

	Jorge	I came to school here, I was pretty much bored. I was bored, I was pretty much the class clown until one of my teachers--her name is Miss Capen -- she said, "Mr. Alvarez, instead of being class clown, why don't you consider a career in acting?" I was like, "No, that's whack. I'm not...I don't want to be an actor." And she...I was like, "They don't make a lot of money." And then, she was like, "What do you think, Denzel Washington does it for free?"
An Intro to Acting	Andy Jorge	So did you explore the acting field in high school and as a career? The funny thing is that a year later--my sophomore year-- Carmen Rivera, she wrote a play called "La Gringa." So, she came to my school and she did this workshop where she brought the class to a play and it blew my mind away. Seeing the play "La Gringa" was the most amazing thing that had happened to my life, up to that point, because I saw someone from two different worlds trying to make it in America.
	Andy.	So at the end of class Carmen Rivera asked if anyone is interested in acting. And she referred Jorge to the Henry Street Settlement, a non-profit social service agency on New York's Lower East Side. From there, he got involved in an acting group called the Urban Youth Theatre (or UYT for short).
	Jorge	I started doing plays, I started taking acting classes every Saturday. I would take the train at that age...I would take the D train all the way to Broadway and Lafayette, then transferred to the F train to Delancey and Essex and walk to Henry Street Settlement every day. That was my life until I got to college, pretty much. From my sophomore year all the way to my freshman year of college, that's all I did.
	Andy	Jorge went to Lehman College to pursue a drama degree. And at the same time he was producing and acting in his own plays. But after college he started to get more deeply involved in drugs and partying.
A Life of Drugs and Alcohol	Jorge	I was just fed up with everything I did not learn in college about the entertainment industry. So I wanted to just focus on finding myself and finding myself including partying every day. I would go to bars, I was at every networking event that I could possibly find that had to do with acting. And I was just getting wasted: wasted with my friends, wasted with family members, every day, like...

		<p>...Seven days a week, I was drinking and wasted and smoking every day. Yeah. And I moved in with my sister and so, I was living with my sister at the time. And her situation was just horrible.</p> <p>So I move in with her, thinking that, "Okay, I'm going to figure out a way to find myself. I'm going to reconnect with my sister," but no. It was complete hell.</p>
	Andy	<p>Jorge's sister was a young mother. But she was also a drug dealer.</p> <p>Jorge lived with her for two years. And his stories of those two years involve drugs, guns, the police and even murder.</p> <p>After he moved out of his sister's apartment, a close friend finally confronted him about his own drug problems.</p>
	Jorge	<p>I met up with another friend who was a filmmaker and she...we had a heart-to-heart and she said, "You know what your problem is? You're an addict."</p> <p>And I'm like, "What?" I'm like, "I'm not an addict." And I was just completely blown away by someone saying that I'm an addict, like, "Yeah, you drink, you're always smoking, you're always high." And this was the friend who had fired me from a film because I couldn't memorize my lines, because I was too high.</p>
	Andy	Jorge went to his first Alcoholics Anonymous Meeting.
My First "AA" Meeting	Jorge	<p>So we have another mutual friend, his name is Yao. And Yao takes me to an AA meeting. And so, I end up at this beginners meeting and it was kind of like UYT again--my first theater group--where I am in a diverse group of people and we all have one thing in common. That blew my mind, hearing someone who was 30 years older than me, someone from India, someone from a completely different part of the world talk about their addiction. And I can relate to everything. I was able to relate to everything. The truth scared me that day and so, I didn't come back for another two weeks.</p> <p>And so, I...my friend Yao had found Phoenix House and he was like, "You need to be in a place where someone's going to support you if your goal is to be clean."</p>
	Andy	Phoenix House is a drug & alcohol rehabilitation organization. Jorge was there for 15 months.

Enter Phoenix House	Jorge	<p>Phoenix House was a fucking mess. I was in intense treatment. So in intense treatment, there are...there's a loophole where folks who want to avoid prison sentences go to drug programs.</p> <p>It was rough. And I was trying to get away from environments like that, where if I'm...if you're soft-spoken, if you have manners, you're not going to make it far in jail. So in this program, it was kind of similar, where I got into a lot of altercations, but it never went anywhere far. But there was drug dealing within the program, there were fights, there was a lot of crazy shit going on. I had no idea how valuable a pack of cigarettes is.</p>
	Andy	<p>It's here that the story starts to improve. After a first round of treatment, Jorge moved to a less intensive Phoenix House facility. And he first became involved with a group called "Back on My Feet" here.</p>
Running with "Back on My Feet"	Jorge	<p>Back On My Feet is a peer running group that meets three times a week, to run at 5:30 a.m. We share the serenity prayer, we talk to each other, we grow, we hug each other and...some of the best hugs I've ever gotten in my life.</p>
	Andy	<p>On a personal note, I run with the group every Wednesday morning in New York City. And it's an amazing experience.</p> <p>Every run starts with "The Circle." Residents like Jorge gather with volunteers who stand shoulder to shoulder with their arms around each other. And they say the serenity prayer together.</p>
		<p style="text-align: center;">SERENITY PRAYER WITH "BACK ON MY FEET" RUNNING GROUP</p>
	Andy	<p>Residents need to commit to running with the group three days per week – Monday, Wednesday and Friday -- from 5:30-6:30 am. If they can stick to this for a month, Back on My Feet starts to provide customized services to them like job training, employment coaching and housing assistance.</p> <p>But it all starts by waking up at 5:30 am and running with the group.</p>
	Jorge	<p>It was extremely tough, because even though your mind might be sober, your body might not be used to running.</p> <p>When I would come back, I would stay in bed for about an hour. Yeah, I was in bed for about an hour, I would put ice on my knees, I would hydrate, I would...I'd eat bananas to stop myself from cramping up. Yeah, it was tough. It was extremely...it was really tough.</p>

	Andy	<p>Mariel Feigen, Member Services Manager at Back on My Feet, worked closely with Jorge to help him get back into the workforce.</p>
Back in the Workforce	Mariel	<p>He was already at the employment-seeking part of his journey when I met him. You know, he was sober. He had the education and trainings that he wanted. He was ready to go back out into the workforce, but his background and his passion had been acting, drama, things like that.</p> <p>And what's unique about Back on My Feet is that we're very flexible in how we work with members and we're never trying to force someone into a job that they don't necessarily want. We talk a lot about long-term planning and if you're gonna be successful on a job, you have to like it long-term.</p> <p>So it was easy to work with him and start planning, "Okay. Well, if you're not gonna get some job right now to make money, like, what kind of job are you interested in? Can acting, and drama, and that side of your life still be your passion, but maybe not be the primary way that you're making a living?"</p>
	Andy	<p>Back on My Feet helped connect Jorge with potential employers and coached him through the interview process.</p>
	Jorge	<p>I was learning how to rehearse for interviews, I would do mock interviews. My resume, Muriel reviewed my resume, They sat down with me to go over what my goals were. Went to different workshops at Deloitte, bank accounts, savings accounts. We went through everything, everything we needed to get ourselves back on my feet...yeah, to get ourselves back on our feet.</p>
	Andy	<p>His first job was a seasonal position at Brooklyn-based online retail company called Uncommon Goods.</p>
	Jorge	<p>So at Uncommon Goods, I was doing customer service. I would take orders over the phone, I would handle deliveries, fix any issues that a customer may have as far as what they purchased, their item, I would do returns.</p>
	Mariel	<p>They loved him so much they, like, kept him on for as long as they could, and he was enjoying it. So he stayed on for all the extra hours. He would pick up extra shifts. It was a very very successful relationship for both of them.</p>
	Andy	<p>And that was the start. Today, he works for a sustainable recycling company. He manages a team of ten people that are in the field working with their clients to recycle glass and aluminum. And he's happy.</p>

I Love My Job	Jorge (39:21)	I love my job. I love working with my boss, who is a bit of a nut, but he has a lot on his shoulders and he really cares. I love working with people who genuinely care about others. That's hard to find in New York City.
	Andy	I asked him about the challenge of staying sober.
Staying Clean and Sober	Jorge	The struggle is hard. The journey--my journey with my addiction, or however...whatever name I give it at some point--has been painful.
	Andy	How do you stay straight? How do you keep on a path?
	Jorge	Oh, I talk to people. Yeah. I go to weekly meetings where I'm talking to someone and I cry. I cry a lot. I think that before treatment, I thought I was a punk for crying. Now, I cry all the time. I make sure I get at least one or two good cries a week.
	Andy	To conclude the interview with Jorge I asked him two final questions.
	Andy	This podcast is about second acts. So if you were counseling somebody and you were giving them advice--someone who is in your situation and was an addict or is an addict--what would you...what advice would you give them about starting over or about going through what you went through?
Advice about Second Acts	Jorge	Find allies. Find allies that you can cry with. Pray, believe in yourself. There is hope out there. There are people who care. You have Back On My Feet. You have Phoenix House. There are so many programs out there. So look for allies. Someone who cares about you and loves you is going to point you in the right direction.
	Andy	Final question. For people who are not addicts, what would you want them to know about addiction? What would you want them to understand about addiction?
	Jorge	When you see an addict or someone struggling, they just need love. Yeah. It sounds cliché and bullshit and pretentious, but folks you see out on the streets who might not smell pleasant, or if they're out there talking to themselves, that is someone who probably missed a few hugs.

	Andy	For the final word, we're going to go back to Mariel Feigen who shared with me a touching story about Jorge.
A Final Story about Jorge	Mariel	<p>I guess my favorite success story with Jorge...so after he graduated, he moved out. He had this amazing job. As you said, I work with a lot of people, so I often, unfortunately lose touch with the alumni who are doing well because they might not need me to be calling them and keeping in touch with them anymore.</p> <p>Jorge out of the blue one day last year called me just to tell me that he had been promoted and just to say that he was interested in talking with me a little more and maybe in the future being able to offer positions, employment positions, to current Back on My Feet members, because he wanted to give back to Back on My Feet for where we had helped him get to.</p> <p>And it was a great conversation and knowing that he was doing so well that he could start thinking about giving back to others what he had received.</p>
		OUTGOING MUSIC
Thank-You and Show Credits	Andy	<p>Of course, we want to thank Jorge Alvarez for sharing his very personal "second act" story with us today. We also want to thank Mariel Feigen and all the volunteers at Back on My Feet. If you are interested in ever running with Back on My Feet, they have chapters in 13 different cities across America. You can find them at www.backonmyfeet.org.</p> <p>If you know of a "Second Act Story" that we should profile, please contact me, that's Andy Levine, at SecondActStories@gmail.com. I'd love to hear from you.</p> <p>And if you're struggling with addiction challenges, as Jorge said you want to "Find Allies" to help you. There are all sorts of programs out there. But a good start is Alcoholics Anonymous or AA.org.</p> <p>Earlier we shared that every Back on My Feet Run starts with the serenity prayer. The group ends the run in exactly the same...shoulder to shoulder; arm in arm with the same prayer. And that's how we're going to end today's podcast with Back on My Feet's "Team ABC" in New York City.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SERENITY PRAYER WITH "BACK ON MY FEET" RUNNING GROUP</p> <p>We hope you'll keep listening. A new Second Act Story" is just two weeks away.</p>