

A Game of Healing

by Patricio Robayo

When Lance Wilson sat awake at three in the morning, he wasn't planning to write a book. He had spent decades writing for the federal courts—formal memos and reports. But that night was different.

Out of the darkness, a story appeared in his mind all at once.

"I saw the whole book flash before my eyes," Wilson said. "It was such a strange experience. I just started typing and never looked back."

That story became *A Wizard's Guide to Family Recovery*, a novel that mixes fantasy, humor, and real-life pain. It's about addiction, healing, and the power of letting go.

"An absolutely brilliant approach to understanding the recovery process."

—Hugh Patterson, Recovery and Chess Coach

A WIZARD'S GUIDE TO FAMILY RECOVERY

Fictionalized
Inspirational
Self-Help



A Novel

Lance S. Wilson

Chess as Refuge

Wilson first found peace in an unexpected place: a chessboard.

He was in eighth grade when his father, who struggled with alcoholism, took his own life during the holidays.

"Chess became a lifeline for me," he said. "It gave me something steady when everything else was falling apart."

He joined the school chess club, became president, and found purpose through the game. Teachers drove him to tournaments miles away.

"It surrounded me with positive role models," he said. "It gave me a sense of identity and belonging."

Writing Through Loss

Years later, after a long career in the federal courts, Wilson faced another loss—his son went missing while battling psychosis and addiction.

"It was one of the darkest times of our lives," he said.

That's when *A Wizard's Guide to Family Recovery* came to him. The story follows a wizard in the form of a chess queen, an insecure pawn, and two men attending group meetings – all searching for healing.

"I never planned to write fiction," he said. "But once I started, I couldn't stop. It helped me through that time."

The Pawn's Lesson

One of the book's most memorable characters is QP, a pawn who doubts her own worth.

"QP represents someone struggling with codependency," Wilson said. "That's something I've lived with most of my life."

"When we assign point values to chess pieces, we limit what we think they can do," he said. "QP learns she's worth more than she believes."

Recovery Together

Wilson discovered that addiction affects the whole family.

"When our son first had challenges, his counselor suggested we go to meetings," he said. "At first, I thought, 'Why? I'm not the one using drugs.' But I learned it's a family illness."

Through Al-Anon and Nar-Anon, he learned to let go—without giving up.

“You learn you’re powerless over the addict,” he said. “It doesn’t mean you stop caring. It means you start caring for yourself too.”

Even now, with his son 20 months into recovery, Wilson still attends weekly meetings. “You don’t graduate from recovery,” he said. “You keep showing up.”

Lessons on the Board

For Wilson, chess and recovery share the same truth: patience and acceptance.

“In both, you can only control your own moves,” he said. “Not the whole board.”

His book’s final checkmate isn’t about winning—it’s about peace. “It’s realizing that you can survive what you once thought you couldn’t,” he said.

A Son’s Help

Wilson’s son, now healthy, helped him write parts of the book.

“He’s a mathematician and game-theory expert,” Wilson said. “He helped me with a chapter about strategy.”

When Wilson doubted the book’s reach, his son told him, “Dad, this book already succeeded—it helped you heal.”

“That meant everything,” Wilson said.

Letting Go

In the novel, the wizard Merlin teaches that life keeps changing—and peace comes from letting go.

“When I stopped trying to control what I couldn’t, life became easier,” Wilson said. “That goes for work, family, everything.”

He remembers someone at an early recovery meeting saying, “I’m grateful to have an addict in my life, because I’ve grown so much.”

“At first, I thought that person was crazy,” Wilson said. “But years later, I found myself saying the same thing.”

Moving Forward

Wilson still speaks publicly about codependency and recovery. He still plays chess and writes.

When asked what he would say to his younger self—the boy who turned to chess after losing his father—Wilson paused for a moment. “I hope he’d say thank you,” he said softly. “I hope he’d feel proud that we made it through.”

Wilson has heard from several readers who said his book helped them through difficult times. Those comments, he said, warm his heart.

His book is available on Amazon and through his wife’s Etsy shop, *Starved Raccoon*.

“Life’s a lot like chess,” Wilson said. “You can lose a few pieces and still win the game.”



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What matters now? Looking back, I realize how close I came to talking myself out of even applying. I made assumptions about *their* assumptions. I didn’t have faith in my own credentials. Even after I got the offer, I dithered until I got [the best career advice ever](#) from my cousin Mike. Loading up my car and taking the Eastern highway to New York was a life-changing event that I almost missed. Not because I didn’t qualify. But because I almost didn’t even try.

Yes, job hunting today feels more like playing the lottery. But you can’t win if you don’t buy the ticket. Sure, odds in some cases are low. But *someone* will win. Why not you? Don’t sell yourself short. Give it a shot.

Buy the ticket.