

## **I STOPPED BEING A VICTIM**

I USED TO FEEL LIKE I WAS THE KIND OF DRUG ADDICT who was never going to be able to stay sober. On January 3, 2006, I celebrated a year of continuous sobriety. It took seven years to get there. I came into the rooms on September 26, 1998, in Los Angeles after having used crystal meth for three years. Doing drugs had become the

most important thing to me—and had wrung everything I cherished out of my life.

I was so damaged when I arrived it took almost a year just to speak clearly. About sixty days into recovery, I was admitted to a mental ward because of a drug-induced psychosis that was initially misdiagnosed as bipolar disorder. The destruction to my central nervous system was extensive. After I was released from the psychiatric unit, I began working with a sponsor, attending meetings, and sleeping for what seemed like the better part of each day. Slowly, over a period of six months, during which time I decided to stop the psychotropic meds I had been put on while locked away, I began to feel better. Then I relapsed for two days.

What followed during the next three or four years were periods of sobriety—three, six, even seven months. I could never make it longer than that. I was involved in my program, always working closely with a sponsor, doing Step work, and attending meetings. But I was tremendously discouraged. I heard a nun speak at a meeting once, and she shared that for her first six or so years, she could never make it to a year. One day someone pointed out to her that she had never taken the First Step. She, like me, had worked her ass off on all the other stuff, yet kept relapsing. This got my attention, though I was not entirely sure how to apply the lessons of her situation to my own life.

I learned about the denial component of addiction and the compulsion to use. This is what I was now experiencing: The relapses over all of those years had led me to believe that I could come in and out as I chose. I desperately wanted to stop this cycle but could not. I went to meetings loaded and terrified. One day the obsession to use was lifted, and I put a couple of days together. I got six months, then had another relapse. Within two days, I'd injected for the first time. I was on another tear, and this time it lasted five weeks. During this relapse, I was resigned to continue until the bitter end. I thought, *Let me die*.

Yet this didn't happen. High or not, I continued to go to meetings, and I was honest with the people around me. No longer lying about the horror of what was going on, I went into treatment last January. In rehab, I learned so much. I wrote out my First Step again, concentrating especially on the unmanageability caused by active addiction. I felt a huge hole in my gut.

Instead of pulling it together as best I could and immediately getting

on with life, I stopped everything. I got clean. I laid a foundation, which I had never done before. One thing that was important to me was learning to ask for help, especially when it concerned how to live a sober life. I could get clean and stop using drugs, but I couldn't live soberly. I was the kind of guy that didn't want help and hated asking for it. I learned that I can't stay sober today on anything I did yesterday. It is sober action on a daily basis that treats my disease.

I am so grateful today for my recovery—it is the most important thing in my life. I feel that I have tremendous freedom and have been given a gift whose value is beyond words. I am becoming the man I have always wanted to be and feel I can be responsible while living with this disease. I have given up being a victim. —*J.D.*