



My name is Wynonna Judd and I'm a recovering entertainer

The Recovery Living Interview

When Wynonna Judd walked in the conference room at Brain State Technologies, her smile lit up the room. Although she has more gold and platinum records than she can count and an impressive list of awards, Wynonna doesn't come across as a big music star but rather as a lovely and friendly woman willing to share her experience in order to help others.

Born Christina Claire Ciminella in Ashland Kentucky, she renamed herself Wynonna Judd—taking her last name from her mother's maiden name and her first name from the line “Don't forget Winona” in the pop song “Route 66”—



and gained immediate success as part of the duo, the Judds, with her mother Naomi in the early eighties. Eight years later, Naomi was diagnosed with Hepatitis C and had to leave the tour. The Judds embarked on their last tour dubbed “The Farewell Tour” and won an unprecedented eighth consecutive win for Country Duo at CMA Awards.

In November 2003, Wynonna was arrested for a DUI and her mug shot was displayed on televisions and on the front pages all over the country. But Wynonna’s addiction was not alcohol. Her addictive issues are codependent family relationships, primarily with her mother, Naomi, and her sister, Ashley, but also with her husband and children; a destructive relationship with money; and what she calls a “severe dependency on food.”

During their eight years on the road, mother and daughter lived in the confines of a Silver Eagle bus and fought each other over anything and everything. In those days, Wynonna called her mother “my beloved enemy” and Naomi railed about her daughter’s chronic lateness and disastrous taste in men. Young Ashley was not immune to the family bickering. In time, and with the help of much family therapy, the Judd women would learn to forge their separate identities and live peacefully on their adjoining farms in Tennessee.

In December of 2003, Wynonna’s staff, led by her manager, Kerry Hansen, informed her that she was going bankrupt. In spite of her huge income from records and concerts, she was spending far more than she was earning and she was on the verge of losing her beloved 525-acre farm—unless she took drastic measures. To emphasize the urgency of the intervention, they gave Wynonna a business card with a name and phone number.

The name on the card was Ted Klontz, and he ran Onsite, a healing center in Cumberland Furnace, Tennessee. In January of 2004, Wynonna attended her first Onsite workshop. Holed up in a cabin for five days, she did her genealogy, put her entire life on a whiteboard and looked at the patterns of her behavior in the mirror of her life.

In short order, Ted Klontz would become the family coach—a family that included her mother, Naomi, her sister Ashley, her children, Grace, Elijah and Zac, and the man she had considered to be her dad, Michael Ciminella, from whom she had been estranged for almost a decade.

In January of 2006, on Ted’s advice, Wynonna spent 42 days at the Shades of Hope rehab facility in Buffalo Gap, Texas, for eating disorders. She had just published her memoir, *Coming Home to Myself*, in September 2005, had finished the book tour, and was tired of struggling with her weight. “I’ve given my music career over to God. I’ve given my family over to God.” It was time to give over her food issues to God.

The last leg of Wynonna’s long journey of survival and redemption was Brain State Technologies in Scottsdale, Arizona. Ted Klontz found out about Lee Gerdes’ brain conditioning process and mentioned it to Wynonna and Naomi in the spring of 2008. In no time, mother and daughter were on a plane to Arizona for the first series of ten sessions of brain harmonizing.

This interview was conducted on September 10, 2008 while Wynonna was in Arizona for a weeklong ten-session refresher course of Brain State Conditioning.

WYNONNAJUDD: Hi, my name's Wynonna and I'm a recovering entertainer.

RECOVERY LIVING MAGAZINE: How did you hear about Brain State Conditioning?

WYNONNA: Ted Klontz, my coach, called me to Onsite to show me the DVD about Brain State Conditioning, and it literally like blew the doors wide open to possibilities I had never experienced before. And I've done it all—literally. I've been on this journey to self-discovery for some time.

RLM: What kinds of therapies did you do before Onsite and Brain State?

WYNONNA: I've had countless therapists. I was considered to be a special-needs child and I had severe ADD. I was always in some kind of a process, with a teacher saying, "We really love Wynonna and she's such a bright light, but we can't get her to focus. What are we gonna do with her?" I feel like my whole life has been a process of finding out where to fit in, because there was this norm and I was always out here somewhere. My Mom was always trying to find somebody to help me. I always felt like the misfit of my family.

Then, around eight years of age, a special teacher told me, "You're really different. You're really unique and special," so that was a validation. And then, fast-forward to 15, when I had my first experience with a probation officer, because I stole lipstick from the Kroeger in town, I had somebody, a coach if you will, look after me. And then in 1990, my mom and I did our Farewell Tour. The family was so, so broken that we all went into therapy together—the whole family, my mom, my pop, Ashley, myself, my husband at the time, my grandmother, everybody would at some point come in and out the door. After the Farewell Tour, my life just exploded.

My entire life was such a paradox at that time—my mom had left the road, I was starting my own career, I was an orphan but I was very successful, I was breaking all the records but I was on my bus alone. One moment, I'm affirmed on stage with ten or twenty thousand people cheering, the next moment the lights are out and I'm alone with my addicted mind in my hotel room, trying to fight the chaos, trying to find balance.

RLM: What was the focus of the therapies?

WYNONNA: The focus was—what in the

world? I am such in a battle between feeling affirmed on stage and feeling the light, you know, shining on me literally and figuratively, and then stepping off stage and the lights being out, and being isolated. So, I would go from a hotel room alone with my addiction mind, to 10,000-20,000 people, and it was just too much. So I was looking for balance.

My mom's book says I was born singing on perfect pitch in search of harmony and balance, and I think that's true, but I was also born into chaos, probably starting in the womb, and somewhere I got the message that I'm part of the chaos, even responsible for it, and I'm looking for affirmation that I'm OK—looking at everybody and everything else but



myself. I'm seeing therapist after therapist. I try EMDR, I go to Deepak Chopra's clinic for two weeks and learn that I'm "pitakofa"—fire. I got married, had my children, then in 2003, I get in financial trouble and my team did an intervention, saying, "What we're watching is slow suicide. What are you gonna do about it?" And they hand me a card that said Ted Klontz, and I called Ted Klontz but he didn't answer, thank God, and I leave a message, thinking I did it, that's it—and then Ted called me right back.

So I wound up at Onsite in 2003. It was supposed to be a financial workshop, sort of how to deal with money, and ended up being anything but. It was like "We have a lot of work to do before we talk about the money," then it was, "Money is the least of your worries right now, we need to start from your personal process—" So I'm at Onsite, living in a cabin for six days, showing up to class, seeing my whole life, you know, up on the wall, flashing before me, and I'm peeling back the layers, one at a time. It was profoundly life-changing, and I see the addiction and I realize that I'm in a battle for my life, and so in 2005 I went to treatment for 42 days to an all-addictions facility that specializes in eating disorders. It's called Shades of Hope and it's in Buffalo Gap, Texas. I ended up down there and, boy-oh-boy, the whole family came. I had quite a family week. It was wild. It was the first time I had had my family in the same room since I was a child.

I come from a long line of addiction. They had me do a genealogy and we're the typical dysfunctional family—there's work addiction, food addiction, alcoholism, gambling, all of it. I had known—and I'm in the perfect business to indulge in addiction because in there's no moderation in what I do. I have to do it with as much passion as I have, and it's always about "more." It's always all or nothing.

Then I realized that my husband has his issues with drugs and alcohol, and he went to treatment in the same place, and our family went through a process of realizing that he had his work to do and I had my work to do. We separated. I had been practicing our diseases in our marriage and I had taken on the role of sort of enabler, the role of the fix-it person, and I had to stop playing the old tapes in my head, the tapes that kept saying, "You're the problem." So now I'm back to being a single parent, raising a family and working. And my family and I entered into a family process.

RLM: What is the family process?

WYNONNA: I have a theory that my family will probably disagree with—I like to refer to it as the "bait and switch". Everyone came to family week because everyone wanted to change *me*, I was the one that needed fixing. And everyone else got their share of reality and they each had to take a look at their own process. And we all benefited. We're all spokes in a wheel and Shades of Hope represents the all-addiction part.

Well I won't speak for everyone. I'll just say that I continue to benefit from Shades. It was my first experience with codependency. It helped me realize how much of a codependent I really was and how I got my absolute happiness from other people. I was a people-pleaser of all people-pleasers in my family, and that I had pretty much enabled a lot of people. In my family, I tended to be the mediator, and carry the load, physically, with weight, and emotionally. I felt very responsible for my mom and my sister. So we're all in this process, and Ted facilitates a lot of it. He does the work with us both individually and as a family. It's multi-layered.

I did this thing at Onsite that really helped me understand why I do what I do. It was "The Wall"—they hook you up to a harness and you have to climb this wall. I tried for close to an hour, huffing and puffing, and there was this professional rock climber standing right there. After about twenty tries I was just fighting mad, and Ted sat me down and said, "Did you ever think about asking for help?" I said "No! I am woman, hear me roar!" I kept trying and it didn't work, and finally the moment came when I went, "Oh, I might need to ask for help. I might need to reach out and get some advice." No-one ever taught me to do that.

RLM: Where do you meet with your family?

WYNONNA: We meet usually on the farm—at one of the houses on the farm—around the supper table. Ted sits in the center, literally, and I want to say he holds court. We're all three very strong alpha females and we're pretty opinionated and passionate like any other family, and Ted has to be the one who says "I need you to stop. Hang on just a second." Sometimes in my family we want to be right more than we wanted to be loved. And Ted sort of holds up the mirror, and says, "I hear you saying this, let's take a look at you."

What I do is to hold on to information so that the others will come to me and ask, because I'm needed. I had a tendency to stand between my mom and sister a lot and say to my mom, "I need for you to talk to Ashley about that." And when I got fired as the person everyone came to, it got real lonely. But I got really sick of that role. At Onsite, we did this exercise where I carried a tray of glasses filled with water, learning to balance it with one hand so I could do other things, and it took a whole two weeks before someone finally came up to me and said, "You don't have to carry that anymore, you know?" No, I didn't know. But I learned my lesson.

RLM: Okay, so when did you start Brain State?

WYNONNA: In May of 2008 on my birth-

day. I came here with my mom. It was a gift to me for my birthday, quite a great gift. I walked in here wanting to be the student, and yet wanted to really do it right, be smart, be savvy, be a champion. And the whole time we were here, Lee Gerdes kept saying that it was about not driving and not controlling. He told me to just let go, which is not something I'm good at—letting go and letting God—because I'm recovering from perfectionism, which they say is the highest form of abuse. And I came in here really wanting to do it right, wanting to be the teacher's pet, wanting to raise my hand and figure out the answers. And here I am, realizing that I don't have to write things down and get the answers right. Are you kidding? You mean I don't have to do anything? I don't have to be smart or be successful or be perfect? I can just sit here and let my brain get balanced? Is that possible? It's too easy. I mean, what a concept! For the first time, I don't have to be smart, beautiful, talented, funny, charming. I can just show up and wait for God to walk through the room.

RLM: How long was your first session of treatments here?

WYNONNA: Ten sessions, two a day. We did an intensive, because of our schedules. I wanted the birthday surprise, and bulldog that I am, I wouldn't leave until the miracle happened—

RLM: So when did it happen?

WYNONNA: I felt some subtle things and some shifts right away, but it wasn't until later, a week or two, that I started seeing changes. There were validations along the way—people have said, "Something's going on with you" or my mom says I didn't interrupt her this time or Lee says he's never seen my eyes look so clear. You get these validations and you smile and go "I didn't have to take a pill, I didn't have to get all the answers right, I didn't have to list all the things I did today!" And it's been pretty incredible. And my husband said that my tone was softer and that I mirrored him without giving him advice. That's huge! It's huger than huge! I should win a Nobel Prize for that!

RLM: Has Brain State Conditioning affected your music—or you professionally—in any way?

WYNONNA: In all aspects.

RLM: How so?

WYNONNA: Are you ready? Okay. I'll give you an example of a recent experience that was huge for me. I've spent a lot of my career putting on the brakes to try to slow things down,



because I tend to go at 100 miles an hour. So I had a real problem with being late, procrastination is huge for me. I have battled performer's anxiety—PTSD—the fear of being eighteen and having to show up and sing in front of 50,000 people, feeling afraid and terrified of failing or whatever. I remember my first time on stage, in front of 10,000 people. The curtain was going up, and I looked at my mother and said, "I wanna go home"—sort of, "how could you do this to me?" And I see 10,000 people and the term "fight or flight" comes to mind, where I was just terrified. I've spent a lot of my career in that mode, wanting to show up and sing the music but feeling that the cost was too great.

And here we are at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, a couple of weeks ago. I showed up early, prepared, calm, and open to talking to people, which has never happened. Usually when I hit that bus door, I go straight from A to B, point B being stage. Everything from point A to point B, I am not fully present for. I don't hear people, I can't concentrate, I can't engage with anyone. I don't hear them. It's just that anxiety takes over me, and I make a bee-line for that stage, and once I'm on stage I'm great, you know, and I have a great experience, and then I go right back to my bus, then I go into a little bit of post-holiday depression. Cash-and-burn, I call it. And this time, at the Opry, I was ready before they came to get me. Usually they're standing at the bus waiting, and saying, you know, "We need to go." And I'm able to walk through all those people and be fully present and live consciously and still have enough energy to be on stage and do my show—all without medication, or going into my pre-show ritual of chanting affirmations, putting on the armor and leaning forward like I'm a linebacker, going into the Superbowl. I'm telling you, that doesn't happen. That's huger than huge. I thought, "Oh, my gosh, this is profound."



RLM: Have you noticed other changes?

WYNONNA: I've spent a lot of my life with my brakes on—everything is too much too fast too soon and I wanna go home. Years ago, someone said to me, "Did you know you're an introvert?" And I said, "I'm a comedian, come on! I'm the funniest guy alive!" I've been so taught to be an entertainer that I didn't realize that there was that part of me that craved to be alone. That's why I isolate. So Brain State was kind of the cart before the horse. It actually planted this beautiful idea that I can be both people at the same time. I can be introverted and extraverted in the same environment. I don't have to fight and battle my way through. I'm now able to show up in the studio without sitting in the car for ten minutes trying to get up enough courage to come in. And it's pretty organic—I'm now off all medications.

All my life I've heard, "Be the change you want to see in the world" and I've got all the books, I've got all the bumper stickers, I've got all the t-shirts. I've read most of the books. And in my mind I'm really smart and I know way too much. And yet I didn't apply it. People would say, "You're smarter than you act." What does that mean? I've spent so much of my adult life in adolescence because I just craved playing and enjoying my success, and I wasn't able to. When I went on Oprah, I got 700,000 emails from people saying "I had no idea that you were in this much pain!" Yet I've battled depression as long as I can remember.

Brain State is the final frontier, is my final sort of resting place, if you will. I noticed right away that I was making different choices. I tend to be in morbid reflection, to live in the past. I can go to the Judd Library and see what I was like when I was twelve—we have the biographies, the shows, the hairstyles and I lived in that past—or I could contemplate the future because we're planners—but I didn't know how to live in the present. And I notice now that I can actually engage and be in the

present without multi-tasking, looking at my watch, thinking about tomorrow, without my static brain being full of fifty thoughts in three seconds. I've been waiting for someone to give me permission to live.

And I stopped playing the little game I play with myself called "Borrowing from Peter to pay Paul." I usually says yes to everybody. Ask my manager. She's like, "Wynonna, I don't know that it's necessary to do a hundred benefits this year." But I say yes because I love the light-up on the face, I feel I can't give back enough. I'd book two and three things at the same time and then I'd end up making people mad. Now, I say, "Wait a minute, I don't know if I can."

Also, as a mom, I just don't feel the need to overtake and control my daughter like I did, because she's a pre-teen, and the president of her own country, but I would tend to drive her the way my mother drove me when we were on a bus for ten years, whether it's her hair or her clothes or her friends. Since Brain State, I actually don't need to do as much. It's huge and it's breaking the cycle.

RLM: You've been battling your weight issue and contemplated gastric bypass surgery.

WYNONNA: Yes, I was desperate. I've been suffering in silence until the Oprah shows a couple of years ago. That opened up a whole new door to Wynonna's journey, and people were living vicariously through me and watching me so they don't have to look at their stuff. I feel like I have a key to the door now, a key I didn't have before.

Since Brain State, I don't crave sugar like I did. I usually use sugar for two things—when I'm hungry and when I'm not. Not anymore. Usually, I have to have my mini-bar ejected, and I didn't this time. That's huge. I haven't ordered dessert with my meals. That's huuuuuge. I'm not so consumed by it like the heroin addict is.

RLM: Are you in a 12-Step program right now?

WYNONNA: I would say I'm in a process. One of the traditions of 12-Steps programs is not to broadcast it. No media, no radio. But talking to you as a friend, I could share my story. Food and money continue to be part of my journey. They're interchangeable; they're one and the same. I've lived that typical American life—"Make a lot, spend a lot, make a lot, spend a lot"—it's the debtor/spender thing. Now the word I just keep hearing is "balance, balance, balance."

About the money, I still remember the day my people came to see me and said, "You continue to do this and you'll end up like that other guy from Memphis, Tennessee—the guy named Elvis." It was time. And with the food, I've caught myself saying, "I'm hungry, I haven't eaten", when I just ate an hour ago. I was in such denial, I didn't realize what I was doing. I wasn't living consciously.

Bottom line is Brain State has allowed me to live consciously. What is that line? "Everything's not okay but I'm okay with everything." I went from zero to sixty in three seconds. And now I can gear up and gear down. Before, between zero to sixty, there was no in between. Now I'm learning to live in the in-between, in the balance. That's just not the Judd way! But I like living consciously in-between zero and sixty. Brain State has taught me, "Just in case you're wondering, there is a Higher Power, and you're not it." But, hey, other than that, there's not a whole lot going on.