

When I was two years old I was one of those kids you couldn't turn your back on. If I managed to get out of the yard I would go down the street, take one look back and I was gone. I can remember times when the police would bring me back. When I was six years old my mother took me to see "Peter Pan". I was very impressed. One day my mother was vacuuming the living room and I wanted to fly so I went to the window, took all my clothes off, and jumped. They took me to the hospital but I was all right. So you see ... at the beginning of my life I was impulsive. I didn't think. For whatever reason I would do whatever I wanted regardless of the consequences.

As a young boy life was not easy. Things became very difficult when my family broke up. When I was ten years old I came home from school to find my father throwing all his clothes into the car. He pulled out of the driveway and I never saw him again. About an hour later our house was surrounded by the State Police and the FBI. My mother lost her mind and they had to take her away. I had a brother four years younger than myself. He was crying. I then started to cry. Life was changing very rapidly for us and we had no control. Initially one of our uncles came to get us. Unfortunately, however, no one seemed to want us. We lived with a series of families over the many years we remained together. I loved my brother dearly. We were all each other had in the world.

I remember feeling very much alone. One day I was going to play baseball and while walking through the woods I started to cry. There was a big pain in my gut and it hurt. I was frightened, insecure and lonely. I wanted someone to hug me and tell me that they loved me.

On this day, while standing in the woods, I made the first of many bad decisions. I couldn't deal with these feelings so I decided to never let anything else hurt me again. I started building walls around me so no one could hurt me. I resented other people and the gifts they had in life. This resentment built up inside me. I wanted what other kids had like clothes and toys but I could not get it. I had no money. So I started stealing just for the hell of it because I was building up resentment towards life in general.

Eventually, I started to develop a life of crime. Aside from stealing I started smashing things like cars and windows. I became a "hardened" juvenile delinquent before I started using drugs. I had many opportunities and many people who tried to help me. I was a bright kid and had a chance to go to school but I had chosen a lifestyle ... the wrong lifestyle. I don't blame anyone for this. It was my decision. I had a feeling inside me that I did not like what I had become, that it was against my true nature, but I didn't know what to do about it.

Then I started using drugs. I think I started using drugs in an attempt to fix myself. After I started using, I was hooked. I cannot remember a day of not using after I started. I was not the right personality type to start using drugs. Once I was consumed with drugs I couldn't accomplish anything. I didn't know what was happening to me. I overdosed and went to jail on many occasions. I tried. I wanted to have a life, to be happy, to love and be loved, and to have a future but I couldn't when I was taking drugs.

My life on drugs was frustrating. I thought I had it all at different points in time. I had money, cars, houses, job titles, and prestige. But there always seemed to be something missing. I knew

there had to be something more to life. Even though I was unsuccessful at changing my life I knew there had to be something more. There was a hunger inside that was pushing me to change.

I went on the methadone program to combat my heroin addiction. I was on this program for three years. In the end I felt destroyed. My life had become completely unmanageable. The destruction on the inside was incredible. The program had failed, and I didn't know it at the time, but I was headed for a big fall.

In 1978 I was with a woman I had been with for a few years. I loved her as best I knew how. One day she left, stating that she thought I was self destructing and she did not want to be around the day I was going to die.

In the next three years I saw everything go – the furniture, the friends, the car. Eventually, my brother couldn't look at me anymore. I can't describe the pain when he told me this. I was totally alone and I knew I was "going down".

I tried to stop using on my own. I started locking myself up in places in attempt to go "cold turkey". It was a horror story. I lost control completely. I would be putting drugs in my body knowing full well that it was going to kill me. I could not stop it. it was like standing outside my body, watching a movie, and having no control over the outcome.

In desperation I turned to religion even though I didn't believe it in. I went to a priest and told him everything. For the first time in my life I told another human being all the things that happened to me, all the things I'd been doing, how I had lost control, and how unhappy I was. All those things I held inside of me and I had to let them go. I needed to trust somebody. This felt good.

In July of 1981 I locked myself up in one of my hiding places. I was absolutely determined to kick my drug habit or die trying. On July 13, 1981 at five thirty in the morning I became extremely ill. So I took some pills but it wasn't killing the pain. I remained lying on the floor smoking a cigarette when my cigarette fell out of my mouth. It started to burn a hole in my neck but I could not feel it. Then this guy I didn't like and hadn't seen in over a year came into the room. I do not know how he got in. he saved my life. He looked at me and said "you don't look so good. Let me take you to the hospital". I tried to tell him in one breath that it's no use because I had been to them all, but I did not have the strength to say anything. At that moment, as I was lying on the floor, I truly did not want to live anymore.

The doctors in the emergency ward had seen me numerous times so they yelled: "get him out of here". but then the lights went out – I stopped breathing. So they had to take me. I didn't know this at the time but this was the beginning of a new life.

I was in intensive care when I regained consciousness. I had tubes all over my body. When someone overdoses, oxygen stops going to his brain. The first thing that shuts down is your motor mechanism. For example, I can remember visiting a lot of my friends who have overdosed and experienced brain damage. They were once healthy people but now they drool uncontrollably and are unable to tie their shoes. When I "came to" I checked my hands and my

feet to see if they worked. They did. My next thought was that I made it but it's just a matter of time before you're in this same position again and the next time you might not be so lucky.

I looked over in the other bed and there was another heroin addict. He also had overdosed. We looked at each other for what seemed to be hours. He then curled up in a little ball and died. This is the reality of addiction: jail, institutions, and death. It took me an incredible amount of pain and eighty seven detox admissions to realize that I might be an addict.

The thing was that I did not know how to quit. I couldn't imagine life without drugs and I never knew anyone who had stopped using. A few days later a social worker came in to see me. I told her I'd have to be locked up in a nut house or someplace like it for thirty days because I could not trust myself. I knew I would use drugs again. The next day I was in a mental institution. There was a Narcotics Anonymous meeting on the same day and I attended. I received the message I needed to hear: "the only desire necessary was the desire to stop". I took this very simple concept with me on my road to recovery. Sometimes I could only live an hour or a minute at a time. The treatment I received helped me obtain a future. Today I have healthy relationships with people, I have a job and life is pretty good.

Joseph