

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.

I WAS A LUCKY GIRL

I WAS A LUCKY GIRL. I ACTUALLY HAD A NICE CHILDHOOD, a loving family, and a solid academic record, so I don't know why I was so curious about drugs. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that I was lonely and felt "less than" during middle school. I was mousy, awkward, uncool. I had frizzy hair and braces and couldn't dress for the life of me.

By the time I got to high school, I wanted to reinvent myself. When a friend slipped a rave flyer into my hand, I jumped at the opportunity to go. I was 15 years old. At the dance party, I was passed my first pill of ecstasy, and I didn't hesitate from taking it for a second. I was never scared of drugs, only wide-eyed, fascinated, and hungry for acceptance. Soon I was going to raves every weekend and using tons of ecstasy, Ketamine, cocaine, marijuana, and crystal on a regular basis. In college, I graduated from raves to circuit parties but stopped using crystal—I knew I liked it too much. I graduated and established myself in a career that lent itself to heavy drinking and cocaine use. This allowed me to justify my drug habit to myself and others.

About a year ago, I was out in the Hamptons at a couple of events for work. By the end of the day, I drove up to another party at someone's house

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on the beach. I had a good time dancing, but by the time we left, I was pretty drunk and had snorted all the cocaine I had brought with me. We went back to my friend's house and decided to go back out partying, but I was tired and wanted more coke. He didn't have any but offered crystal meth.

I told him I didn't do that anymore but still followed him into his bedroom. I had never seen anyone smoke crystal before, and although I was slightly horrified, the addict in me crept out and was intrigued. I absolutely knew I shouldn't go near it but made the decision to try it anyway. The next nine months were a bitter cycle of hedonistic weekends that became hazy weeks and hazy weeks that became high-strung months. I spent weekend nights at my favorite bar or club and weekend days sitting around my apartment with a bunch of guys smoking, chatting, "recovering," and proclaiming our commitment "not do this again next weekend."

I ended up using every day, sometimes in the bathroom at work. I was embarrassed by my behavior. I was one mistake away from losing everything, and I knew it. One Friday, after an especially exhausting binge, I called one of my best friends, whom I hadn't spoken to in about nine months, since he had gotten sober.

I was finally ready to ask for help. He came to talk to me after work. He seemed so clear, wise, and patient. He was so genuine and caring—I didn't feel deserving of it. I brought a bag containing my pipe to the LGBT Community Center in the West Village and ceremoniously threw it into the trash. Then I walked into the Sunday-night Crystal Meth Anonymous meeting and was greeted by smiling, warm, friendly faces. I knew I was safe and in the right place. It's funny—I came to the program to get sober, but I stay to get spiritual. I am being introduced to an entirely new world of knowledge, spirituality, self-realization, and well-being. I respect every single person in the program and their belief systems. I am filled with gratitude for their presence and for their investment in my sobriety. I am so grateful for this program, for my sobriety, and for the ability to say, "My name is Jamie, and I'm an addict." —*Jamie K.*