

breathe, heal, repeat

The night of the accident was the last time Dina Knight had a drink. She'd been out partying in Honolulu's Chinatown and doesn't remember how she ended up driving so far from home. What she does remember is hitting the concrete barrier that caused her car to flip. The rest of the night comes to her in bursts — two men helping her out of the car, fainting on the highway, flagging down a stranger to take her home.



words: Michelle Reagan
photos: Lauren Gould



Throughout the course of the accident and its aftermath, Knight damaged City and County property, left the scene of an accident, reported her car stolen, committed insurance fraud, and notarized a false statement. At this point, lying was second nature. But for the first time, she realized it wasn't tenable.

"Making the decision to change and to stick with sobriety is rooted in the realization that everything you've done in the past and the way you've done it didn't work," says Knight. "You have to do things differently now."

In pieces

Knight's addiction started when she was a teenager. She was a latchkey kid with parents who loved her deeply but didn't always agree on how to raise her. Her extreme independence at an impressionable age made it easy for her to manipulate them. Within months of going away to college, she'd been expelled after two hospitalizations related to her substance use. Her dad helped her get into another school, where she made it to her senior year before two more hospitalizations.

She says that many of her parents' efforts to bail her out only enabled her. She tears up talking about all the people who are overwhelmed and hopeless because of their addiction, those who don't have the support that she did. She



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encourages addicts and their families to seek professional help and to accept the fact that those close to us aren't always the best ones to help us.

In total, Knight was hospitalized eight times before the accident. “Knowing what I know now, I was playing with death on a daily basis. Just no regard for the consequences,” Knight says. “I was a corpse trying to make it through life.”

After the accident, Knight had to face the consequences of years of lying. Her relationships were superficial and she'd lost the trust of the people she cared about most. She barely knew herself. It was time to get sober.

Becoming whole

Knight credits her recovery to familiar interventions — working the steps with an addiction professional, finding community support, and medication.

But she credits much of her lasting success to yoga.

Although she walked away from the accident with barely a scratch, Knight had lingering back pain and severe anxiety. She started stretching in her living room to find some relief.

“It started as a very informal practice. It was an acknowledgement that through drinking and drug and alcohol abuse, I totally lost any connection with how my physical body was feeling,” she says. “So I started stretching and really being able to affect the way my body felt.”

Knight says many addicts find yoga in recovery because they feel disconnected from their lives. Yoga requires presence of mind. It requires physical and mental discipline. And it requires you to slow down. That's a tall order for most people, but especially for those who are used to delirium and detachment.

The benefits can't be denied. Yoga and meditation test practitioners' mental and physical limits, asking them to repeatedly control their response to stress. Over time, these practices change the shape of the brain, improving mental resilience.

Today, Knight works as a yoga teacher and helps others build their own home practice. “Yoga is a therapeutic psychological tool to work through trauma, to work through stress, to work through physical blockages,” she says.

“It's an acknowledgement that we have all these different levels that we function on so that we can be complete, balanced, happy, healthy people.” She says it's the perfect metaphor for recovery: you need to go deep to find deep healing.

If you or someone you love is battling addiction, visit:
health.hawaii.gov/substance-abuse/prevention-treatment.