

JOURNEY

Nationally Acclaimed Co-Authors and Presenters Bring Real-Life Triumph Over Adversity to Houston

Odyssey House Summer Benefit Luncheon Exceeds all Expectations

More than 300 filled The Junior League of Houston ballroom on June 27th in great anticipation of hearing Kristina Wandzilak and Constance Curry's riveting mother-daughter narrative of addiction coming full circle. The facts are real, and often brutal, but theirs is a story of hope as documented in their memoir, *The Lost Years*. Triumph over devastation is Wandzilak and Curry's theme as this typical American family recounts their journey from addiction to recovery to reconciliation. While addiction is the catalyst in their drama, their message resonates with everyone. All in attendance were captivated, even inspired by their story as it applies to a myriad of life issues.

Odyssey House teamed with Intervention & Recovery Programs to bring this dynamic duo to Houston for the first time. Channel 13 News Reporter, Laura Whitley, was the event's Mistress of Ceremonies and Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church Rector, The Reverend James W. Nutter, gave the invocation. All in attendance received a copy of *The Lost Years*, as well as Odyssey House's book, *So This is What Good Feels Like*. After the luncheon, many remained for book sales and signings in the foyer.

Odyssey House was privileged to have this unique opportunity to give back to the community that has supported it with referrals and resources for nearly two decades. By hosting such a high-impact event, Odyssey House exceeded all expectations for bolstering awareness. Best of all, *The Lost Years* story provided a living testament to the purpose of Odyssey House as a residential treatment resource serving this community.



Sitting is Kristina Wandzilak and Constance Curry. Standing is Robert Martinez, Intervention & Recovery Programs and Donna Wilson, Odyssey House Texas.

MISSION STATEMENT

Odyssey House helps troubled adolescents break destructive cycles caused by drug and alcohol abuse. We help them uncover the root of their problems and treat the whole person. Ultimately, we provide them the opportunity and the tools they need to rebuild their lives and rewrite their futures.

Greetings from Board President, Dorothy Marchand

PURPOSE

- To provide the appropriate length of time required for healthy growth and recovery
 - To provide a safe and nurturing environment that encourages trust and risk
- To provide life skills for daily and independent living
- To provide continuing care that supports transition back into the community
- To provide a professional environment that grows and evolves with the needs of adolescents in our changing community

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Odyssey House Texas, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) supported by private gifts, grants, and a contract with the Texas Department of State Health Services

The board of directors of Odyssey House Texas is comprised of a diverse group of individuals, young and old, from various walks of life, with one shared passion: to provide the resources and oversight that will allow Odyssey House Texas to thrive.

Many of us on the Board have in some very personal way been impacted by substance abuse or addiction, while others have only witnessed the devastating impact it can have on all of society. Regardless of how we have been affected, all members of the Board have become ardent believers in the need for the Odyssey House therapeutic program - and the miraculous impact it can have on the adolescents, families, and community it serves.

If you have not lived through the pain of having a family member with substance abuse or addiction issues, it would be tempting to turn away from such a problem as not your own, and deny the need for such comprehensive treatment. There is no quick fix. Daily, Odyssey House deals with the challenges this illness presents, using its unique, nurturing, all-encompassing approach structured directly for these troubled adolescents – a program virtually unparalleled by any other treatment center in the area. It is both humbling and enlightening to witness the dedication and professionalism of the staff as they struggle day-in and day-out with each teen as he or she battles the demon of substance addiction. Then transformation occurs. Together they succeed. Finally, this troubled teen experiences perhaps for his or her first time, “what good feels like.”

The members of the Board are believers in this mission and strive to offer the support needed to management and staff in order to perpetuate this goal. It is a joy and a privilege to serve on the Board of Directors at Odyssey House, to give back a miniscule amount to this program and staff for the lives they save every day. I encourage you to learn more about Odyssey House Texas, and to make those with a need aware of this fine gem, so that it can be utilized to its fullest extent in serving our community.

KRISTOPHER'S STORY

“Odyssey House Texas changed, and most probably saved my life. I was born into an average working-class family. Our family had issues as most do; yet my parents continually loved and supported my older brother, younger sister, and me. My father, a hard-working Houston Firefighter, always helped me as long as I was willing to help myself. My mother worked hard inside the home so she could be close to us, and made sure all our needs were met. Even though we were well loved, our childhood was negatively impacted by my dad’s bad temper and my mom’s battle with depression. Regardless, I’m not sure that was the cause for the destructive journey to come.

From my earliest memory, I felt different. In school or when playing with friends, I thought there was something wrong with me if someone knew something that I didn’t. I was picked on by classmates, wore thick glasses, and always had an answer in class. I was a nerd. Although I had friends on my street to play with, even a best friend, I spent most of my time feeling completely alone and unaccepted.

The first time I felt comfortable in my own skin was when I started using illegal substances. The summer I turned 11, my best friend introduced me to alcohol. His mother believed that he and

his older sister were going to drink anyway, so it might as well be under her supervision. **When I was 13, I began using marijuana, and my drug use quickly escalated.** Again, a best friend’s older sister and her friends provided the drugs. This time, there was no stopping. The drug culture is just that—an entire culture, one that welcomed me with open arms. We found dealers in our siblings’ older friends and constantly looked for a bigger, better high. I began using LSD, mushrooms, and pills when I was 15. Throughout this time, my parents couldn’t figure out why I was depressed and suffering from anxiety, even though they had me under a psychiatrist’s care and I was being medicated with anti-depressants and anti-anxiety pills. It made no sense to me either. Just after my 16th birthday, my behavior became very erratic, and I began stealing.

I agreed to drug treatment when I couldn’t stop using on my own. But after 8 months in treatment, I relapsed, and 6 months later I was at the brink of death.

I had begun using cocaine and anything else I could get my hands on, selling drugs and stealing to support my habit. I lost 30 pounds when I didn’t have 30 pounds to lose. I was arrested for possession with intent to distribute a controlled substance – still, there was no stopping. When I was

arrested, I called my father from jail. He told me I could come home only if I agreed to go back to treatment, so I chose not to go home. I lived with my brother instead, and we began using together. It wasn’t long before we were both in debt with drug dealers, about to be evicted from our apartment.

New Year’s Day 1997, I decided to get sober. I had spent New Year’s Eve teetering on the third floor balcony of the apartment we were soon to lose, hoping I would fall headfirst into the concrete below. After spending another sleepless night trying to figure out how I was going to dig out of the hole I was in, I woke up and couldn’t find any drugs for the first time in a long time. I was forced to face reality without my coping mechanism. I began crying. After showering, I looked in the mirror and saw what was left of me. I thought I was hopeless. My brother had given me a quarter to call in sick from work. I called my parents, instead.

I detoxed in an adult facility, where they told me that I needed long-term treatment for my problem. Because I had been in two prior facilities, no one wanted me except Odyssey House,

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The Lost Years Luncheon Underwriters and Sponsors

With heartfelt appreciation, we acknowledge those who generously gave of their resources, time, and talent. Because of you, The Lost Years Luncheon was an overwhelming success:

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KRISTOPHER'S STORY

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my last hope. Its staff and residents interviewed me, and I was accepted. I believe God must have been in the room when they voted me in that day.

Coming back from the brink of death, I was willing to do anything to stay sober. Still, Odyssey House taught me there was more to life than merely staying sober. At Odyssey House, I learned all the basic skills of living in society, things most people take for granted: communicating with others, taking responsibility for my actions, waking up on time, taking care of myself, paying my dues in life. Odyssey House taught me skills to take into the workforce: how to interview for a job, how to be a good worker; how to manage others. They taught me the structure of a home, and how to lead one. I learned how to get along with those who were not like me and how to solve disagreements. **Every skill and value I have today was either taught to me or reinforced in me by Odyssey House. My parents had given**

me a strong set of values; however I had to relearn them after living as I had. Odyssey House taught me to make those values my own. I learned how to be my own person. I learned that, when I live my values, I am able to be comfortable in my own skin. This was the most freeing thing of all.

I never wanted to leave Odyssey House; however, when it was time for me to do so, they made sure I was ready. Donna Wilson promised that she wouldn't let me leave until I had a safe place to go. I didn't want to go home because of the temptation of falling in with the people, places, and things that were detrimental to my staying sober and sane. Odyssey House helped me transition into a Halfway house for young adults. There, I put into action my new skills and found a job through a contact Donna Wilson made for me. After working in that job for a year and half, Odyssey House graduate, Andrew Hemley, asked

me to come to work for him at the law firm, Thompson Knight. I worked for Andrew for six years and was promoted to Assistant Supervisor during that time.

Today, my life is a dream come true. I have been married for 8 years to Heather, and we have 2 children: 7-year-old Tristen and 2-year-old Bella.

I own my own home, and have a great job. Because of the values and leadership skills learned at Odyssey House, then honed at Thompson Knight, I manage one of the most valuable accounts for the largest company in my industry. By God's grace through Odyssey House, I achieved all of this - and I am only 29 years old!

Odyssey House is a blessing that all who need it should have the chance to have. My brother took his own life in February of this year. Would he still be here had he had the help he needed at such a young age, as I did? I can't help but wonder."



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