

Living with Substance Abuse & Addiction

Rock-bottom and getting clean

By Anonymous

One would think that convulsions, vomiting, shaking, profuse sweating, slurred speech and more would be enough to get you clean and sober. Well, not for me. After 11 years of active addiction and an intense night of substance abuse towards the end (6 substances to be exact), I still wasn't done!

In 2002, at the age of 20, it started with Marijuana. I smoked my first joint with friends and I was hooked. It was still a social thing but I needed my fix every night. From there it was an avalanche of destruction.

My timeline went something like this:

- 2002 - Started using marijuana
- 2005 - LSD (Acid)
- 2006 - Ecstasy
- 2007 - Cocaine
- 2008 - Kat (Amphetamine)
- 2013 - Entered a Rehabilitation Centre

Keep in mind, from 2002 to 2013, all

of the above-mentioned substances continued to be used, sometimes together, sometimes separately.

It's a guideline of when I tried each substance for the first time. I went from a well-raised, relatively level-headed young man, to a reckless, soul-less, dead-man-walking. It can happen to the best of us. After completing high school, I attempted a law degree. In the 1st semester, I cruised through three subjects, including a distinction in one. During the holiday period between semesters one and two is when I smoked that first joint. Needless to say I dismally failed the second semester's three subjects and called it a day. From there, I entered into an apprenticeship programme in the earthmoving industry, and remain in the same industry today.

During the 11 year period of active addiction, I observed and witnessed my life crumble... Addiction had affected my mind, body and soul. These are some of the symptoms of each of the afore-

mentioned aspects:

Mind

- Memory loss
- Aggression
- Depression
- Hallucinations
- Extreme 'highs and lows'

Body

- Loss of appetite
- Severe dehydration
- Shakes
- Slurred speech
- Vomiting
- Nausea
- Skin irritations

As for the soul, I always say that 'I was a dead man walking', meaning that everything I had lived for, believed in, and had any emotion or passion towards, was dead and gone. I cared about one thing and one thing only - when I would have my next hit of whatever it was at that stage. For the last five odd years of my active addiction I mainly used cocaine, Kat (Methcathinone) and marijuana, all on



a daily basis.

I was fortunate enough to have a job, but it didn't pay well enough to cover my living expenses combined with what I needed to fuel my substance abuse. So, when I got paid, I would transfer a certain amount of that salary into another account to make sure I had enough money to buy my drugs for the month. The remainder would cover a few debit orders, and others would bounce. Then, the next month I would repeat the exercise of removing my 'drug-money' and with the remainder I would pay the debit orders that bounced the last month, and allow last month's paid debit orders to bounce this month. Get it? It was complicated, but obsession can make you do conniving and manipulative things.

On August 12, 2013, I'd had enough. Enough of the dark dungeon I was living in. The thought of getting 'clean' was daunting. I was depressed and broken, but the mere thought of feeling like this and having to stop using my substances, my escape, was extremely scary. Surely the depression would intensify if I stopped using! I knew I had to do it, or I was going to die. It would be death by accidental overdose or suicide. The thought of suicide had crossed my mind daily in the weeks leading up to August 12. I

approached my parents, who at the time had no idea I was an addict. I told them absolutely everything. I broke their hearts, turned their lives upside down. They were shattered. It was risky for me, as I knew it was a 50/50. Either they were going to disown me, or help me. Thankfully, even though they were angry and heart-broken, they supported me.

Due to my career and the importance of keeping a job in the current economic climate, I was sent to the out-patient programme at the Addiction Recovery Centre (ARC) in Benoni for three months, where I would endure regular drug-testing, psychology and counselling for two hours every night. At ARC, I was advised to 'live the Narcotics Anonymous programme' which included the following:

- N.A Meetings
- 12 Step Programme
- Get a sponsor
- Believe in a Higher Power
- Service

Believe me, I was desperate. So, I shut my mouth and opened my ears and was willing to do exactly what I was advised to do. I went to an N.A meeting the next day. Terrifying. About 80 people from all walks of life, sitting in a huge circle, ready for

the meeting. On that day, I walked in to that meeting with my head hung low and the weight of the world on my shoulders. But, that was the last time I walked into a meeting being the broken newcomer. At the next meeting, I had started to accumulate clean-time, albeit very little, and the newcomers started to inspire me because I could see them walking into their first meeting with that same terror, heads hung low and the world on their shoulders that had slowly started to lift away from me. I needed this. I needed to be reminded of what I was enduring whilst in active addiction.

Today five years later, I occasionally attend N.A Meetings. I always relate the 12 steps to daily experiences. I have a sponsor that I can turn to in tough times. I have a tight relationship with my Higher Power (God in my case) and I bring N.A Meetings to the local rehab (Service).

I have never been happier. My entire life has changed, although much has stayed the same. The change came from inside. I am now happily married and my wife gave birth to our son six months ago. I am thankful for so much, but most importantly, I am thankful I didn't take my own life. I am rich, but not wealthy. Some people are so poor, that all they have got is money. **MHM**