

I AM POWERLESS

WHEN I CAME TO CRYSTAL METH ANONYMOUS, I ARRIVED at a place I needed badly. Crystal meth had devastated my life. It was most obvious in my appearance: I had lost about 20 pounds, transforming into a gaunt, stooped shell of the vigorous man I had been. I was sick. I had developed Crohn's disease, which had worsened because of neglect, and I was in constant pain. My career, once the greatest light in my life, was in tatters. Friends and family had slipped away, and my days and nights were a nightmarish whirlpool of Internet hookups and heavy drug use. Fun had disappeared; life had no meaning. I had come to anesthetize the pain of my illness and my life on crystal and other drugs. I was destined to die in this dark world, it seemed.

At CMA, I noticed a banner on which the Twelve Steps of recovery were printed. I had heard of these before. In fact, I had attended a few Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in 1994. (I didn't relate to the alcoholic condition, or maybe I just wasn't ready to sober up.) On this day, in late January 2004, I had been given the gift of desperation, and whatever force had motivated me to come to CMA also gave me the blessing of clarity as I realized that this might very well be my last best chance to end years of misery. Grandiosity, the monkey on my back, had prevented me from seeing the facts of my life clearly, but confronting my shortcomings was not the most immediate concern. First, I was faced with an even more challenging notion: that I was powerless over drugs and alcohol and that my life had become unmanageable.

The unmanageability was as clear to me as an unused crack pipe, but I wasn't sure whether I was truly powerless over crystal meth. Hadn't I been able to stay clean from crystal from Tuesday to Friday on a few occasions? Yes, I had eventually used again, but I was sure I could refrain if I really wanted. I was two weeks clean of crystal on the day I arrived at CMA. Here's what I decided I would do: I would follow the suggestions of

the fellowship to attend regular meetings and get a sponsor. But I would continue to drink and do drugs other than crystal until I got to the point where I lost interest in meth.

The more I heard you share your stories and solutions, your transformed lives, your messages of hope, your laughs and tears, the more I wanted to stay and enjoy you. I would later understand that the group had become my Higher Power and that it was helping me to stay away from crystal.

Even so, troubling things kept occurring. It seemed that every time I smoked pot, did poppers, drank alcohol, or logged on to "that" Web site in search of sex, I came into close proximity with crystal. Reluctantly I shared this with my sponsor, and he pointed out that CMA is a program of total abstinence and that crystal would continue to dog me as long as I maintained relationships with the people, places, and things that were part of my active drug life. One night—while drunk and online—I ran into a "friend." He offered me crystal. As I dressed to go meet him, I had a spiritual breakthrough. An inner voice reminded me of the hell my life had been for the previous three years. Suddenly I felt uncomfortable, that I wasn't being true to myself. Then I felt a nagging pain because I wasn't being honest—I was deceiving my new friends. I shut down the computer, and the next day I told my sponsor I would be willing to try one day of complete sobriety. I reset my day count to Day 1.

That was February 18, 2004, and I have not had a mind- or mood-altering substance since. That night I learned what became for me the "ABCs" of sobriety: Alcohol Becomes Crystal. I cannot safely use any drugs or drink. Later I learned another ABC of the program, three pertinent ideas: "(a) That we were addicts and could not manage our own lives; (b) That probably no human power could have relieved our addiction; (c) That God could and would if He were sought" (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 60).

Accepting these concepts has kept me sober. Crystal is a subtle, powerful, cunning foe, and I have been tested by it time and time again. I have come to accept that crystal will always be here. But I don't have to use it nor despise or regret it. I have a weapon in CMA and this miraculous fellowship. I am grateful I am sober today. —Jeff G.

THE CITY WAS MY PROBLEM

THE BOY I WAS WHEN I SHOWED UP FOR COLLEGE WAS SO naïve—not to mention scared, lost, and frightened.

I never seemed to learn from my mistakes, but why beat myself up? I was just a kid. I was having fun, loving popularity and attention. I thought that I was “living life.” However, something was missing. I felt empty on the inside, and the only things that seemed to fill the void were men and the drugs I learned to use along with them.

I had never done hard drugs before I moved to New Orleans for school. Even so, all it took was one hot guy to introduce me to a substance. After that, whatever I used seemed to become part of me forever. Men would come and go, but the drugs they introduced me to would stay put. But wasn't that what I was supposed to be doing in college? Going out, having fun? I didn't think I was an addict. If I just did a bump before clubbing, I wasn't an addict, was I? Addicts are the people who shoot up under freeway overpasses. Plus, I came from such a good family: I had a Catholic upbringing and was always taken care of financially. Addicts are starving, broke, and homeless, right? Ha-ha—again, so naïve.

So you know the story. I got so screwed up I lost all my ambition. I changed my major from communications with a minor in sociology to Spanish with a minor in ballet. It was the easy way out—I was already fluent in Spanish (I'm Latino), and I always went to the ballet rolling! Drugs really got a hold of me. I thought I was functioning, but I wasn't. I was miserable. The abusive relationship I was in was tragic. I was raped on GHB and couldn't stand myself anymore.

My crashes became severe, and the depression increased. By the time I got my own apartment, I was using drugs almost every day. Crystal meth brought me down fast. I started robbing from the store at which I worked and began selling my furniture and clothes. Near the end of living in New Orleans, I had only my laptop and a futon. I was a mess.

But the problem wasn't me. It was the city. The city was trash, and I needed out. At a trade show, I met a fashion designer who offered me a job in Los Angeles. (She said she thought I had talent, but the best talents I had at that time were probably manipulation and lying.)

I moved to L.A. and hated it almost immediately. I lived and worked with my boss, who was a year older than me. I didn't know anyone and thought L.A. was sooo cheesy. New York City was where I wanted to be. Within three months, I had quit my job, landed a new one in Manhattan, and was headed to the Big Apple to work in fashion.

In New York, I felt fortunate. I felt like I had graduated from college (I hadn't, though) and was now a professional. Happy hour turned into every hour, and I was soon getting caught up in the lifestyle. The party was on. I used drugs mainly so I didn't have to give a damn about anything. I treated my career like a part-time job. I would show up at the office and pass out on the couch. I went through four apartments in six months. I was broke all the time and soon quit work.

During this mess, I met a guy who always had crystal. The using started quickly, and I was back to being promiscuous. I would meet up with this guy, get high, and have sex with him in a vain attempt to fill that empty emotional space inside.

At this point, I was really scared of where my life was going. After all, I couldn't blame the city again because I was now living in New York. Clearly it was me who had the problem. I was also afraid of getting kicked out of yet another apartment. My roommate had said I couldn't do drugs while living with him, and I was sure he had heard the lighter going off in my room every half-hour at night. He had to know I was smoking crystal.

I realized I now had the gift of desperation. I looked at myself in the mirror and saw that I was addicted to crystal meth and that my life was going nowhere. I cried and called for help, something I was unaccustomed to doing. (My ego was too big, and I didn't want to admit I had lost control.) The problem, however, was obvious, and I needed help. I looked up a Twelve Step group on the Internet and took my high self to a meeting. I cried over and over but got the hugs, smiles, and help I craved. I then found a Crystal Meth Anonymous meeting. This is where my life would actually start. I let these men love me until I was able to start loving myself. I got a sponsor and started doing Step work. My life started changing because I was now escaping old patterns. I began to understand that I had to let go of my way and trust that there was another path—that God's way was better. My way of doing things had earned me nothing. I began to trust the people I met in CMA, and soon I started learning more about living life on

life's terms. My career started booming again and I was now being trusted at work, not right away but slowly.

I have to keep in mind that I can't let the life that CMA has given me take me away from the life of CMA. My career is going so well. I've gotten two huge promotions and have now lived in the same apartment for a whole year! I'm finally content.

Life still happens, though. My mom has had some health problems, but I've been able to show up for her. Life isn't easy, but it's better. My father is dying, and I have been able to show up for him, too, though we don't speak anymore. Also in recovery, I lost a good friend who, unfortunately, could not recover. His addiction caused him to kill himself by overdosing on crystal. This was another chapter of my life that was tough. I got through it. I know today that God won't put anything in my life that I can't handle.

I'm not cured, and I know this is a lifelong process. I want my recovery to be long and slow. As far as my job goes, I'm an account executive for a multiline showroom and get to travel a lot. I have awesome relationships with most of my immediate family. The love life is just starting to kick in. It was suggested that I not date during my first year of recovery. It was difficult to keep my impulses in check, but now I understand the reason: I had to be sure I was always putting sobriety first. Anything I put ahead of it, I will lose! So now I'm casually dating and having fun. I no longer need a man to fill my every need (though a little validation is always nice!). So that's where I'm at and where I've been. My life has gone in a new direction, and I'm traveling farther than in my wildest dreams. I'm finally happy. —*Pablo D.*