

One Man's Story with the 12 Steps

I have a picture of myself sitting on a bed, the room is as only an addict can get it when life's falling apart, I have Blue Black hair, a punk T-shirt and Leather Jacket on, and jeans that people would pay a lot of money for these days to look that worn. I was looking up at the camera, head turned, elbows on knees, seated on the bed. I have a crazy smile, a smile that was trying to cover an early life time of sins up. There was a time I thought I looked great when I looked like that, I was thin, pale white, and had a romanticized view of addiction, but I was dying.

This is how I made it to my first 12 step meeting, defeated, damned if I used, damned if I don't.

I woke up one day knowing simply I couldn't lie anymore, not to myself, not to my family. I started telling the truth, firstly to mum, she booked me into the family Doctor, next to the Doctor, he booked me into treatment, then to the assessing officer at the detox, and he booked me into treatment. That night I was taken to my first 12 step meeting.

It was suffocating, I didn't know I was self-centred at the time, those lessons came later. On the night the main thing I remember is that when people spoke, I felt as though I understood. I felt as though people understood me for the first time. I didn't know others had the same pain, fears, shame about who they were.

In the beginning it's the 12 step slogans that an addict remembers, it's all you can remember in the stress of detox. "*Keep coming Back*", "*It works if you work it*", "*Easy does it*" and so on. At the end of that meeting I was approached by two people that said they were in the same Detox as me and one had 30 days the other had about ninety. It gave me hope. That week I was taken to three more meetings, and there was a Hospitals and Institutions meeting at the Detox, where members came and shared their story. I related. It was like someone had followed me around and took notes. I was told to take the cotton wool out of my ears and put it in my mouth. I didn't like it, but they were right. I started listening and following the suggestions. I got Phone numbers, I bought the literature, I got a meetings list.

They suggested on leaving treatment that you do 90 meetings in 90 days. When I first heard this I really did think to myself "*how do you fit that in?*". It was only when I got home, and literally got up that first morning, and after I had a shower and then breakfast, I didn't know what to do, as I was a full time addict in the end, so that had consumed all my time. I got out the meeting list and as at a meeting that lunch time, and then that evening. I ended up doing two meetings a day and three on Sundays. It was an amazing turn around. I heard on a 12 step tape early on that when you get to the 12 step fellowship it is like you are being dragged behind a bus, and eventually you learn to smile while you are being dragged. It was that way for me. I was afraid to go back to addiction and I was afraid to join the program, but the pain of staying the same was greater than the fear of going to meetings and trying a new way of life.

In the end I really started to enjoy meetings, I liked the stories, and I started to listen to what the people with time up said when they talked about "working the Steps" I heard that you needed a sponsor, someone to help you work through the steps. I picked the guy at the meeting that had the most time up. I knew that I needed a lot of help.

I bought the steps book and guide and basically became a recovery nerd, but I made recovery cool. It was a spiritual program, and I saw a lot of people get hung up on that. I knew that I believed in something, but I did not really know what. The program told me that once I had surrendered in the first step by admitting I was powerless, and that my life was unmanageable, that the second step challenge was to admit that I was crazy!, and that I needed to be restored to sanity.

I wasn't run down the street frothing at the mouth crazy, I was I think I can repeat the same mistake and expect a different result sort of crazy. The program told me I could use this power greater than me before I understood it, just like you can turn the light switch on to illuminate a room, without understanding electricity, you just need to know where the switch is. They say it's a simple program for complicated people, and these sort of simple suggestions certainly made early recovery easier to cope with. The first step challenge is to hand your will and life over to that power, and that done, completed the surrender, and started me on a road of faith, Faith that it was possible to get well. The rest of the 12 steps gets you to inventory your life, identify those things that get in the way of making recovery possible and then giving you the tools to get relief from those, and then they start you on a recovery life that is principle based, not impulse based. The 12 steps then tells you that you *"can't keep what you have without giving it away"*, and this begins a life of service. The Therapeutic Value of one addict helping another is without parallel!"

27 years of continuous sobriety later I cannot begin to tell you the wonderful journey that it has been. It has been a rollercoaster, as layers of the onion were peeled back, it lead to therapy, firstly about relationships, leading to Family of Origin, to looking at men's issues. It took me back to University, and onto a whole other career. The 12 step meetings are not recovery. They are where recovering people go to tell their story, and share how they work the steps in their daily lives, and the benefits that it brings them.

The most asked question of an old timer in the recovery movement is, *"Why do you still go to meetings?"* I simply state for the growth, the fellowship, the laughter, the lifestyle" It's no different than someone attending Church for their guidance and solace, or someone joining a gym to maintain a healthy fitness, once you stop going , you lose that fitness.

A grateful addict is someone that is in good shape of maintaining their recovery. I am a grateful addict. It has given me a life free of addiction, and has given me a program that has given the freedom of the bondage of self. You see, abstinence does not equal recovery. It just means you stopped. Abstinence, plus a 12 step program, means freedom, greater than you have ever known.