



## Taking the Escalator Guest Blogger: *Nicole Tierney, LAC* – **COPING WITH AN OVERACTIVE MIND**

*Nicole Tierney has over 10 years in recovery, thanks in part to receiving treatment using the Taking the Escalator methodology which helped Nicole focus on self-awareness, insight and motivation building with equal attention give not just substance use alone but also co-existing mental health concerns as well, which you can clearly see in this inspiring and helpful personal blog entry:*



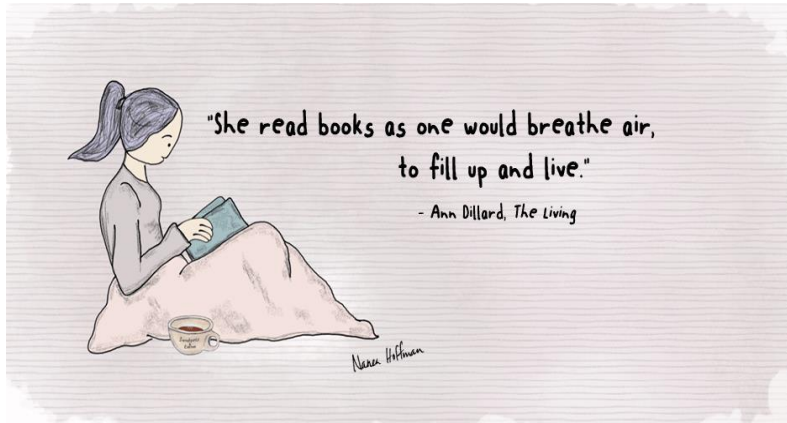
One of the things I remember most vividly about when I was first trying to get ‘sober’ and stop drinking and using drugs was that people were very nice and gave me a plethora of helpful advice and information. However, for many reasons, ***I could not cognitively or emotionally deal with so much information or stimulation.***

I had been using prescription pain medicine daily for at least ten years. That habit had evolved into using other substances and drinking too. While I knew I did not want to live the rest of my life like that, I also felt incapable of processing so much advice, albeit helpful and caring, at once when my brain and heart were still so raw. Similarly, I can remember my thoughts racing all the time. Worry, panic, rumination, pondering. I actually felt tired because I could not seem to stop thinking and feeling.

I remember fondly a counselor whom I confided in about this constant battle in my head suggesting I try ‘*thought stopping*’. It sounded so appealing and relieving. However, here was my problem, at that time, I was estranged from most family members, really had no social connections or support, had a no-contact order with my children, recently filed for bankruptcy, and would-be starting drug court in a week. So therein was the conundrum, I can stop the negative thoughts, but then what do I think about? ***What fills the void in my overactive mind, from a cognitive and emotional perspective?***

I was also given the advice to stay present, be positive, and always be grateful, but those feelings were difficult for me to conjure based on my nonexistent self-esteem (or more aptly described as self-hatred and self-loathing) and my current external position. I simply did not have the tools or capability to develop those replacement thoughts or feelings internally. *I knew I would use substances before long if I did not address this painful and taxing issue within my brain.*

On one particularly bad day, I did not know how I would last another minute with myself. My thoughts were so toxic and noxious. I needed a break. That is when I saw a stack of books my aunt had given me, which she purchased at a garage sale. My aunt meant so well and I remember wishing I could only stop ruminating and read. Having absolutely nothing to lose, I tried. I grabbed what appeared to be the thinnest book and the shortest story, which just happened to be Jonathan Livingston Seagull. I was expecting the book to be about birds, but I was sorely mistaken. The book was so difficult to understand, I found my negative thoughts had unwittingly paused. I was reading and re-reading. I was trying to understand and process the letters and words on the pages, and I was enjoying it. Well enjoying may be a strong word, but ***I was no longer suffering in the company of my own vitriolic thoughts.***



Therein began my healthy go to coping mechanism – reading. I would read anything. It was the salve my mind and soul needed. Over time, I began reading about recovery, substance use disorders, stories of perseverance, spirituality, and even neurology. I literally got lost in words. Over time, as my mind and soul healed, my thought pattern slowed, and I was able to increase control and occasionally engage in the occasional ‘thought stopping’. I was able to respond and not react. I was able to

experience gratitude and stay present. Notwithstanding those improvements in my abilities and thinking, I still love reading. I subsequently came to learn that Jonathan Livingston Seagull was actually a popular book about life, self-perfection, and flight. Though the messages are still murky and the meaning not completely clear, I truly consider Jonathan Livingston Seagull my first friend in recovery and his story ***played a huge role in my journey of wellness and healing.***

Click the link below to hear some more of Nicole’s amazing story in podcast format:

[A Story of Recovery and Hope - Nicole Tierney](#)



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