

CHAPTER ONE

Rock Bottom

I felt like a failure, scraping the bottom of the barrel. Me, Jane, going to rehab—how did my life come to this?

The shame welled inside me as my Mum drove me to the rehab centre. It is located within a private hospital in Brisbane. The redbrick building came into view, and I knew my life would change, but it needed to. I could barely look at my mother. A mix of emotions swelling inside of me. I felt like a loser, a no-good drunk from an old-fashioned movie sprawled in the gutter, and I hated myself.

The red Honda hatchback came to a slow stop. A heavy sigh slipped out, not knowing what to say. Mum always knew best, she was always there to pick up the pieces. She took me by the arm and we walked into the building. Inside, the fluorescent lights stabbed at my already aching eyes, still hungover from the night before, I had drowned myself with last drinks, my head pounding, just like any other normal day really. I could smell the alcohol coming out of my pores, but my mother ignored it.

The lady at the reception desk was clicking her pen. Each time it snapped my head throbbed even more.

What's your name Love?.

"Jane Musgrave," my mother answered for me, as I tried to avoid eye contact with everyone.

The administrator looked at me, with slight empathy. I am sure she had seen a thousand Jane's before, but this moment was the most shameful in my life. She handed me some papers to sign. Before today, I would have been sitting here so confidently, the person in charge, I was a functioning alcoholic. No one knew, not my coworkers, not my social circle, no one.

My admission to the clinic was now complete. Relief came with the knowledge my Health Insurance will cover the staggering \$14,000 cost. The nurse clipped the plastic identification tag on my arm, pointed to the elevator and told me to go up to the third floor and report to the nurses' station. I stood up, grabbed my suitcase, the reality hitting me like a medicine ball being thrown at my chest. It was heartbreaking, I hugged my Mum and said goodbye, trying not to cry. She held a stiff upper lip, telling me everything would be okay.

Coming out of the elevator on the rehab floor was daunting, I was by myself, I felt like I had let everyone I loved down, I was the worst person in the world. I found the nurses' station and handed over my paperwork. There were two female nurses' and a male nurse, they introduced themselves and I immediately felt safe. They were so kind and caring and I knew they had my best interests at heart.

One of the nurses' guided me to a chair next to a trolley with a blood pressure monitor, and other leads and devices stacked on it. She cusped the band around my arm. The plastic felt cool but within seconds a layer of condensation appeared. The machine beeped, which wasn't helping my hangover. Also, the pinch of the oxygen monitor on my finger annoyed me.

The nurse clucked her tongue. "That's not good."

I stared at her vaguely.

"Your blood pressure, it's alarmingly high, I'm happy you made it to us." She gave me a reassuring smile.

"I'm scared," I admitted. Something that was hard for me to even admit to myself.

She placed a reassuring arm around my shoulder. "How long have you been drinking? How bad is it?"

"I have been drinking seven days a week, fifty-two weeks of the year for thirty years. You tell me." My voice had a bitter edge on it.

"It is a good thing you are here. If you had stopped drinking cold turkey, your brain and body could have had a violent reaction... there can be seizures... psychosis... anyway it is good you are here. Let's get you some Diazepam for the detox it will help. I promise."

She handed me a small white paper cup with pills that I would become all too familiar with two x 5mg (milligrams), I will be required to have 10mg four times per day to start.

I put the cup to my lips and swallowed the pills, chased by a glass of water. Both things that my body desperately needed.

The nurse smiled kindly at me and led me by the arm to my room. By the time we reached the door I had a lovely floating sensation coursing through my body.

The nurse smiled wider as she saw my body relax. "It will help ease you off of the alcohol as painlessly as possible." The nurse opened the door. "What do you think?"

The room is a sickly beige colour and set up as a standard hospital room, a bed, a shared bathroom and toilet connected with the next room, a set of drawers, a table, chair and a window. No television, nothing fancy at all. It's very clinical, my outer calmness crumbles and I burst into tears. "It's not very nice, but it is all I deserve, I am just devastated to be here". "I know, but look at the view of this lovely tree." She walked me to the window. A huge tree fills the entire window space.

It's lunchtime. The nurse escorts me to the dining room and explains how meals work on weekdays versus weekends. Today is Friday, and the other patients are already eating. I scan the room, freeze, and feel

the humiliation flare. Sensing my distress, the nurse steers me to the sandwich bar and suggests I take something back to my room. I nod, tears spilling again.

My room feels even gloomier now, so I wander the corridors in search of the television room. I finally settle into a single recliner and lose myself in *The Bold and the Beautiful*, pure mind-numbing distraction.

Not long after, one of the nurses' finds me, brightly telling me it's time for observations (obs) and more medication (meds). This, I'm happy for, I want that relaxing feeling to keep my nerves calm. After I take the two little pills in the white paper cup, the nurse has me hold my hands out to see if I have the shakes. I don't, which is a good sign, no withdrawal symptoms.

I opt to have dinner in my room, not ready to be social with others yet. I'm still so disgusted with myself for being here. As I eat the hospital-style meal, I pray for this day to end so I can sleep and forget everything for a while.

Afterward came a shower, the slow routine of preparing for bed, then a stop at the nurses' station for nighttime obs, meds, and yet another round of hand-shake tests. Back in the room, the hospital bed offered little comfort: starchy sheets, a flat pillow, a plastic mattress that squeaked with every movement. Rest seemed unlikely, the night stretching out ahead with little promise of peace.

Waking restless in the early hours, I get out of the squeaky bed and head to the nurses' station for more meds. Back into bed for more broken sleep.

Saturday dawns, and nothing has changed, the same drab room, and I still feel miserable. More obs and meds start the day, then I venture into the dining room for breakfast, trying to give a slight smile to the others there. After a quick meal of cereal and toast, I scurry away to find a spot in the sun to read a book.

One of the nurses' finds me, she needs to take my blood. A full blood work up is required to see what thirty years of alcohol consumption has done to my body. A small blessing in my life is the fact I drink an insane amount of water, at least three litres per day, always.

I go to the television room, find a couple of others, introduce myself, and we watch a few of hours of TV. Back in my depressing room, I call my Mum to let her know how I'm coping, how much I hate it, but that I know I have to do this if there's any chance of getting off alcohol. My emotions overwhelm me again, and I'm crying, just hating my life.

Dinner time rolls around, and I eat in the dining room with some of the other patients. The room is set up like a self-serve canteen, a line of bain-maries with hot food, bread and butter at the end, and a little fridge with desserts. The food is okay; at this stage, I don't care what it tastes like, as I'm still beating myself up for being here. On the other hand, I'm very interested in the dessert selection, sugar and sweets are becoming my new best friend!

A few of us watch another TV show, then it's time for bed. More obs, more meds, my hands not shaking, and I'm doing well, so they cut the medication dose to start weaning me off the Diazepam. I'm now alcohol-free, the last thing I need is to become dependent on a different substance.

It's Saturday night, and I'm looking forward to tomorrow, Sunday and Mother's Day. My son, his girlfriend, and my Mum are coming to visit me. I feel devastated to be here on this special day; I cry myself to sleep.

They arrive around 10:00 a.m. on Mother's Day. The joy of seeing them is overwhelming. I'm so happy but feel so guilty about being here, like I'm in jail. On the other hand, knowing they support me through this makes everything worthwhile.

We walk to the cafe next door to the hospital for coffee, milkshakes and cake. I tell them of my experience so far, trying not to cry. The

visit ends all too soon. We walk back to the hospital, say our goodbyes, and they assure me this is for the best, I will come out a new person.

Monday arrives, at the nurses' station, I'm given an even lower dose of medication 5mg to be taken four times today. Then I'm called to my room where the doctor I was referred to is waiting. This is our first meeting, and we immediately form a good rapport. He sets my mind at ease, telling me it's okay and normal to feel as I do; he'd be worried if I didn't feel these emotions.

I tell him how hard it is to let go of my past, the hold my ex-husband still has on me. He shares a fantastic analogy. It is referring to Homer Simpson with his hand stuck in a beer vending machine. No one can get it unstuck, not the Fire Department, Ambulance, or Council. Then Moe, the bartender, says to Homer, "Let go of the can," and his hand comes free. It's just like letting go of the past. I remember that every time I struggle to let something go.

After the doctor's visit, I'm starting to feel better about being here. I say to myself, "I don't ever want to end up here again!"

I can now start participating in the classes. A two-week schedule is handed to me, and it needs to be stamped after every lesson to prove my attendance. The classes are set in rooms with desks, chairs, and a whiteboard, just like being back at school. At 48, I find myself back in a classroom, and I can't help but laugh. They say you're never too old to learn.

The classes are run by therapists, each focusing on different aspects of what they're teaching us. We receive training manuals to follow and make notes in, our bible for the next two weeks and for when we return home. The first day's classes focus on devaluing alcohol and ending the love affair with it. I hear the best advice: "Start to get into a routine." I'll discuss the importance of this in a later chapter.

Art therapy classes quickly became my favourite. As a creative person, I love hands-on learning. The task was to go through magazines

and cut out pictures of what our life looked like while drinking out of control, then cut out pictures of what we want our life to look like going forward. We stuck them all onto two separate sheets of coloured paper, these we can look back at when back out in the real world, to motivate us, to keep working towards sobriety. These classes relax me, and I continue to use this therapy to this day.

On Monday afternoon, I meet with a psychologist and share my story. She tells me I've been a victim of domestic violence, abuse, and control since meeting my ex-husband. I read from my journal, where I am blaming myself for the situation, thinking that earlier rehab might have given my son a better life or strengthened me to leave. She shuts me down immediately, telling me to stop berating myself. I didn't ask to be treated this way, and now I must look after myself to care for others.

I get to know the other patients; we're all here for the same reason and support each other. For safety reasons, we don't share last names, phone numbers, or social media details. I'm fully on board with this, I will have my own problems when I leave and don't want any other distractions.

The next morning, the doctor stops by my room for his daily visit, this will happen every weekday between 7.00 and 8.00am. He has the results for my blood tests, I hold my breath and brace for the bad news. I have an enlarged fatty liver, no surprise there, and the rest of my health is very good. I am pleasantly surprised and give thanks to my love of drinking water. With me it was either water or wine, water all day, wine all night!!

The classes continue and I am fully detoxed. I note an interesting topic in my journal: the Grief Process. *We must let go of alcohol and grieve for it, like a death.* I decided to do this for both alcohol and my ex-husband. "Grieve for both, then move on." *Emotions must be dealt with, listen to whispers before they become screams,* great advice.

The next weekend, visitors are allowed, and Mum comes to see me. We walk through the Roma Street Parklands and into the city for lunch. It's a beautiful spring day with a deep blue sky, and the flowers are in full bloom, their perfume permeating the air. Mum sees the change in me, and she's happy and proud. I feel different too, accepting I'm an alcoholic but knowing I can fix it by staying strong and not drinking. Simple.

The second week is pretty much a repeat of the first, sleep, eat, lessons, learn, but we have a special visitor one evening. A gentleman from an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) group comes in to talk to us about meetings. He's been sober for 12 years, an impressive achievement. But I dismiss his message, thinking AA is religious and not wanting to be preached to about God. I tune out, say no thank you, and walk away... Big mistake, Jane!

After a total of 14 days, I've completed the program and am free to go. The clinic offers day rehab, but I need to return to Central Queensland for work, so I opt for weekly phone calls to check on my progress.

On Friday afternoon, walking out of that clinic, I feel like a new person, determined never to drink again. I know it will be a challenge, but I'm resolved never to feel as I did when I first walked through those doors. Little did I know, this would not be the case, and oh boy, did I fall off the wagon!

My first time in rehab. The following is an exact extract from the journal I started upon entering rehab; it is raw and brutally honest.

09th May 2014 – Admission Day. All good so far, my observations have been taken, and I am shown to my room by the nurse, who explains the rules. I sit in the room until the nurse comes and takes me to the dining room for lunch and explains the weekday procedures. I tear up

and lose it, so we go back to my room, and the nurse tells me it's all ok. It's so overwhelming, and I have lunch in my room. After a good cry and lots more explanations, I get a tour of the facility and fill out more forms, then there are more tears.

I am HUMILIATED to be here, I HATE the room, so I go and find a TV to watch B&B. I have more observations (obs) taken and have some medication, then I opt for dinner in my room. I try to get the TV on my phone but just waste my data. More obs and more medication and I go to sleep at 9.30. I wake up restless at 2.30am and get some more medication. I then wake up at 6.45am, the nurse comes in at 7.30 and I go for obs and medication. I am feeling anxious and end up in tears again. I head off for breakfast and settle down to some reading. More doctors followed by morning tea and I am still trying to cope that I am in here and I have more medication. I start feeling a bit better and I decide I DO NOT EVER WANT TO END UP HERE EVER AGAIN.

I hope to watch TV later, and I suggest to the nurse that I might attend the BBQ tomorrow. I have no cravings yet, just anxiety. I watch TV and talk to Mum on the phone. I am still crying, and I still blame my ex-husband for this, why should he be happy and cut me off when I needed his help, well that's going to change!!! More obs and medication, then dinner and go to watch a show with some other people in there until 9.30pm then obs, medication, shower and bed. I am looking forward to a visit tomorrow from my son. It is Mother's Day tomorrow and I am in here.

How did I get here...?

MY JOURNEY OUT OF THE BOTTLE

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