

## TWEAKIN' JAZZMAN

THE FIRST LIE I SOLD MYSELF WAS THAT IT WAS OKAY IF JAZZ MUSICIANS GOT loaded. All the greats got loaded and that made them play better, right? Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Bud Powell, Hank Mobley, Stan Getz. Or perhaps I thought it was a rite of passage for a young musician to be a drug addict. This was when I was 17 and began smoking pot several times a day.

The reason I call it a lie I sold myself was that I was an addict-alcoholic years before that and had been looking for an excuse to be loaded every day. I was a blackout drinker before I ever took a hit of pot or speed—an ominous warning, indeed. Once I surrendered in recovery, certain truths began to come clear. The first one: I liked getting loaded from as far back as I can remember. Even before I was a teenager, I liked to finish off the drinks the adults left at parties. After that, I clearly remember pouring a little from each bottle of my father's booze into a glass, holding my nose and chugging the whole thing before leaving for school. I was drunk for first-period PE. I don't remember any of my friends doing that.

At high school parties, I was the guy who drank eight or nine beers and was passed out before everyone else even got started. I had a reputation as the one who wanted to get the drunkest the fastest. When I was introduced to smoking pot, I found a socially acceptable way to expand my addictions and be loaded every day. Along with pot, I tried everything else: acid, mushrooms, cocaine, PCP, nitrous oxide, X. I especially liked Black

Beauties and Cross Tops (amphetamines). In an early moment of clarity, I switched majors in college and graduated with a degree in business instead of music. I finished college smoking pot and taking Cross Tops daily. I didn't smoke speed until I was 30 years old.

I grew up in the San Fernando Valley, north of Los Angeles, and always felt like an outsider. I was a loner and never felt comfortable in my own skin—I never felt cool or accepted until I was a drug addict. I never understood how people could not want to be constantly high. I thought being stoned or drunk was the preferred way to be. Being loaded was by far the most compelling part of my life. There was no comparison. As a young drug addict and alcoholic, I didn't know I was playing Russian roulette. I thought that because I wasn't a homeless wino or junkie I couldn't be addicted to anything. I thought I was bulletproof. I used to say, "Reality is for people who can't handle drugs." I think the real truth was that I was a sitting duck waiting for the substance that would eventually knock my socks off and take me all the way down. That it hadn't happened yet was not because of any sort of divine guidance or self-control. It's just that I hadn't yet found the substance that one day would turn in flight like a boomerang and all but cut me to ribbons.

My boomerang was speed. I snorted it several times and liked the effect but didn't like the wear and tear on my nose. When I discovered you could smoke it, though, it was as if all my prior drug experiences were child's play. This was it. I even remember extolling the virtues of speed to my normy friends. Here was a drug that let me work harder and longer than the next guy, plus get the hours from 12:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. all to myself to do with as I pleased. Sex was terrific. What was so wrong with this? Show me the downside, I thought—I saw none because I am an addict.

Now, when I played gigs, I smoked both speed and pot. The lie I sold myself then was that I had more endurance and creativity. I met my wife on a gig and soon got her addicted to smoking meth, too. The next few years were a whirlwind of activity; I wasn't really getting anywhere but was still very active nonetheless—getting fired from several jobs while still thinking that the drug wasn't a factor. I was trying to live a normal life, but I ended up being like Sisyphus pushing the rock up the hill. It was

impossible. I would build up some stability by getting a new job, and then do something to tear it all down around my head.

I went from job to job, mostly in sales executive positions. I did lousy work but was talented enough that my bosses still wanted to keep me, thinking I'd be an asset if I ever got my act together—which I never did, of course. Also, because I had to keep getting high, I didn't fit in the organization socially. How could I chitchat with people who didn't get high like me? Why couldn't they understand me? I lasted about a year in each of a succession of jobs, the whole time flying into almost every major airport in the country with a bag of speed in my crotch. That I wasn't ever arrested was a miracle. It would have been a blessing in disguise.

I also was chronically late. I never could be on time. I always was sitting at home smoking my pipe, staring at the computer screen, and waiting for that hit that would take me up and out of my chair and into the shower. The problem was that it never happened—I'd smoke until I was late. This happened every day. Another thing I didn't do was follow directions. If the boss gave me a task to do, I would do something else. It's a wonder I lasted as long as I did at some of those places.

I left my wife and started the major slide toward oblivion. I think having to be responsible for someone else had kept me from free-falling in my first several years of addiction. In my wife's case, she seemed to fall much faster than I did. She picked at her face and arms and eventually pulled out all of her hair. That was her behavior when high. After we split up, my home life became a mess. Like most drug addicts, I lived a dual life. My particular duality was wearing a suit and tie by day and hanging out with homeless kids half my age at night. I vaguely recall being proud that I could pull that off. I called the kids "waifs."

I got ripped off so many times I lost count. I still opened my door to them because I was lonely and needy. Besides, these people were my connections. Later on, the feeling of being taken advantage of would help me make a truly disastrous decision.

Recovery later gave me this insight—I had loved the drama. I wasn't one to create the drama directly, but I loved being a victim or on the sidelines. During my drug career, my favorite emotion was righteous

indignation. I would say, “How could you steal from me after all I’ve given you?” Then I would let these people—the waifs—into my apartment again because they said they could get the “bomb” dope. (It wasn’t ever as good as they said.) My behavior was the definition of insanity: repeating the same thing over and over while expecting different results.

Quitting wasn’t an option. I thought I would use until the day I died. My disease was so strong that I never considered getting help. The end result: I was truly a mess. I used to say that I couldn’t afford to quit, that I couldn’t afford the time away from work to sleep for a week and stop using. But every time I found myself between jobs, I smoked more.

This is not to say I didn’t appear normal to the people in my life who mattered. No one in my family knew I was getting high. All my employers threw up their hands in frustration because I was a crummy employee, albeit talented. It was in my drug life, my “real” life, where things were falling apart. I believed if you kept the exterior clean, you could do with the interior as you wished. That is, keep the car registered, keep working, make all the absolutely necessary appointments, see the family a few times a year, and I could do whatever I pleased with the rest of my life. That philosophy kept me in my disease for a very long time. That was how I kept up appearances to the outside world. But the inside world was completely screwed up.

I still believed I could make the whole thing work—if I just got it together long enough, I could still use and have the picket fence and a life that approached normal. But with each passing failure, my dream of winning in the “meth game” grew more tenuous. I feared I was hopelessly destined for failure. My clouded mind wouldn’t admit the entire reason for my misery was speed. I thought if I just learned how to get high without the drama, then I would be okay. Or maybe if I didn’t need to have contact with the waifs, then I’d be okay.

My best thinking had me learn to manufacture methamphetamine. I didn’t really cook for all that long—I got busted quickly. I never made too much; I cooked for myself. I didn’t really like to share. Well, no wonder—it was pure. Not diluted. Just the strength I needed to hasten my free fall into clouded oblivion. The end came when I was arrested for manufacturing.

For all of you who may read this while you are still in your disease: If you cook dope, the cops will find you. It's no joke. You can't win. It's a losing proposition. You will get busted, and it's no fun.

In recovery, I learned that for my first nine years of daily tweaking, the only governor of my consumption was cost. I didn't like dealing, so I was limited to using what I could afford. I had to work to afford the drugs, and I couldn't work if I was up for more than a couple of days. Those two factors held my drug use in check. But with the manufacturing came an unlimited supply of the strongest dope available. Toward the end, the only thing I could do was make another batch. I wouldn't even shower. I lived like an animal. I'd lost my last job because I stopped showing up entirely and they were forced to fire me. The only time I cleaned up was to go to the store to get more pills or chemicals.

Cooking was a power trip. I obsessed over cooking dope long after I obsessed over using. It was a separate addiction I needed to recover from. Recovery showed me how I had always thought I was better than the people who cared only for their drugs. I soon became exactly that—someone who was overtly out of control, a total slave to speed. Getting arrested was the best thing that ever could have happened to me. It was over.

So, to add it all up, beginning with my daily pot smoking at age 17, I was loaded every day for twenty-two years. I smoked speed almost every day for nearly ten years; the last three were almost a continuous free fall. No breaks. No vacations. I had a long road of reconstruction ahead.

Fortunately, I had a great (and very expensive) lawyer and was put into a program. I took advantage of the opportunity given to me to get well. I went to three to four meetings a day for about six months, and then one a day for the next year. I worked the Steps in that time and found my own Higher Power. I became (and still am) very active in my recovery. After nine months or so, a few other addicts and I started the first CMA meeting in Orange County, California. The meeting started with four people but soon grew to over fifty. That meeting is still going strong today.

In recovery, I discovered one of the most important things for me is to be self-aware. Once I got some clean time, gained knowledge of my disease, and understood the power with which I could be filled by being

connected to my own concept of God, I found I no longer had an excuse to be ignorant of my actions. I now hold myself to a much higher standard of behavior than I did even before I started using, and the only way to accomplish that is to be aware of my actions at all times and view them in light of whether I am relapsing or recovering. There is no middle ground for me. If I am not growing spiritually and emotionally, then I am not well. The visual I use is a metal ball on a grooved piece of wood. If I tilt the wood one way and then the other, the ball is always moving; it never stays still. That's what my recovery life is like. I think if I stay still, I will lose ground.

Another epiphany I've had is that I can be self-destructive without getting high. This was never something I would have understood under the influence. Relapse is probably the ultimate form of self-destructive behavior. I like to think that getting high is the last of a litany of things I would do on my way to relapse. The goal, I think, is to understand that relapse doesn't happen in a vacuum. If I am aware of my behavior in terms of whether I am in relapse or recovery mode, then I can do something for my state of mind: go to a meeting, work with another addict, exercise, pray.

Being self-aware is so important. If I do nothing about my state of mind when I know I'm in trouble, I am embracing relapse. I might not get high right away, or even for several months or years, but I will get high eventually. That's one truth. Another truth is that I experience both relapse behavior and recovery behavior several times each day. Progress, not perfection, right? It's my heart, my intentions, and (most important) my actions that count. At least, that's the way I look at it. That's not condoning bad behavior. That's constantly being aware that I am and always will be a drug addict, and I need to look at my actions in that light.

For those of us just starting our recovery journey, I think it's important to understand that the insanity that goes along with long-term speed usage isn't easy to displace. It sticks to us like glue. And we feel remorse, anger, rage, and guilt. We feel these things in a sober state, and it hurts like hell. Using methamphetamine produced an insanity that we came to expect as part of our drug lives, and once we stop using, that insanity is the only thing that still seems real to us. I believe that's why a lot of people stumble early on. They miss the insanity.

It helps to understand that recovery is a slow, long-term process. It takes time. We can't quickly fix what took us so long to screw up. Like most addicts, I want to get well just as fast as I got high—unfortunately, it just doesn't work that way. Recovery is a lifelong day-at-a-time journey.

Today, I get joy out of things that I never would have thought would bring me happiness—especially family and friends. I never got joy out of things that didn't relate directly to getting high. Now, it seems life is lush with joy. At around four years sober, I met someone in the program and we married a few years later. We just celebrated our fifth year of marriage and I couldn't be happier. The "Big Book" says that we have a kit of spiritual tools "laid at our feet." My disease is so cunning, I need to use all of our tools, not just one or two. When I was getting high, I had one tool to fix all my problems. I've heard it said that if the only tool you have is a hammer, then all your problems look like nails. My hammer was a glass pipe. Life is infinitely better now.

If you are new, I strongly advise you to get a sponsor and work the Steps. Read my story and look for similarities with your experience. Don't look for differences. If nothing in my story strikes a chord with you, then read another one until you hear your own story. Find your own Higher Power and always be true to yourself.