



Opening Remarks from Tony Valadez, Co-Chairman of the 36th Annual Fall Luncheon with Alice Cooper, November 1, 2018

My name is Tony and I'm an alcoholic living in recovery.

It is both an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to co-chair this luncheon benefiting The Council on Recovery.

I think it's important to shed light on what recovery means to me personally, so that some of you that may not be familiar with this lifestyle can walk away from today's luncheon with relevant information and so that you can spread the word to someone you know that may need help.

I was raised in a good family. My parents are still together after 50 years of marriage. As a kid, I was kind of a mixture between a wanna-be jock and a new waver – which basically means I wore pinch roll pants, yellow jackets and bolo ties.... think Don Johnson but much skinnier and with an afro – FRO was my nickname in high school.

My upbringing was rather normal, and I respected my parents and avoided their discipline. When I went off to college and flew the coop for the first time, I discovered that I loved alcohol. And that my favorite drink was MORE.

I even went to a college that catered to my new lifestyle, which some of you might know since it's right up 59 North..SFA which I later found out stands for School for Alcoholics! My experience there may hamper my chances of running for a political office.

I carried those party years into my adult life – not knowing that most people weren't waking up in the late morning throwing up so much that all that would come out was bile acid. They didn't try to find solace in a warm shower until the water turned cold, then go back to bed sweating and repeat the process a couple of more times. My motto used to be: "If you aren't wasted, the day is."

Some of you may know a bit about my personal life. It's important to me to be the best father that I can be. My son was born with an extremely rare and catastrophic seizure disorder. He has had multiple resections of his brain, countless drugs and therapies, implanted brain stimulators, global delays, limited vision, low functioning and non-verbal autism. Bottom line is that he's not normal or mainstream. He is the exact child that I was meant to have. He is pure love and a reflection of what I am aspiring to be in recovery. Accepting, non-judgmental, observing, happy, curious, content, harmless, and most of all – loving.

I cannot predict what the future has in store for him – but then again, I can't predict what the future has in store for me. All I have is right now and the opportunity to put my best foot forward with my chin up as I walk in the glow of GODs light like an inquisitive child.

Living in recovery means to live sober...It means that in social situations where drinking is normal, I don't drink. At first this seems an insurmountable task but the fellowship among those of us living this "underground lifestyle" and the building of character that develops by working a program of recovery turns us into confident, spiritual beings that are both happy and present in the moment. I became clear headed and clear eyed and I started following what I like to call "my true north".

I found out that happiness is an inside job that cannot be swayed by external influences. Nobody can take away my serenity any longer.

My mom used to always tell me that all she wanted for me was to be happy...Today, I am truly happy.