

Stories of Recovery



Out of Control

My binge drinking began in high school, and with it, blackouts and promiscuous sex. I brought hard liquor in Gatorade bottles to school dances and hooked up with boys in darkened hallways. I lost my virginity to a guy I barely knew at a house party. When I woke up the next morning, I hardly remembered it.

My friends and I had fake ID's and would go out to bars. I met lots of men and had lots of casual sex. One night as I drifted in and out of drunken consciousness, I was date raped by a man who I thought was a friend. A few months later, it happened again. At the time I didn't connect the drinking with the negative episodes in my life. I thought that everyone drank the way I did. I was angry that my life wasn't going as I wanted it to and that so many bad things were "happening to me." I felt completely out of control and weak because I could not stop drinking, and my self-esteem began to plummet. I would seek to increase my self-esteem by getting attention from men, often with sex, but when they ultimately rejected me, I felt even worse.

When I graduated high school my drinking progressed, and my friends began to get real lives. I remained stuck in a pattern of drinking all day, every day. I needed help.

In recovery I have witnessed a miracle in myself. I have been given a new life. I am less jealous, angry, and lonely. I am present in my relationships with family and friends. I am attracting the kind of people that I want to attract and giving back to people more than I ever could when I was drinking.

- Amy, 19

Full-time Junkie

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It started with drinks before a night out, and it ended in a very small bathroom with a needle in my arm. Along the way many good friends said goodbye because they offered help and I refused it. I fell out of the usual circle of family birthdays and holidays. I promised attendance and didn't show. I lost my job and became a full-time junkie. I traded sex for money in order to get a fix. My life became very small and very scary, and I just let it happen.

Homeless and out of money, one day I was offered help and I said yes. The moment I accepted help my world changed. There were challenges. I had to get honest. I had to be careful about falling into familiar patterns. But the truth is the challenges in recovery are easier than anything I had to do when I was out there.

I am the man I want to be today. I have real relationships with people. I have the respect of people whom I respect, something I had lost. I have joined my family again. This is how I stay sober: I don't use drugs or alcohol, I have a program, I talk to sober people every day, I tell the truth and I try to show up for others.

- *Raja, 20*

I Stopped Running

I reached a bottom, an awareness that this was not working enough to numb the pain and other difficult emotions I was being tormented with inside of my head and heart. One day, I awoke for the first time with a feeling I needed to make a change in my life around this pattern of drinking and drugging.

So I went to a meeting. I met a young person who then introduced me to another person in my age group and I saw that this was working for them. I wanted what they had. I developed a support network of friends that helped me embrace a program of recovery, which has managed to keep me sober.

- *Juan, 17*

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Sweet Seventeen

I was 15 the first time I went through treatment. I had no idea what was going on and wasn't ready to listen. I knew it all, and no one could tell me different. Drugs and alcohol were the only things that I thought made me happy. I was having fun. When I was 17 I came back to treatment beat up and ready to listen. **I wasn't having fun anymore.** I was young and not sure if I was going to be able to stop drinking and drugging.

I struggled, trying to decide if recovery is really what I wanted or if I wanted to continue to use. I was in treatment during the holidays and came up with an analogy that worked for me. I thought back to when I was a little girl and couldn't wait to open up my Christmas presents to see what kind of toys I was getting. But when I opened the gifts and all I received were sweaters and other winter clothes, I was upset. It wasn't until it got cold that I was grateful for the clothes that I got and happy that I didn't throw them away. That is how I looked at my recovery. I wasn't very happy to have it at the age of 17, but I thought that maybe there would be a time when I would be grateful to have it and would regret it if I threw it away.

Today, I am grateful that I stayed sober. It's not always easy, but it is much better than when getting high was the only thing that was on my mind.

- Kat, 21

No Shoes

On June 15, 1998, I entered a rehab facility. I was 18 years old, confused and abusing drugs. Alcohol was my drug of choice but I smoked pot, popped pills, used acid, crack, cocaine--whatever I could get my hands on. It wasn't about a particular drug. I just wanted to escape, get away from being me, so to speak. I started drinking when I was 14.

I agreed to 30 days of treatment, ended up staying for 16 months. Today, I remain

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employed at this same place. Back then, I had heard crazy things about this rehab and what *they* made you do. I was scared, desperate and broke. I needed something to turn my life around. Treatment was the only option I had left before I killed myself from using drugs. I used drugs from the time I got up in the morning until I fell asleep, whatever time that was.

Just before I finally walked into the rehab that would change my life, I was living in a motel room in Florida. It was a dark, lonely, seedy place. I lived with a guy I met in a treatment program we both fled. Two other guys I met on the beach shackled up in the same room. Gross. The motel was disgusting. I could reach for the refrigerator from the bed, so I was drinking before I even put my feet on the floor. When I made it to the shower, I drank there. No money left, I had somehow managed to lose every pair of shoes I had. Burning my feet on the pavement and begging for coin on the dunes was taking a toll on me. I wanted to go home. I asked my Mom for help. She came down from New York and brought me back to rehab.

My first week at the treatment place my mother signed me into was a whirlwind and then I began to adjust. I was mesmerized and miserable at the same time. I was treated, truly, as an adult for the first time in my life. I was held accountable. I was confronted when I did the wrong thing. I was being taught. I was starting to get it. Learning. I hated it. I also loved it. I watched how the residents who had been around for several months did things. More learning. They really ran the facility and they were teaching me. People respected them and they were becoming my role models. I wanted to be like them. But despite my secret desire, I still acted out. I had to face the fact that I was a drug addict and an alcoholic and I didn't know how to break my negative patterns. My behavior really sucked. *I pushed and pushed to see how long I could push before someone pushed back. They never did. They pulled me up. This was the first place in my life that I went to where I wasn't asked to leave.*

Eventually I changed. My behavior no longer was bad. I was able to gain insight into my negative pathology, *those unhealthy thought patterns which often crippled me.* I started to understand why I did certain things and I gained greater insight into the reasons I drank or used drugs. I learned better coping skills, enabling me to deal with issues and problems as they came up without using drugs. My self-esteem was finally based on a realistic view of myself, no longer was I rating myself above or below other people. *And, for the first time in my life, I had real friends who told me the truth.* I found the courage to rebuild my relationship with my family....how to get along with my father, mother, brother and sister. I allowed myself to grow up.

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While in rehab, I was afforded the opportunity to go to college. On the first day I attended class, I was so nervous and almost backed out. My roommate had packed me a lunch. When I got to school, I was early, so I had time to look into the lunch bag. Besides an apple and a granola bar, there were many pieces of paper. I was curious and began to pick out each piece. I couldn't believe it. On each piece of paper there was a note from every resident and staff member wishing me luck on my first day at school. I cried. People really cared about me. It was one of the best feelings I had ever experienced. When I walked into that classroom, I felt so confident. I was sober. I was free. I was heading in the right direction.

Two years later, I completed my studies and received an Associates Degree. Six years beyond this, while working two jobs, I received a Bachelors Degree in Criminal Justice, Communications and Psychology. Just a few years ago, in 2007, I became a Credentialed Alcohol and Substance Abuse Counselor (CASAC).

My journey was filled with much doubt and despair. When I earned the title of *graduate*, from the rehab facility, it was arguably the proudest moment of my life. I was given this honor because I demonstrated that I could live a better life without drugs and that this accomplishment would lead to many more positive milestones in my life going forward if I remained sober. I found hope in sobriety.

Today, my work in the same rehab where I got sober, is very rewarding. By helping others seeking recovery, I strengthen my own recovery. As well, I continue to go to therapy off and on to keep on track and I attend AA regularly. AA has helped me immeasurably on a spiritual level - which has been wonderful and quite fulfilling.

I am grateful that I have embraced the fruits of what it means to be accountable. I know what trust is now. There is nothing greater in my mind than the feeling of being *believed in*. This made a huge difference. Structure and consequence offered me the chance to find out what being responsible really meant. People told me the truth. These were really good people who I could recognize as being good because I was drug free. I found the friendships I made in treatment to be very special and so different from other relationships from my past. I accepted these new friends because they accepted me.

For 13 years now, I am living a substance free life one day at a time. I have a key to my parent's

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house. I have a good and honest relationship with my siblings. I was lucky to meet a man, fall in love and marry. We have a healthy, intimate partnership with an understanding that we must constantly work at communicating to make our bond stronger. What a gift he is. We love each other and I have the capacity to love. In those darkest times in that motel room where I had my last drink and joint, I wasn't thinking about love. I certainly didn't love myself.

Today, my husband and I have great friends. He is supportive of my ongoing educational goals. I'm currently working towards a Masters Degree in Social Work.

I love my job and I love my life. Most important, I love the rehab facility for helping me become the woman I am today.

- *Alison*

([From NCADD's Hope, Help and Healing: Personal Stories of Recovery - Young People and Recovery](#))