

STORIES OF HOPE

“A piece of my mind” J’s Story



I was born in Chicago, Illinois, to alcoholic parents. My childhood revolved around alcohol. Life was chaotic. I have very few memories of my parents playing with me, or doing any of the normal things parents do with their children. My mother died of acute alcohol poisoning when I was nine. I found her body. My father died of the disease about six months later, and I became a ward of the State of Illinois for a couple of years before I was adopted.

My new family members were devout Christians, and they didn’t drink at all. After I was adopted, I started to drink. There was no real reason except boredom. I felt uncomfortable and I thought that with alcohol I would fit in better.

My journey has been fraught with homelessness and incarceration. I intermittently lived on the streets for a 20 year period, I’ve been to prison 13 times, and according to my booking history, I’ve been in jail 33 times over the last 10 years. I’ve lost homes and family members, everything that was dear to me, all on account of alcohol and drugs. After a while, you get so used to it. You don’t understand that there’s another way of life.

The last time I was in jail, I decided to just stop using. They had these WRAP classes that were available, so I signed up for them. I learned that there’s a myriad of programs out there, and people with mental challenges have more opportunities now than any other time in history. The facilitator encouraged me to seek treatment after my release, so I did. The program I chose provides a lot of support, like counseling services and medication.



With all of my experiences, I have some valuable lessons to share:

To those struggling with substance abuse issues, drug and alcohol disease is curable, and you don’t have to hit bottom, like me, before you quit. That’s no way to live.

To family members who have a loved one struggling with addiction, try not to enable them. Be patient and encouraging.

To those who encounter someone with drug addiction or mental health challenges, try not to judge. You don’t know where they’ve been in life, and what’s possibly happened to put them in the situation that they’re in.

And to mental health professionals and counselors, let each person be directly involved in their own recovery. Have the client build his own treatment plan so he feels like he has a part in it.

The road to recovery has been difficult, but it feels great knowing that I'm on my way. When I was using alcohol, I spent a lot of time wishing that I was dead. I felt like the next day would only bring more disappointment. I now have high self-esteem, and I look forward to tomorrow.

As I ask God for another day of sobriety, I approach my future with confidence and hope.

* Consumer name changed to protect privacy