be communicating more about how this impacts Beech Brook at the Beech Ball and in other messages going forward. I hope you'll join me in working toward a time when there is just "us" in a community where everyone thrives.



Wade Administration Building and Fenn-Wright Center today.

Update on the Beech Brook Land Sale and Move

In November of 1915, *The Plain Dealer* reported that the Board of Trustees of the Cleveland Protestant Orphan Asylum had decided to obtain a farm within an hour's ride of the city and their current location at 5000 St. Clair Ave.

Two years later, Jephtha Homer Wade and his wife presented the (then) 95-acre Beech Brook Farm to the orphanage, and the rest, as they say, is history...until now!

Today, 104 years later, the search for a new home is on again, but this time to take us in another direction – back toward the community once more!

As you may have read in the *Chagrin Valley Times* a few weeks ago, Beech Brook is under contract with the Axiom Development Group for the sale of our Lander Road Property. The developer presented a plan to the Pepper Pike Planning and Zoning Commission in February for a future mixed-use district which would have a combination of residential, retail and office space. This new development would require rezoning of our property and would need to be approved by Pepper Pike voters in November 2019, if plans have progressed far enough at that point.

The land sale and move are part of a plan developed shortly after the closing of our residential program and adoption of our new mission focused on prevention and early



View of Beech Brook campus shortly after it was completed in the 1920s.

intervention. With no need for the cottages on this large property, we knew that we could put the funds from the land sale to better use in our community-based programs for children and families.

A Beech Brook team is currently working to determine our space needs and other requirements, as well as looking at potential sites. We don't know where our new location will be yet, but our goal is to find a place that is easily accessible for our clients and community-based staff.

We'll keep you posted as soon as we know more so stay tuned for the next steps! And if you hear anyone saying that Beech Brook is closing, please tell them resoundingly that we are here to stay.

At 167 years, we're just getting started!

Shackles, tea parties and the victory road

By Nancy Kortemeyer

This story about Kenneth's journey was presented at the 2013 National Conference of the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities.

It's a sweltering afternoon in the hills of southern Ohio. Inside the squalid trailer they call home, three children wander among liquor bottles, dirty dishes and trash. They're hot. They're tired. But most of all, they're starving.

They haven't eaten all day – maybe longer – and the situation is spiraling out of control.

That's when Kenneth decides to take charge. It's not the first time he's had to care for his sister, who is 3, and his brother, who is still a baby.

He doesn't know why his mom leaves them alone all the time. He doesn't know why his dad doesn't come home. And how could he know? Kenneth is only five.

All he knows is that – again today – there's no one to care for them. And he wants to cry, as he often has: "Mama, Mama, why did you leave me?" But right now, they're all hungry, and something must be done.

Kenneth thinks he knows how to make scrambled eggs. He drags a stool up to the stove, and he's just getting started when

suddenly, there's a knock. It's a police officer and a stranger who says she's taking them to a safe place.

Barefoot and frightened, the children are bundled into a car and taken away from the only home they've known. Kenneth doesn't know where they're going or whether their mom will ever come for them.

He doesn't know that he will never live with his brother and sister again. He doesn't know there will be no happy childhood ahead or that the road to recovery will be a long and painful journey.

It will be years before he understands that his mom supports her drug habit by prostitution.

It will be years before he understands that his dad shot himself and won't ever be coming back.

And it will be seven painful years before Kenneth...age 11 and out of options...arrives at Beech Brook.

Therapist Jean Homrighausen, fondly known to her clients as "Miss H," has worked many tough cases over her 40+ years in social work. But even so, this one's a challenge.

As she studies the file, each page detailing the tragic saga of a shattered childhood, she wonders grimly, "What does the future hold for this lost child?"

- Separated early on from his siblings.
- Bounced from one foster home to another.
- Reunited with his mom for a brief – and disastrous – stay.

An adoption brings hope that Kenneth may finally have a new family, but his explosive behavior continues to escalate.

Miss H reads on. Even with a new family, Kenneth is so out of control that he lands in a detention center where he is pepper sprayed and restrained with shackles...even though he's just 8 years old. He returns home.

But once again, tragedy strikes. His new dad dies, and his adoptive mom, blaming Kenneth, gives him up. Thrown away...again.

Each new loss leaves a terrible scar, every wound deeper than before.

She closes the file and heads to the Intensive Treatment Unit. As she steps inside, a small fair-haired boy offers his hand. "I'm looking forward to working with you," he says politely.

It's not what she expects, and it's not what she'll see in the grueling years ahead.

Often, in the early days, the staff is wary when she comes to see him, worried about her safety. But Kenneth finds in Miss H the first person he has ever trusted. And she sees the highly intelligent and insightful child buried deep inside his wounded soul.

She learns that this once-shackled boy loves to have tea parties with hot chocolate and brownies as they talk...small nurturing moments he'd never known.

The outbursts still come and go as he begins to confront his rage and loss. But eventually, with Miss H as his lifeline, he's able to move to a foster home. Still, amid the growing light, there are times of darkness. One day Miss H finds Kenneth on the porch of his foster home, banging his head on the wall, crying desperately...out of hope.

She sits with him until he is calm, repeating over and over, "You can be healed. You are not

totally broken. You are gifted and smart and there is nothing you can do to make me stop loving you."

He begins to focus on his schoolwork and participate in sports. He discovers that he can help other children, sitting quietly with them when they are drowning in their own despair.

One day he shares a poem with Miss H. It reads, in part:

"Beech Brook is my turnaround place.

It showed me the real and true me.

It showed me that I am somebody

And that I can change.

It showed me that I can make it.

It showed me the strength not to give up.

It showed me the long journey to success...

It showed me the victory road."

Three years later, the boy without a future is 18. He's forgiven and reconnected with his mother who has finally transformed her own life, although it's too late for her to be the mother that he needed. He has a relationship with his sister who has thrived in an adoptive home. He doesn't know his little brother who was placed in another home as a baby.

It's a spring afternoon at Beech Brook. In between therapy sessions, Miss H opens her email to find a message:

"I graduate Sunday. Finally, it's soon to begin... my life.

I cannot and will not forget my roots.

I have come very far.

I will never give up, no matter what.

I cannot forget you...that's impossible!

You, by God's will, shined a light in the void I was in.

You illuminated my fears of others and helped me face those dragons.

I appreciate all you have done for me.

You earned a permanent place in my heart."

Miss H knows Kenneth will always carry the scars of his past and that the journey to healing will continue.

But he is traveling on the victory road now. And she knows that Beech Brook saved his life.

That was Kenneth's story as of 2013. Turn to page 6 to read a message from him today.

Kennith's story won first place in the national conference's "Storytelling Idol" contest that year. Coincidentally, Jean Homrighausen was honored as the Therapist of the Year at the same event.

Thank you for giving me the capacity to fly

By Kenneth M. Morgan

Well, what can I say? Beech Brook and the amazing staff have contributed to my success as a functional member of society. I came to Beech Brook as my last chance; otherwise, I'd have been locked up until I was eighteen years of age, only then to be left on the streets because nobody knew what to do with such a troubled child.

Where are my manners? I probably should introduce myself! Hello, my name is Kenneth M. Morgan. I am 24 years old, single, fully employed, no longer on medication, and a functional member of society...but it wasn't like that over a decade ago. I should give you a brief image of what I endured early in life and how it led me into the hands of an awesome support team at Beech Brook.

As we all know, the world is comprised of both evil and good, chaos and order, light and darkness. Children are ignorant to these concepts and are truly innocent. We know that it is the parents' job to both teach and nurture their offspring. Unfortunately, my own biological parents were not there for me to the point that the state of Ohio took me and my siblings away. Early on, I suffered both sexual and physical abuse between the ages of three and six. I don't recall how many foster homes I was in before I landed in my soon-to-be-adoptive home. I was let down time and time again. As I grew older, I became more violent, and with the loss of my adoptive father, things spiraled out of control. I was in and out of juvenile detention to the point that my adoptive mother gave up on me as there was nothing she could do.

So eventually, at 11 years of age, I was given the chance to go to Beech Brook where I was placed in the Intensive Treatment Unit. I met my therapist, Miss H, who in a joking manner I called my antique therapist because of her sparkly silver hair. She ultimately opened my heart and allowed me to trust again.



Kenneth Morgan, now 24, is seeing America as a cross-country truck driver.

Eventually an awesome team created from my teachers, their aides, group therapists, Miss H and my probation officer from Clermont County got me out of the residential program and back into foster care where I had their support throughout my tribulations.

The staff at Beech Brook gave me the capacity to fly into success despite my wings once being broken. To this day, I still keep in contact with Miss H who is the closest thing I can say to an angel incarnate sent from the Heavens above.

Ultimately, the team who pushed me to become rehabilitated and helped mend some of the fractures in my soul made it possible for me to be successful. Beech Brook was a beautiful place.

Thank you for helping me. Please continue your efforts in aiding children of all paths. Guide them to spread their wings and fly as I have!



Left: Kenneth enjoyed a Cleveland Indians game with therapist Jean Homrighausen while he was in foster care following his stay in residential treatment.

Below: This is an excerpt from a letter Kenneth wrote to Cleveland Indians baseball player Travis Hafner following the death of Travis's father in 2008. Loss was truly something he understood. In it he wrote, "I'm sorry about your father. I know what it feels like to lose someone you dearly care about..." He also told him "I like how you don't give up in baseball...I made this commitment when I was falling down and not getting back up. I will never give up in life!"

I made this commitment
when I was falling down
and not getting Back up.

"I will Never
Give Up In
LIFE!"



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Helping children and families thrive by promoting healthy child development, strengthening the ability to overcome adversity, and enhancing family health and stability.

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Beech Brook is a contract agency of the Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board of Cuyahoga County.

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