

Mountain Air

Relapsing And Finding The Way Back...

One Breath At A Time

“Don’t stay too long in the shame-filled grounds of relapse...

Fertile soil awaits your return and your recovering.”

Holli Kenley, M.A., MFT

Praises for Mountain Air

- “Sustained wellness must be maintained. Holli Kenley takes us on a journey mirrored in the beautiful allegory of nature as she reclaims her true self. Come alongside her as she sheds layers of unhealthy behaviors, thoughts, and feelings... once again finding peace and the ability to breathe in life.”

Julie Hauck, R.N.

- “I love *Mountain Air*! I could relate to it so much. *Mountain Air* takes you on a rippling effect of a journey of healing, with the ups and downs of the healing process. You are on a continuous cycle of feeling better, then plagued with a reminder of the past that sets you back. There are periods of time where you regress back into unhealthy behaviors when you lose focus on how to love you for who you are and not for the damage that was done to you in the past/childhood. As a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, I could relate to the message given in *Mountain Air*. I would recommend this book to anyone in recovery.”

Marie Waldrep

Author – *A Voice That Has Spoken From Within: A Survivor’s Feelings Expressed Through Poetry*
Advocate – Mentor – Speaker – *The Mighty Phoenix*

- “Once I started reading, I could not put your book down. All I can say is WOW! In fact, I have read it twice and have taken the opportunity for personal reflection. Your book has again reaffirmed for me how life teaches the lessons we need wherever we are.

In my work as a therapist, I have been privileged to participate in my clients' courageous journeys from pain to healing. At times, they have had to struggle with the frustrating challenges of relapse. With commitment, they have been able to process and incorporate the new lessons learned as they moved from emotional birth, through death, to rebirth. Author Holli Kenley expresses this flow in a very personal and powerful way. With guided reflections, she offers the readers the opportunity to embrace their pain and move toward healing. She also presents professionals with a tool to augment their clinical work.”

Elizabeth Soeth, M.A., MFT

- “Holli Kenley’s *Mountain Air* is a refreshing look at the process of relapse and recovery. Who better to offer insight than someone who has lived the *dark night of the soul* and come out the other side. Holli’s self-disclosure makes this book so unique. I particularly liked the inclusion of Nature and the seasons as healing tools. As Holli writes, ‘Nature taught me long ago that resiliency is a finely blended outgrowth of devastation and courage’. Discussion questions at the end of each chapter make this into a workbook for recovery as well as a healing story. I will recommend it for my clients.”

Carol Teitelbaum, MFT, Rancho Mirage, California

Founder of www.creativechangeconferenes.com and *It Happens to Boys Project* for men abused as children.

- “Using the strength and power of nature’s lessons, *Mountain Air* provides a message of hope and the strategies to get there. For all who feel they have compromised their time, values, and integrity to the extent they have lost themselves and are now seeking a path back to their truth and authentic self, this is a must read. With Holli’s inspiring personal journey from relapse to recovery and her challenging questions in each chapter, the reader can examine self-defeating behaviors and beliefs that block the natural ability to walk through change, pain, and difficult times. A unique and comprehensive approach for both individuals and clinicians to use as a guide for relapse prevention and recovery.”

Melissa Yarbray, M.A.

Marriage and Family Therapist, Licensed Advanced Alcohol & Drug Counselor

- “*Mountain Air* is a learning tool. It not only provides journaling prompts which allow the readers to become participants in their healing, but it does so in such a meaningful way. Holli Kenley’s ability to share the lessons that she learned from Nature and her own life are inspiring. It makes me want to take more time and ‘listen’ to the messages that are right in front of me – the ones Nature provides. As Holli masterfully crafts both story and emotion, she writes to help others who are struggling and to help loved ones by providing them with greater insight into the topic of relapse.”

Diana Cinatl, M. A. Education, International Baccalaureate Coordinator Secondary Education

- “Holle Kenley, psychotherapist and abuse-survivor herself, has created a work that is unique in the recovery literature. Her particular focus is on the inevitable relapses along the way to healing. Recovery is not a straight line ascent but rather a spiral in which the old issues, temptations, and fears come around again, challenging us to meet them at a higher level of functioning. Without going into the history of her abuse, her book is nevertheless a personal memoir out of which she extracts principles that can be generalized to all who are in recovery, inspiring them to take courage. This poetic and nature-infused account should become a standard for all therapists and all in the process of recovery.”

David Van Nuys, Ph.D.

Emeritus Professor of Psychology

Host, Shrink Rap Radio

For The Recovering

My truth is mine and mine alone,

It centers me and comforts me.

I share it freely and honestly,

Helping others to honor their own.

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Acknowledging our paths...

Loving Healing Press, Inc. – Publisher Victor Volkman, Editor Ernest Dempsey, and Staff –

Our paths first crossed in the Winter of 2009,
Thank you for your unwavering belief in my work,
And for your commitment to empowering the healing community.

Lani Stoner – Fellow Therapist and Trusting Friend-

Our paths connected in the Fall of 2008,
Thank you for your extraordinary talents in editing, revising, and clarifying,
And for your continual investment into the wellness of others.

Diana Cinatl – Longtime Teacher Colleague and Forever Friend-

Our paths intersected in the Summer of 1988,
Thank you for your ability to fine tune a piece of writing,
And for the immeasurable compassion you gift upon others.

Dan Kenley and Alexis Shoemate – Loving Husband and Precious Daughter –

Our paths have joined and intertwined over a lifetime,
Thank you for loving me through the journeys,
And for the joy of loving you in return.

Words of Introduction

Jondra Pennington, M.S., LMFT

As a psychotherapist, reading books about the human condition is part of the job. We read for a myriad of reasons: to learn how to help the people who come to our offices looking for a way out of their pain; to be enlightened by encountering different ways to think about the world; to be moved and inspired by someone's struggle; as well as their defeat or victory in that struggle. Most of the time we read with the client in mind, but every so often we read an account of someone's pain and it resonates deep inside us. Such was the case for me when I picked up *Mountain Air*.

Unaware that this experience of my dear friend and colleague was touching something I hadn't looked at before, I found that I could only read it in small doses, unable to tolerate any more than that before a puzzling visceral gut feeling became nearly intolerable. Then one day, in a moment of stillness, it came to the surface that I had pushed down, shoved away, buried an entire six month period of time in my life where, like Holli, I made a move that I thought would be the very best thing I could do, but resulted in losing my footing and going into a free-fall of confusion and panic as I felt myself slipping away. Instead of feeling confident and sure of myself and my decisions, my days were filled with anxiety, depression, sleepless nights, fear, loneliness, and questions...lots of questions: "why was this happening?" "how could I have been so wrong?" "is there an end to this pain?" and, if so, "how will I survive until I get there?".

Jumping ahead, it took time, but I did find my way back, and I promptly took the events of the previous six months and pushed them way into the background, covered them up with a big black tarp and never looked back....until now.

To a therapist, burying painful events is a big no-no. We encourage and guide people as they pull back the covering on pain and accompany them through the mess it leaves in its wake. I never thought I would need to do that for myself. Arrogance? No. Denial? Most certainly.

Once I realized that there was unfinished emotional business to take care of, I used the relapse and recovery that is shared in *Mountain Air*, as my guide and companion. This wasn't hard to do given the tender and validating style in which it is written. I began by giving myself permission to go as slow as I needed to go so I could drink in every element of the story and how it relates to my experience. The questions at the end of the chapters facilitated going deeper into what happened to me emotionally during those six months. They also helped me see in a very personal way that the recovery process really isn't linear. The process ebbs and flows, but with each ebb there are lessons to hold onto as life inevitably flows forward again.

With *Mountain Air*, Holli has made a major contribution to the world of recovery in all its forms. No doubt, this book will find its way into the offices of many psychotherapists, into treatment centers, and onto the recommended reading lists of those in the recovery field. Her contribution to the profession is without question. But, Holli has gone a step further into a place only a handful of therapists go: sharing a deeply personal and painful life experience in such brutal detail. Her willingness to do so shows you,

the reader, that you are not alone; there is nothing shameful about relapsing, that recovery is most definitely possible, and that on the other side of that relapse is strength and peace.

I pray that you are as blessed as I was as you use *Mountain Air* as part of your own journey back to wholeness.

Preface

Don't stay long in the shame-filled grounds of relapse,

Fertile soil awaits your return and your recovering.

I believe that life is about recovering and about rejoicing. Many of us who have experienced pain in its many forms and faces have also had the opportunity to embrace recovering from it. It is an on-going journey - one that requires a steadfast spirit and an uncompromising commitment. It is a path that brings us our greatest feelings of peace and of purpose; it is a road to living life to its fullest and at its truest. At the same time, no degree of recovering or of healing knowledge can guarantee a relapse-free life. Relapse is a very real part of recovering; and thus, it is worthy of our attention.

This book is for anyone who has experienced the hard work of recovering and who has rejoiced in its rewards. It is for anyone who has encountered relapse along the way; however, this book addresses relapse in the broad sense of the word. It is for any individual who has returned to or regressed into a pattern of behavior that is unhealthy or unsafe. It is for those individuals who have abandoned their authentic ways of being for a life of personal neglect, of indulgence, or of self-destruction. The book speaks to the addict who has lost his sobriety, to the abused who has returned to her abuser, or to the codependent who has given up his resources once again to rescue the uncontrollable. This book also reaches out to individuals who have maintained a life of stability and wellness, but who have found themselves eroding over time, disappearing, and losing their sense of self and of spirit. It is for the person who has fallen away from a life that is not congruent with the truths that he/she has chosen to invest into, trust in or believe in. It is for anyone who has forfeited his way of being and who is fighting to find his way back.

“Mountain Air: Relapsing & Finding The Way Back One Breath At A Time” is a brutally honest personal narrative covering a three year period of time, from the summer of 2008 through the summer of 2011. At the beginning of each chapter, I write in the present tense describing my current circumstances and my descent into relapse. After each chapter’s introductory section where I disclose the painful decline of my healthy way of being, I take the reader back in time to a sustained season of wellness in my life’s healing journey. In each flashback (which is separated in the text with *italics*), I share with the reader a series of relapse lessons and the recovering messages within each. It is in the recalling of these messages that I am able to reclaim their meanings, reintegrate them into my life, and return to healthier ground. Although there are typically several lessons within each chapter, the following theme words describe the essence of each in relation to relapse: Chapter One –Losing ones’ self; Chapter Two – Lessons lost; Chapter Three – Relapse is relentless; Chapter Four – Shame; Chapter Five – The restraints of relapse; Chapter Six – Seeds of doubt and disappointment; Chapter Seven –A fearless inventory; Chapter Eight – Releasing; Chapter Nine – Reclaiming ones’ self and ones’ truth; Chapter Ten – Home; Epilogue – Rewards.

As I share my relapse journey with you, I invite the reader to take an active part in your healing work as well. At the end of each chapter, there are a series of topics for reflective journaling and recovering exercises embedded within them. Choose a time and place that is safe and free of distractions.

Although topics may be difficult to think back upon or about, set a comfortable pace for yourself as you write honestly and openly about your experiences. Acknowledging and expressing your painful injuries, injustices, or inadequacies is the first step in breaking through a period relapse or an episode of regression into unhealthy life patterns. Secondly, learning how to make healthy choices and then acting upon them will help you to maintain and sustain a well way of being.

Let’s begin our recovering together.