

BREAKING UP WITH TINA

SOBRIETY IS A GIFT. IT GAVE ME A SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE. A FEW YEARS AGO I would never have admitted that I am a gay, Asian-American, recovering crystal meth addict. I am 30 years old, and it took me twenty-six years to realize who I am and to accept myself. Alcohol and drugs tormented me. My life became truly unmanageable when I was introduced to crystal, though I thought I had control when I used it. When I was given this gift of sobriety, CMA became the foundation of my recovery. Today, I am happy with myself and thankful for my life.

I was raised in an upper-middle-class neighborhood in a northern suburb of Chicago. Growing up in an Asian household, I knew I was different from the beginning. I went to schools that were predominantly white. In high school, I joined every club there was. I kept saying to myself, "If only I were white, not Asian..." At 15, I realized I was gay. Immediately, I began to convince myself and everyone else that I was straight. I wanted to take my dark secret to the grave. I said to myself, "If only I were straight, not gay..." I hated myself.

Throughout my college years, I covered my pain by drinking. I drank heavily every day. Soon pot and ecstasy took over. As a result of partying too much, I was kicked out of school. I moved back to my parents' house in Chicago. With no degree, I got a job as a cashier in a retail store. My self-esteem was low. I went to clubs, raves, and after-hours parties and used

ecstasy every weekend for the next two years. I was going nowhere in life until the day I was introduced to crystal meth.

Crystal put me on top of the world. I was hooked instantly. I felt so invincible, I came out to everybody the very next day at a New Year's Eve party. Having been awake for two days, I climbed onto a table at the stroke of midnight and shouted, "Hey, everybody! Guess what? I'm gay!!!" I had no idea that was only the start of my self-destructive spiral. I knew I could not *really* handle coming out, so I turned to crystal meth to numb my pain.

Every gay man I met did crystal meth, which they called Tina. I believed it was socially acceptable for gay men to use Tina—I thought being gay meant venturing to circuit parties, going to bathhouses, having lots of anonymous sex, and doing lots of drugs. Over the course of the following two years, my bottom just kept getting lower and lower.

My life's unmanageability sprang from crystal meth. Meth devastated my spirituality, emotional life, body, mind, family, friends, and work. Addiction took over my world. I felt abandoned by God, and I was angry at Him. I lost my faith in everything. I asked God, "Why did you make me this way?" My emotions grew chaotic. My happy life morphed into an argumentative, irritable, rigid, and withdrawn one. I felt guilty, shameful, isolated, and lonely. I did not care about my future or myself. I was unpredictable and unreliable. I'd lost all self-esteem. My body suffered: I was convinced the tremors, hallucinations, and convulsions were okay. I believed staying up for five days and sleeping two days was okay. I overdosed and thought that would be the end of me.

My mind broke into a shambles. I used meth to accomplish tasks, only to find I couldn't concentrate. I got nothing done. My clouded brain convinced me I was sane—the rest of the world was going crazy. I grew paranoid and fell into psychosis. My family was tormented. I constantly fought and argued with them, lied to them, and even stole from them. Despite their constant warnings, I did not listen. Soon I found myself avoiding family functions; I didn't feel worthy. I lost their respect. My social life became destructive. I dropped all my friends who were not using. I was surrounded instead by superficial friends who hung out with me only when I had drugs to share. When the drugs were gone, so were

they. I believed using Tina was more important than friendship. Tina was my only friend. At work I was not productive. I found myself arriving late or not going at all and thought that was okay. I was terminated from a job I enjoyed.

Assessing the impact of meth on my life, I knew I needed help. I knew I could not control my drug use, but I did not know where to turn. I tried several times to quit. Even after I overdosed, I used the very next day. I was powerless over my addiction. I wanted to break out of Tina's grip. My life was one disaster after another—I had lost everything. I screamed, "Will this soap opera ever end?"

My parents brought me to treatment on a day in early April—my sobriety date. It was the best thing that ever happened to me. That day, I finally surrendered and admitted defeat. In treatment, I learned there was life after meth.

Coming into recovery was hard at first. I had to ask for help from everyone, because what I'd done before never worked. I had to relearn everything. I had to restructure my belief system. When I attended my first CMA meeting, I realized that not all gay men actively used crystal meth, and that baffled me. At that moment I came to believe that recovery was possible.

Today, I feel alive. Even after four years of sobriety, I'm still on my pink cloud. I've learned to accept myself for who I am. Once in a while I still think about crystal meth, but I now have the courage and strength to persevere through my difficulties without using. The driving force in my recovery is hope.

Having lost absolutely everything to my addiction, I am so grateful my life has changed direction. I am healthy. I have the renewed trust of my family. I am surrounded by real friends. I went back to school and completed my bachelor's degree; today I'm in graduate school. I landed the job of my dreams. I live in a fabulous condo. I love to play in an orchestra, deejay, flag, and dance and have found many other outlets for creative expression. I know I am capable of doing anything.

I try to work my recovery program to the fullest. I go to CMA meetings several times a week. I talk to other recovering addicts and alcoholics. I keep

at least one service position at any given time. I do the suggested work. I try to live a spiritual life. I feel so lucky that relapse is not a part of my story—I've done enough research! Just for today, I do what it takes to stay on the road of recovery.

Since I got sober, I have lived in joy. Joy is the total acceptance of the world as it is right now. I am the happiest addict I know. Self-acceptance is one of the most important tools I have learned, but it takes effort. When I was young, I never thought I would be an addict—but that is what I am. I have accepted it. Today I am comfortable in my own skin. I have tremendous gratitude for my life, for my family and friends, and for my recovery. I am so grateful for all that I have. I am thankful my life is no longer centered on drugs, bars, bathhouses, and drama.

I owe my life to CMA. Most of my friends today are in the fellowship. I honestly do not know where I'd be today if it weren't for CMA. There are so many blessings here that I have not found anywhere else. The bonds I've formed, the help I've received, and the love I feel are only some of the gifts I've found—and I could find them only in CMA. With the help of CMA, my life just keeps getting better. I have learned happiness, joy, self-acceptance, and gratitude. I love myself. I can look at myself in the mirror today and say I am proud to be a gay, Asian-American, recovering crystal meth addict, and I am proud to be an integral part of CMA.