

**Julie Hooker and Sue Purchase
Narrators**

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Julie Hooker -JH

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JH: This was one of my artifacts from 1998.

SP: Where did *The Statesman* come from? Oh you were in Oregon. Minnesota would never do anything so impolite.

JH: I thought this was interesting too. The front page is all about this recovering alcoholic and then they also have “more officers now on the streets.”

SP: And “U.S. used nerve gas in Vietnam.” Banning violent video games.

JH: Remember that era? There were a lot of things going on back then. Are you familiar with Oxford House?

SP: The therapeutic community?

JH: It’s self-run, self-governed.

SP: I’ve had friends and family go through, horrible.

JH: Horrible experiences? That’s too bad. I had a great experience.

SP: That’s good.

JH: I had just gotten out of jail for the umpteenth time and I didn’t have a place to live. So I found this Oxford House situation. Actually it was an old convent. We called it the house of habits. It was perfect. I had a great experience there and I lived there for year and a half. Then I decided to go back to Salem which is the state capital and start opening Oxford Houses there because they didn’t have any. The first house we opened went under the radar.

The second house that we opened took front page news. This woman, it's a terrible picture of her, her name is Nancy. She was also a working girl. She got cancer and talked to some reporter. The reporter showed up at the house to interview her but my story was colorful because it had this word in it. Then given my last name it made it very front page news. This article started off saying we had lost the only detox center, they had run out of money. This was another option for people, at least for housing purposes. Then I think on this next page, I love this one. "Julie Hooker ignored laws, defied probation rules, and generally bucked authority during her 'insane' existence." Insane is in quotes which means I said it. I never said that. It wasn't insane. It was a little chaotic but it wasn't insane. Then, "even now she resents the notion of anyone telling her what to do." It got really a little odd. A lot of these things "we can't afford to float people," that's not what we're talking about. "It's the inmates running the asylum." All these weird things that I never did say.

Anyways the point of why I hung on to this is because I was fresh out of the chaotic insanity of injecting drug use and was sort of moving into another realm. We didn't have harm reduction strategies. There was only one pharmacist in town, it was at Fred Myers. There was a Fred Myers pharmacist who was friendly to us so we could purchase syringes from him. If he wasn't working we were out of luck. I was using puddle water, the same syringe five other people had used. It was just that was insane. The point of saving that article was really to showcase not so much the Oxford House piece of it but how society looked at people like me. This is classic. I didn't say it. Half of the things I'm quoted as saying, I didn't say. This is how society looked at people like me.

SP: Also the media doesn't portray things accurately. They're more about a sensational story rather than the truth and the life of a human being. I too have lived in Oregon, southern Oregon, Grant's Pass. I'm familiar with it and I lived in the Northwest.

JH: I love that area. I lived in Oregon for twenty three years. They're a pretty progressive state, even then. As far as substance use, harm reduction, and looking at people with a substance use disorder it was not friendly and it was not supportive. It was not kind and it was not loving. It was very punitive, shaming. Back in that day treatment was shaming and degrading. You put people in the middle of the room and everybody told them what a piece of crap they were. I had to wear a sign that said, "manipulative." I'll never forget it. What am I doing here right now? Where is the love? For me this article represents one hundred percent why I do what I do. Why I believe in harm reduction as fully as I do is because I have lived the other side of it and survived it. I'm a licensed alcohol and drug counselor. I have a master's degree in social and community services. The focus here in Minnesota still is punitive.

SP: You need to be abstinent.

JH: Yes, complete and total abstinence. I was telling you before every place that I ever worked I was always in trouble because I bucked authority and defied probation. Even then I was doing that. Now I work for myself. I make the rules. I wrote the tenets of the organization and I wrote the policies and procedures and based substance use treatment in a harm reduction setting. It doesn't seem as though it's unique and it's not a eureka moment but it's weird and unusual for Minnesota.

SP: It flies in the face of puritanical standards here, particularly for women.

JH: Who do I think I am? I did have somebody say something like that to me. I said, "I haven't figured that out yet. Let's see."

SP: I'm Julie Hooker.

JH: Former boozier, prostitute. I think that's part of the fun of this thing is being able to laugh through it, especially because that is my last name. It was not a way to earn a living but to survive. It was all about survival not anything but that. To be punished for that was just ridiculous.

SP: The thing that I find really wonderful is just that you didn't submit to the punishment. You overcame it. You kept moving for something different because this is not right. Many people would cave. They'd own it. "Yes I am" and continue that model and push it along.

JH: It's funny because I had to come back here to Minnesota to the land of ten thousand treatment centers to find harm reduction. I never knew what that meant. I'd never heard that term but I was a harm reductionist even though I didn't know what it was called. When I found other people who were like me and told me, "No you're not unusual." I was like, "Thank goodness there are people who think along those same lines."

SP: When did you leave Oregon?

JH: In 2000. Just a few years after that article was written.

SP: Why Minnesota?

JH: I grew up here. Born and raised here. I left when I was twenty one. I went on an adventure. I went to Oregon so I could grow pot.

SP: It used to be the third largest pot producing state in the nation.

JH: Humboldt County had nothing on us. That is exactly why I went there. I lived by Elk River halfway between Corvallis and Newport at the base of Mary's Peak. I loved it. It was home in many, many ways to me. That was an introduction to peace and love in ways that I had no barrier.

SP: Where did you come to in Minnesota when you came back?

JH: St. Paul.

SP: Then what did you do?

JH: I went back to school. I went to school for ten years. I came here trying to pursue some housing ideas that I had that were going to be integrated with this Oxford House thing. I was shut down at every turn because I had no credentials behind my name, no initials. It wasn't enough. So I said, "Alright, I'll go back to get those credentials. I'll get those initials." Even with the credentials it's still not enough because who do I think I am? Who do you think you are? We are going to write these rules because these are best practices. I say best practices change and evolve.

SP: Best practices in a harm reduction or an abstinence based setting? Best practices maybe but punitive nevertheless when you think about what can happen to people.

JH: That's what we do in our treatment facility. It's called Resurrection Recovery. It's about the Resurrection plant which is also known as the Rose of Jericho. It looks like a tumbleweed. It lives in the south, it dries up, it looks like a dried up ball of sticks until it gets water and light and then it springs back to life. It's a metaphor. There's Mr. Lee. We don't do urine drug screens, we don't kick people out for continuing to use, and you can even come high if you want to as long as you're not obstinate or punching holes in the wall.

[End of Recording]