

Here I am

I want to share a little bit of my story with the goal to increase hope and knowledge that recovery happens and recovery is also “addicting”. I am a former everything : junkie, coke head , benzo addict, alcoholic, pot head. I have been free from all substances now for over 30 years but life was not that way for my first 29. I will just get my history out of the way in a raw fashion. My method and my story will not fit others and rightly so .... It is mine.

Growing up my mother “drank a little too much”. My dad was a kind helper. Later I realized she was an alcoholic and my dad was an enabler. I grew up in a north central Connecticut town and graduated high school in 1976. At around 10 years old I was run over by a drunken woman on our street. Some injuries , ended up in the hospital and had minor head injury and other injuries. I was lucky but in hindsight I often wonder if this was my initial low impulse development. At about 12 years old I had already dabbled in having a beer here and there and decided to try weed. It all seemed so normal. I found I was very interested in the high. It provided new found confidence, new friends and a new way to cope with me. Fast track to age 16. Between 12-16 I had tried LSD, mushrooms and peyote and used them often. I gradually lost interest in all extra school activities except art. Soccer went away so did soccer peers. Hiking did not go completely away but the hiking peers changed in a dramatic way as did the meaning of the hike. By age 16 I had desire for ... more. I began using eyedropper needles for crystal meth and cocaine. By my senior year in high school I had lost my art drive as well. I still would dabble but it was always under the influence. My friends group changed in a big way.

After high school I worked at restaurants, local factories but eventually they too became boring. I was supporting myself selling drugs (any drug). There were periods I would try and sober up: after an arrest or car accident or a break up with a girl. None lasted but I did get my first taste at AA meetings and those memories helped pave the way later in life. I hung around with a darker crew; those that were in the life were the people who supported my way of life. I would crack up cars often. I actually totaled 9 cars before the age of 24. We had bigger cars back then and I somehow lived through them. I began accumulating arrests. Misdemeanors, traffic offenses and in 1978 felonies for gun possession related offences. It was in 1978 that I was sent for longer term drug treatment and then a half-way house that the pebble of recovery was thrown and that waves of hope began to show. I would go to meetings, talk about staying clean and would paint more often, took some art classes at a rural community college . During this time I developed a sense of hope and longing for something different. It did not last. I was relocated on a rehab package to a central western MA city. I fell hard. I went back to drug selling quicker and amped up my usage as if I never stopped.

During the next several years I would go in and out of AA rooms. I obtained some factory work that gave me a living and all too often I spiraled down to more drugs and more difficulty maintaining any sense of life. All along my family had various reactions: avoidance, continued love, disgust, anger and all were spot on. Of note here my parents never gave up but did develop some boundaries that as an addict I would inevitably find a hole in the armor. I am telling you the war part in effort to have an understanding that one can fall deep and hard but as evidence of my story one can emerge right sized and a new sense of living. In the 1980s I would sell larger quantities and eventually I was convicted of a

very large quantity of cocaine in New Jersey. This added to my already 3 felony gun convictions. This was another setback. Looking back as I write this it seems surreal. I was determined to change. Unfortunately I owed big money and could not just walk away. I had to earn that money back and I did. The Peruvians were satisfied and I did break away from that particular group.

The change. I awoke one morning in 1988 with no knowledge of past 1 week. I had my job at the factory (barely) but I had the sickest gut feeling that something went much more wrong than I could imagine. I called the Employee Assistance Plan at work and was in my last treatment center as an active addict in my life. I was calling for me not because of some arrest or a doctor yelling at me. All of my past exposure to meetings and professional help at various hospitals began to make sense. I dug in to save my life. I cut ties to the neon lights, to the motorcycle world I knew and to all drug connections. ( I have to say without a cell phone it may have been easier!?!). After spending 28 days in a rehab I reconnected to a woman who had no tolerance for my old self. It helped. The meetings helped me more, I went to 3 half meetings a day. I was too anxious to go to a full meeting. Eventually I gave in and sat through a full one. It stuck. I am forever grateful for those that were tolerant with me.

I lived another life after 1988 , was married and divorced. My relationship with family improved. Of note many families struggle with the addict being clean and trust is not developed for at times years. I was successfully treated recently for medical illness directly related to my injection drug use. (My medical related issues will stay with me to the end, endless orthopedic surgeries, nasal rebuilds and liver issues linger even 30 years later)

After several years in recovery I wanted more. I went back to college and eventually completed my Master's Degree in Counseling Psychology. I have now been in the mental health field in various modalities since 1994. Helping others is addicting. IU helped AIDS patients while they passed in the 1990s and helped in many types of addiction treatment programs. Today I am a midlevel leader at a large hospital. Recovery is addicting. Being positive is addicting. We forget that people not only survive but often thrive. There is NO one answer for one person but the answer is to keep trying, going back, finding that personal key . When you find it you will not want to let it go. I know I am lucky and this is a small snapshot of my past life but shows some of the struggles and pain that I cause myself and others

I remain anonymous. By writing my story I am hoping one day the "need" to remain anonymous goes away. There is still so much stigma related to addiction. If you are struggling keep trying. If you are a family or friend of an addict love them. Learn about enabling , learn about Alonon, AA , NA and smart recovery. Talk to someone, get help. The labels and misconceptions need to be part of our next war. Love wins. Always has. Always will.