

## All-American Guy Overcomes Addiction

Tom Coderre, in long-term recovery from addiction, does not want others to experience the shame that he did when he started working on his recovery. Today, Tom is working as an advocate to assist people in getting the help they need to recover from addiction. “Almost everyone knows someone who has been touched by addiction and recovery. It is time for us to talk with our friends, families, elected officials and neighbors about these experiences, and bring this out into the open,” stresses Tom.

This article is one way in which Tom is sharing his experiences with addiction and what it was like finding the recovery he enjoys today. “I was so ashamed of myself,” he says, describing how he felt when he was secretly using drugs during one of his first attempts at treatment. “I was lying to the staff at the treatment center and to my family because I could not stop using and did not know how to ask for help.”

A heavy drinker as a young adult, Tom was introduced to cocaine when he was 30 years old. “I was instantly hooked,” he recalls. “I loved the instant escape it provided so much that I wondered why I had spent so many years wasting my time with alcohol.” In just a few short months, he realized that the drug had taken control of his life. It was three years before he was able to get back on track and on the road to recovery.

Bright, articulate, and energetic, Tom was elected to a state senate seat in Rhode Island at the young age of 25. By the time he turned 29, he was the senate deputy whip and was director of a nonprofit organization in Providence. “Looking back, I was using alcohol to self-medicate,” he says. “I was under a great deal of stress at work and in the senate. I was under a lot of pressure to balance everything that was going on in my life.”

### An escalating problem

While Tom started drinking at an early age, it was not until he began using cocaine that he realized he had a problem. He started missing work and began isolating at home. It was not long before his mother became concerned about a significant change in his mood and personality.

There were physical changes, too. He had no appetite and was neglecting his personal appearance. Normally about 170 pounds, he dropped to 132 pounds. When he could not get high enough from smoking cocaine, he tried injecting it. He would lose feeling in his legs or arms. Cocaine had completely consumed him. He recalls that the drug had “brought me to my knees.” At the time though, he had yet to find out just how impaired he was.

He tried to stop drinking and taking drugs a few times on his own and checked into residential treatment programs in the area. He was able to abstain from cocaine and alcohol for as long as a month or two, but his addiction was so powerful that he would start using again. “Addiction had taken its toll on me spiritually, mentally, and physically,” recalls Tom.

The turning point came when he was arrested for possession of cocaine in April of 2003. He was mandated to seek inpatient care and was admitted to Butler’s addictions program.

According to Michael Fiori, MD, chief of Butler’s Alcohol and Drug Inpatient Program, Tom’s situation is all too common. “We see people from all walks of life who feel they have hit rock bottom and that there is no hope,” says Dr. Fiori. “We had to get him

See Addictions on page 6.

## Mental Health in the Media

### When a child must deal with tragedy

Book review by Lisa Uebelacker, PhD, staff psychologist, assistant professor (Research) at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University

Imagine a place without fear, disappointment, or sadness; a place where you are accepted just as you are or where you can become anything you want to become. Such a magical world exists for the two young friends in the story *Bridge to Terabithia*, which was recently made into a movie.

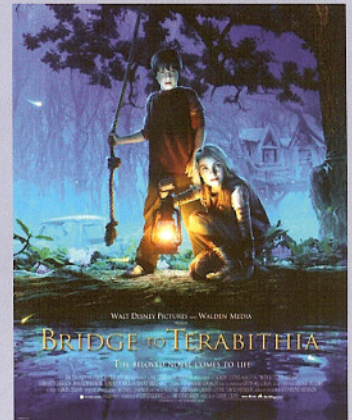
Jesse and Leslie use *Terabithia* to escape from things that many children their age experience — isolation, being bullied, annoyances with siblings, and fear of letting down those we love. This is a story of how the human spirit is lifted up by the love and loyalty of a friendship. It is also a story of how traumatic, unexpected events can strike people at any time — even young children.

Jesse is a quiet and morose boy who comes from a poor farming family on the outskirts of town. He is the object of ridicule and pranks at school. Not only does he have trouble interacting with his classmates, he has problems at home as well. He is constantly having confrontations with his father, which adds to his feelings of isolation and depression. Jesse spends all his spare time drawing wonderfully imaginative pictures in a notebook that he always keeps with him.

He remains isolated from his classmates and his family until he becomes friends with a new student in class, Leslie. The two children create *Terabithia*, a kingdom of dreams and magic in the woods behind their houses. Leslie shows Jesse that the world is full of endless possibilities, and that even when things are at their worst, you can still enjoy life if you have the right attitude and the support of a good friend. She teaches him to “keep his mind wide open.”

When tragedy unexpectedly strikes, and Leslie is gone, Jesse discovers that his family can be a source of comfort and support, and that one must work hard to find the emotional strength to go on living.

The story captures the struggle in all of us to enjoy life to the fullest, even in the face of emotional pain. It explores the complex relationships between friends, siblings, parents, and teachers. Yet the story is lyrical and simple. It talks about the importance of hope and the will to never give up, no matter how hard life seems. Regardless of what age you are, it will draw you in and leave you walking away with something special.



## Addictions *(continued from page 2)*

stabilized physically and psychiatrically. Once he was able to think more clearly and felt better, we were able to begin a process of group, family, and individual counseling.”

While at Butler, something finally clicked inside Tom. He realized he had to overcome his addiction or risk losing everything in his life. “The staff in the program were wonderful,” he recalls. “I needed help getting back on my feet.” Members of the hospital’s Care Planning Department got busy matching Tom with a long-term setting where he could continue in his recovery. “As an intensive, short-term program, we are often the first point of intervention,” says Dr. Fiori. “So even as someone is just beginning to be stabilized, we have to be looking for a good program in the community that can help patients continue on their road to recovery.”

### *Butler’s addictions program is a rare service...*

“The people who work in Butler’s program have great contacts in the community and were able to find a facility that was a good fit for my needs. Butler’s addictions program is a rare service that is hard to find anywhere else,” says Tom.

### Feeling blessed

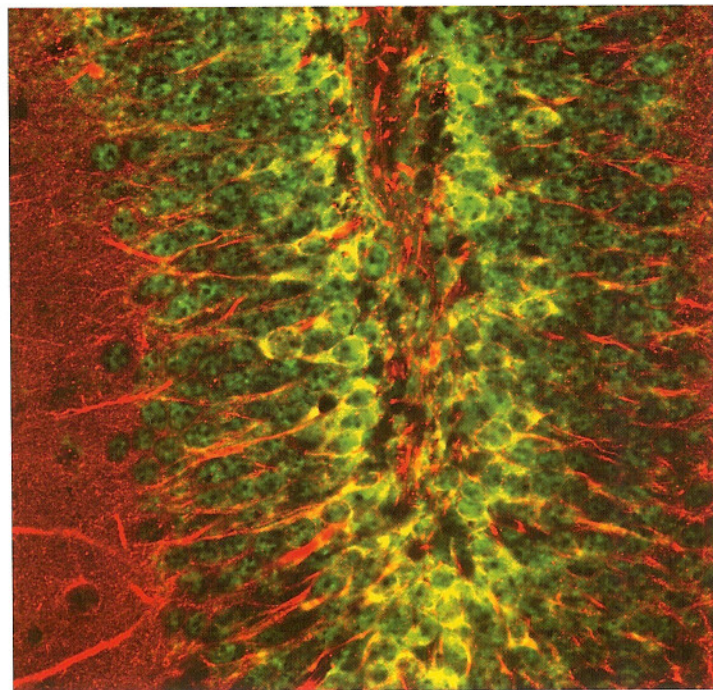
Today, Tom’s life is better than he had ever imagined that it could be. He’s dedicated his life to making a difference in the lives of people affected by alcohol and drug addiction. He wants to make sure more people have the opportunity to find recovery, as he did.

“I am doing what I love,” he says. “I’m involved in public policy, and I’m organizing meetings and forums around the country.” Through his efforts, Tom hopes to change the attitudes of people still struggling with addiction and their families. He’s also working to change state and federal laws so that people struggling with addictions can get help when they need it and are not discriminated against when they achieve long-term recovery.

This past May marked the fourth year of Tom’s recovery. In 2006, he became the national field director of the Washington, DC-based national recovery advocacy organization, Faces & Voices of Recovery. One of his first projects was organizing a grassroots campaign around the Emmy Award-winning HBO documentary, *Addiction*. Faces & Voices of Recovery is now engaged in something close to Tom’s heart, a grassroots civic engagement campaign, Recovery Voices Count, to raise addiction and recovery issues in the 2008 election cycle. More information on the campaign and Faces & Voices of Recovery can be found at [www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org](http://www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org).

Tom has not forgotten his roots and continues to operate from Rhode Island while traveling around the country. He’s working with the statewide recovery community organization, Rhode Island CAREs (Communities for Addiction Recovery Efforts), along with Rep. Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) and other allies, to create a recovery-oriented system of care. He’s also working with a group of addiction professionals to create a new Institute for Addiction Recovery at Rhode Island College.

“I feel really blessed to have been given this opportunity,” says Tom. “Recovery has changed my life. I’m passionate about it. How can I not be passionate about something that has not only changed my



**Brain proteins...** This image was taken from the same region of the brain as the one shown on page 1. Red represents a protein expressed abundantly in the processes of neurons. Green represents synapsin.

## Brain Science

*(continued from page 5)*

protein levels are significantly lower in the brains of individuals with schizophrenia than in those with no psychiatric illness. Recently, Drs. Kao and Porton identified a variation in the synapsin III gene that was found more frequently in schizophrenia. In collaboration with George Augustine, MD, at Duke University, it was found that this gene variation affects the ability of a neuronal growth factor, BDNF (brain-derived neurotrophic factor), to activate synaptic transmission. BDNF has also been studied extensively in the context of many neuropsychiatric diseases. Both BDNF and synapsins interact with other genes, potentially influencing a larger network of genes that are important for normal brain functioning. As explained by Dr. Kao, “it is commonly believed that susceptibility to schizophrenia could be the result of multiple genes, which interact with each other and with environmental factors.”

Another recent finding with possible implications for neuropsychiatric disease is the observation that synapsin III regulates aspects of neurogenesis in the adult brain. Neurogenesis is the process by which new neurons are born in the brain, and it occurs in specific locations within the adult brain. Adult neurogenesis, which is regulated by many genes, is also stimulated by growth factors such as BDNF, but it is decreased by depression, stress, and schizophrenia. Many environmental factors, including psychiatric drugs, neural activity, exercise, and nutrition, influence the production of new neurons in the adult brain.

### Searching for biomarkers of mental illness

Developing a laboratory test for diagnosing mental illness continues to elude researchers. However, progress is being made. One promising method is proteomics, or protein profiling, which

*See Brain Science on page 8*