

Personal Story 2

CMA GAVE ME HOPE

ONE DAY LAST FALL, AS I WAS WALKING TOWARD THE BUILDING WHERE I was to begin teaching a class that started at 8 a.m., I decided the day had come for me to die. The decision had not come suddenly—I had arrived at it weeks, perhaps months earlier. The weekend before, I had driven to my ex's house to pick up a puppy we'd adopted together, so that all of my dogs would be with me before I died. Nothing in particular had happened that morning or the day before; it was just time for the pain to end. After over six years of increasingly heavy meth use—I used to go through two eight balls each weekend—I had gone nine months without doing meth. But my increased use of alcohol during that time and the seeming hopelessness of my life had made me a shell of the person I had always meant to be.

I went through the course of my day, going to work, answering my email. When I returned home early that afternoon, I began drinking. I wrote farewell notes, which I left on my dining table. In my garage, I hooked the exhaust pipe of my car to my window, sealed it with packing tape, and allowed my car to idle for a couple of hours so that my death would be quick. I had done research online, and knew that most catalytic converters allow enough carbon monoxide to escape through exhaust to kill someone in an enclosed space. I taped notices on my front and garage doors warning anyone entering the house to beware of the fumes. I put my dogs in my bedroom with food, water, rawhide, and extra treats. I sent a final

email to a friend in New York who checks her messages early each morning, letting her know what I was doing, asking her to call the police, and telling her whom to contact in my family after I was dead. I got in the car—not crying, not sad, not scared—and I waited to die.

It didn't happen. After ten minutes or so, I realized I wasn't dying like I should be, though I was having trouble breathing. My lungs were expanding significantly—I suddenly thought I would not die, but become a vegetable and a further burden to my family. I got out of the car and called my therapist and asked him to put me in treatment somewhere (which he had been trying to do for months). My mom came from another town and picked me up a few hours later, and I eventually found my way to a long-term care facility where I was able to attend a few Crystal Meth Anonymous meetings. There I met people who shared my experience and gave me strength and hope.

For me, only two-thirds of the spiritual solution I need can be found in other programs—the strength and hope. The shared experience of the crystal meth addict is just different. I believe people who say otherwise have never been a crystal meth addict. When I did my Fifth Step with my CMA sponsor, he was able to share his experience with me—the shadow people, the intense paranoia, the days of porn and chat rooms—and that took away my shame. I wasn't alone anymore, I was part of a fellowship of people who not only understood where I had been, but could show me what I could become and what I could accomplish. My Fifth Step changed my life.

I live in a rural area, and while there is plenty of meth available, the nearest CMA meeting is four hours away. I go whenever I can, but I continue to work the Twelve Steps with my sponsor here, who is in another program. I have found friends in other parts of the country in CMA whom I talk to whenever I can, and I stay connected online, but it is my spiritual connection to the fellowship that means the most to me. Even if the power grid went down tomorrow and I wasn't able to communicate with anyone, I would still feel a part of CMA. It is my spiritual home. The people in it saved my life by giving me something I'm not sure I had ever truly experienced before: They gave me hope.

My life today is amazing. I am a free, whole person for the first time in my life. Everything isn't perfect, but when I see people around me suffering, I am so thankful for the freedom and possibility the program has given me. I have been clean and sober for nine months. On the outside, my life has not changed that much—I have the same great job, the same car and house, and the same dogs. I'm still single. The externals of my life before recovery were fine, too, but I was dead inside. It is hard for me to go a week without someone commenting on how much I have changed—my outlook, my attitude, really everything about me. Today, I want to live. I open my window blinds, and I go outside, and I breathe fresh air, and I am happy to be alive.