

Today's

REALTOR®

November 1996 Published by the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

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MANAGER EDITION

Life After Crack

**A Thanksgiving
Tale of Renewal**



WHAT ARE YOU THANKFUL FOR?

We asked readers to tell us whether they had something special to be grateful for this Thanksgiving. Here's a sample of their stories.

OVERCOMING *a Crack Cocaine Addiction*

BY WALT ALBRO

Seven years ago, Danny Pacheco was a successful, well-known residential salesperson in Honolulu. He had a six-figure income, a nice car, a fancy house, and industry recognition.

Then he started smoking crack cocaine.

After three years of a crack habit that was costing him up to \$1,500 a day, he lost everything but 58 cents and the clothes on his back. "I almost ended up living on the streets," he says.

Today Pacheco has kicked his crack addiction and is rebuilding his shattered real estate career. "I'm thankful to be alive," he says.

He volunteered the story of his addiction for the benefit of other practitioners who may be struggling silently with drug or alcohol problems.

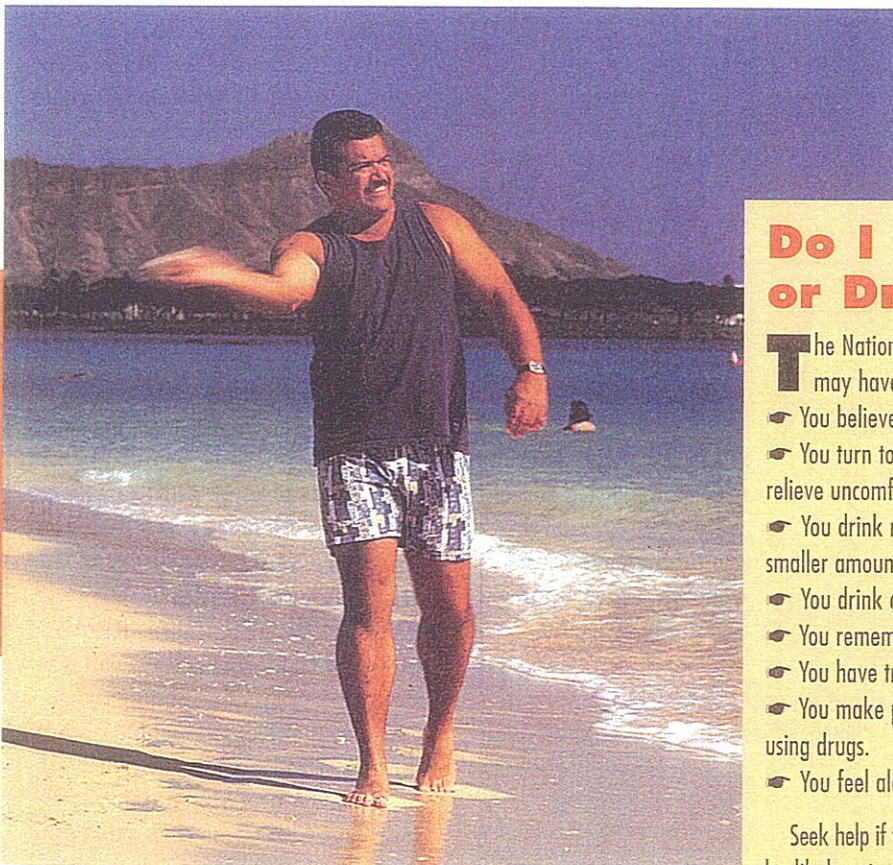
Mr. Personality

Pacheco started selling real estate part-time in 1978. His first year was a disaster; he didn't close a single sale. He enjoyed

selling, so he asked his broker at First Hawaiian Realty for advice on how to succeed. His broker taught him to focus on listings and to set up a proper farm.

By his second year, Pacheco was doing well enough to switch to real estate full-time. A natural people person, he was known to others in his office as "Mr. Personality." Within a short time, still in his 20s, he became the company's top salesperson, earning, at his peak, commissions of more than \$100,000 a year.

Pacheco, a social drinker, found that as a real estate practitioner he began drinking more heavily. "All the real estate meetings, lunches, and dinners seemed to revolve around cocktails," he says. Real estate was a particularly good business for a heavy drinker to be in, he notes, because of the



Danny Pacheco says he hit bottom and "I don't ever want to go there again."

Do I Have an Alcohol or Drug Problem?

The National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information says you may have a problem with alcohol or drugs if

- You believe that to have fun you need to drink or use drugs.
- You turn to alcohol or drugs after a confrontation or argument or to relieve uncomfortable feelings.
- You drink more or use more drugs to get the same effect you got with smaller amounts.
- You drink or use drugs when alone.
- You remember how last night began but not how it ended.
- You have trouble at work because of alcohol or drug use.
- You make promises to yourself or others that you'll stop getting drunk or using drugs.
- You feel alone, scared, miserable, and depressed.

Seek help if you've experienced any of these situations. Contact your local health department or the local chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. For a list of self-help and recovery groups on the World Wide Web, see Recovery@NetWizards.net.

flexible hours. "If I was hungover in the morning, I'd make a phone call and reschedule my appointments," he says. Nobody but his wife knew, or even suspected, that he had a drinking problem.

One December in the mid-1980s, Pacheco attended a party hosted by an escrow office. Since he had been up late drinking the night before, Pacheco looked tired. A fellow real estate salesperson offered to give him something to perk him up. He snorted cocaine for the first time.

Pacheco liked the high. "It made me feel energetic," he says. With cocaine, he could drink more alcohol and stay later in the evenings at the bar.

Instant Addiction

Soon Pacheco carried cocaine with him wherever he went. He spent about \$100 for a bag, which would last a week or two. For years, he sat at open houses with cocaine in his briefcase. Once, the bag almost fell out in a client's home.

In 1989 he and his wife divorced. One factor was his alcohol and drug habits. He and his wife sold their house and divided the proceeds. Pacheco was left with several hundred thousand dollars, much of which he put into a stock market brokerage account.

One night Pacheco went to a party where a friend offered him some crack, a concentrated form of cocaine. From the first puff, Pacheco says, he was "instantly addicted."

Over the next three years, Pacheco spent increasing amounts of money buying more and more crack. Unlike the case with alcohol or cocaine, however, he found that he couldn't function normally while using crack. He missed appointments, and his commission income dropped. He lost weight.

When he couldn't make enough money to pay for crack, he dipped into his stock market account. He quickly wiped it out.

Desperate to buy crack, he began hocking his remaining personal property, including a microwave, a TV, and a VCR. In August 1992 his mother convinced him to check into a hospital drug rehabilitation center. The move, he believes, saved his life.

Learned to Be Grateful

Pacheco now lives more modestly than he did at the peak of his success in the 1980s. During recovery he had to declare personal bankruptcy. For two years he slept on a sofa at his mother's apartment.

Today he can't get a credit card. And he drives a used 1982 Buick.

But he couldn't be happier: "I've learned to be grateful for the little things

in life."

He's been alcohol and drug free four years. Two years ago he joined another company, Savio Realty Ltd.—Better Homes and Gardens, as a salesperson. The owner knows that he's a recovering addict and is supportive, Pacheco says. Last year he was the top salesperson in the company's East Oahu office.

Pacheco volunteers much of his spare time helping recovering addicts and alcoholics.

"They say you have to hit bottom before you seek help," he says. "I've been there, and I don't ever want to go there again."

THANKSGIVING PROFILE

Saving a Troubled Teenager

One fall day, Luci Champion, a salesperson with Realty Executives 100, Falls Church, Va., was convinced she was about to become a crime victim. Unexpectedly, the story had a happy ending.



Luci Champion

She was alone, sitting outside at an open house for a small rural development of new homes, when suddenly she noticed a large young man, barefoot and shirtless and wearing only a pair of jeans. He loitered nearby, acting suspiciously.

Champion watched as he seemed to walk away. But then he turned back toward her with a knife poised in one hand and a rope in the other.

"I knew I was facing death. I cried out, 'Jesus!'" she says.

"To my surprise, he stopped as if a bullet had hit him. He dropped his hands and began to back away, saying, 'Help me! Please help me!'"

"I replied, 'Yes, I'll help you. Just drop those things.'"

"Immediately, he threw the knife and rope in the street.

"Now go and sit in that chair," I insisted. Again, he obeyed. He was looking at me expectantly, and a wave of compassion filled my heart. I have five sons, and I felt I had to try to help him.

"He poured out his story. His father had thrown him out of the house after an argument. He had spent the night in the woods. He had been in trouble and under psychiatric care since he was a small boy.

"I told him that God loved him and that I believed that God could help. He agreed, and we prayed. His whole life changed.

"Later he became a friend of ours. A county judge who worked with juveniles also took an interest in him. Today this young man is living a productive life.

"I'm so thankful that things turned out well for him."