

## WITHOUT A DOUBT, I AM A CRYSTAL METH ADDICT

ON THE DAY MY RECOVERY BEGAN, I HAD NO IDEA IT WAS coming. I was at work, staring at my computer, clicking between my office and personal email accounts. This was typical of my behavior at work when I was crashing. I was bored, depressed, tired, lonely, frustrated, and just trying to get through the day. The phone rang; it was my friend S.

“Do you want to work out this week?” he asked. He was talking about going to the gym together.

“Sure,” I said, not really caring much one way or the other.

“How about tomorrow?” he asked.

“I see my therapist. What about tonight?” I said. A workout would make my blood pump faster. Maybe that would move me through the crashing process a little faster.

“I’m going to Crystal Meth Anonymous tonight,” he said. I knew he was in the program. He was an addict.

“Maybe I could come along,” I suggested. The words surprised me a little, but they didn’t sound wrong. I wasn’t an addict, but it had been getting harder and harder to stay off the crystal. Maybe these meetings could help.

I’d been feeling more and more frustrated and hopeless about using. I kept making vows to not use, but it wasn’t working. I was tired of showing up at my therapist’s office hopeless and frustrated. “What’s the point?” I would say. “It’s the drugs that are making me feel this way. We’re not going to talk our way out of this.”

A few weeks prior, I had reached a low and critical point. I was waiting outside an apartment building on East 14th Street. K., a guy I had used with a few times before, was inside with his dealer. I’d told him we could hang out, but I was definitely not going to use. I had told myself to just stop it. Enough was enough. Standing there in the cold, I revised that decision. *I need something*, I thought. *Some relief. I know I’ll feel like hell on Tuesday, but if I don’t get high, I’m just going to be miserable straight through.* Of course, I got high. On that night, I realized how desperate I was. In that decision, I’d crossed a line. I wondered and feared what lines I would cross next.

Maybe it was that fear that made me ask S. if I could come along with

him to a meeting. We met outside the Community Center so we could walk in together. About twenty people were sitting in a circle of folding chairs. I took a seat and tried not to make eye contact with anyone. The meeting started and soon a speaker was talking about his daily—it seemed like hourly—crystal meth habit. When he would go to his dealer's, he'd use in the lobby on his way out of the building. Throughout any given day, he would duck into bathroom stalls at work, in restaurants, or at bars and take a few hits. He kept his pipe ready to go on his nightstand so he could smoke crystal first thing in the morning.

*I don't have a dealer, I thought. I don't use in the middle of the day. I don't even own a pipe.*

After the speaker was finished, people raised their hands, divulged their day counts, and then talked about their recovery. I didn't raise my hand because I wasn't really an addict. *Maybe next week I will say something, I thought. And, I've got three days today. I want to come back next week and say I have ten.*

The meeting ended and a man next to me turned and said hello. He introduced himself, and I figured he was lonely or hitting on me. Nobody was in a hurry to leave, it seemed, but S. leaned over and said, "Let's get out of here and get something to eat."

"That wasn't so bad," I said to him as he hurried me away from the building. "I'm coming back next week."

The next day, I realized that I'd had only two days clean, not three. Counting to two isn't all that difficult, but I guess my head wasn't so clear.

During the past eight years, I'd been trying to stop using crystal. I thought that the depression that came after using was the only problem. I tried switching substances to avoid the crash, but always came back to crystal. I'd tried every trick in the book to avoid crashing: cranberry juice, abstaining from alcohol, acupuncture, a couple extra antidepressants. Nothing helped at all. Lately, I'd decided that sleep deprivation was the culprit. I'd been using during the day and not staying up all night. But once again, the crashing was as bad as ever.

By Thursday, I decided that I couldn't wait a whole week to go to a CMA meeting. If I tried that, I knew I'd get high again. Plus, I couldn't stop thinking about the meeting. I wanted to go to another one. I wanted to know more. I called S., who told me there were meetings on Thursdays, Fridays, and Sundays, too.

I went back on Friday. I was nervous and excited. A man at the door greeted me and introduced me to a few people. *What a nice person*, I thought.

He was a nice guy, but I didn't understand that he was doing his job as greeter. Again I just listened, but this time I noticed the Steps and the Traditions on the wall. "The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using." *I guess they will let me stay*, I thought.

After that, I went to all four meetings each week. I heard people say ninety meetings in ninety days but figured that didn't apply to me. To be polite, I started to raise my hand, say I was an addict, and say my day count. I asked cute guys for phone numbers and started making program calls. I started going to fellowship.

I hated the days when there were no CMA meetings. I started going to other fellowships so I could go to a meeting a day. When I got about thirty days, I asked that nice guy who had greeted me at my second meeting if he would be my sponsor. He said yes. When I got around ninety days, he suggested we start to work the Steps.

I stayed with it, one day at a time, and admitted I had done my version of many of things that daily users shared about. I had bought drugs from a dealer. I had used crystal at work. I had put myself in very dangerous situations. I had called in sick because I was using or recovering from it. I had lost jobs—not because I went to work high, but because I was hard to get along with. (I learned later that this was caused by my character defects.) I was distant from my family. I hadn't really kept in touch with many friends. I stood people up because I was using. When I did show up to see friends or visit family, I didn't really want to be there. My crystal meth use was probably connected to me getting HIV, that tooth that crumbled, and other health problems. I hadn't been to jail, but every time I'd used, I'd broken the law.

And I had to admit it—before I came to CMA, I had wanted to use crystal meth more than I wanted to do anything else in life. Now there was something else that I wanted to do more than get high: I wanted to go to meetings. I wanted to be with sober people. I wanted to be sober myself.

That was over six years ago. When I first started my recovery, I told myself I had an interesting career, a nice place to live, a good relationship with my family, and some great friends. None of that was really true, certainly not compared to what I have now. My career has opened up in ways I never

imagined. I am closer to my family. I have many new friends, most from the fellowship. Some relationships with old friends have improved. Others fell away as I realized there wasn't much to them. I sponsor a few people, and I have a sponsor.

As I have gotten further away from the details of using drugs, I see that the externals of how much and how often I used were only symptoms of my disease of addiction. Before I came into the program, I thought that the only problem was the depression that followed crystal meth use. I actually thought that using drugs made me a more interesting person. I see it differently now. I was and I am a crystal meth addict. I had a serious spiritual problem that made me want to use drugs. In my opinion, if I need to blast my brains into oblivion with drugs or alcohol—even occasionally—in order to avoid my feelings and reality, something is quite wrong with my approach to life. I am grateful to the fellowship of CMA, the Steps, my fellows, and my Higher Power for giving me a new way to live. —*Bruce C.*