



"Saving Lives and Reuniting Families"

Chris

I woke up still sitting in my car. I had passed out there. Through bloodshot eyes I looked at myself in the mirror; my face was drawn and skinny. I was about a hundred and fifty pounds soaking wet. The face looking back at me in the mirror wasn't mine but I could see my childhood face- the one I remember- looking back at me saying why are you killing me? What did I do to you?

How did I get here? I thought to myself as I looked around the car and all I saw was paraphernalia and empty bottles that have been drifting around on the floor and some still in my lap. I was doing so well and now everything is gone- my family, my money, my apartment, my happiness- everything.

As I look back on my life there were always signs that I had the addictive personality, but I never thought I'd end up like this. An adopted child, product of the middle sixties and seventies I learned when I was young you weren't cool unless you took a drag off that cigarette or a hit off that bottle to fit in. I was a sensitive boy and gentle and the other kids sometimes made fun of me because I have a funny last name so I had to do everything in order to fit in. In hindsight I was probably just a joke that they laughed at once I got a little drunk or high.

I know my sister's friends were older and I was kind of their clown. I remember my sister taking me to a concert when I was about 11 years old and they let me take a drink and some of their pot and watched me flop around for a little while. You can see my using started very young.

I managed to get to high school and college all the while still partying with my friends and going to concerts trying to pretend everything was ok. But there were times, (what I call small disasters) along the way which I think about now and wish I could have seen what they really were- all signs of my disease progressing. Lost relationships, never really saving any money, terrible self-image, always wondering what was wrong with me but never being able to figure it out. I always felt a little separate from everybody else... I could be in a room full of people and feel all alone.

It wasn't that I wasn't a nice person I always tried to be good to other people to do the best I could in any situation and it wasn't like I didn't have triumphs. There were times especially in college when I dived out for periods of time thinking that I was fine and things went better! I graduated college on the President's List. But I drank to celebrate my wins and drank more to cry in my shame when I failed.

My parents divorced when I was 17 and it hurt me very badly inside because I couldn't figure out why my father left me. It was the night of my senior prom when he moved out. I came home from the prom to find a note on my bed and held the resentment for the next 25 years. That gave me one more thing to drink over. I didn't speak to my father more than a few words for that 25 year period. He was sober for some many years when he left and I was not, so we didn't have a whole lot to talk about what a waste.

In 1993 I was working in New York as a printing broker when I narrowly escaped the First World Trade Center bombing. I left eight minutes before the bomb went off. That was an emotionally terrifying incident and I drink over that too. In 2001 I was on my way to work but never made it to the city because two airplanes hit that same building again and destroyed it. I was one of the lucky people who never made it in but got to see it firsthand. For many years after that I drank because of that but it wasn't until later when I realized how lucky I was. A few months after the World Trade Center bombing they found a defect in my heart that almost killed me and once again I was spared. But I didn't see it that way and drank and used even more to escape the pain and fear that I should have got counseling for and never did. It was around this time that a supposed friend introduced me to some harder drugs that led to me going quickly downhill. I think it is part of the human condition not to see how far down you have gone because of denial, dishonesty with yourself, or shame, but I didn't see it. I went along thinking everything was okay when I knew deep down inside it was very far from ok.

At this point I was a representative with a mutual fund firm and had worked very hard to become a retirement planning expert. I stayed clean for that period, at least enough to go to work and even do well! I had accumulated a good deal of money as I was very good at what I did but after 9/11 I really fell apart. Over the next few years I lost interest in my work, my family and anything else that was once important to me and sunk deeper into my disease. It became a job. It got to the point where nobody wanted me around anymore. As I sank deeper, even my mother didn't want me at the house because it was too heartbreaking. I was stealing from her to support my disease. I did things I normally would never do because I was no longer in control. My disease had overcome me. My Sponsor tells me "we stole our mother's sleep"; I know I aged my poor mother during that period just from the worry and heartbreak of watching her son slowly dying.

Back in the 80's my father had worked with a gentleman named Fred for the State Department of Health. They became close friends and both were very involved in helping others recover. Fred had a nephew who came up a very sick addict in California and badly needed some help. Fred was in New Jersey and he called my father to go and help this young man get into a detox. And he did get sober. So there I am years later very sick, homeless, living in a car and my father called his friend Fred who ran a wonderful place called the Freedom House where people learned how to live with their disease of addiction. My father called in a favor and got me a bed after much prodding and after I escaped intervention several times. Fred's wife Pat whom I am most grateful to, chased me down for months.

So then we go back to the beginning of the story where I wake up in the car and I look at myself with my red eyes and my drawn face and the little child who used to be me said why are you killing me- I didn't do anything to you... and I call this my moment of clarity. I believe this is when God put the thought in my head that I truly needed help or would die. It was on March 25th 2006 when I woke up in the car and threw everything out the window that I had and surrendered. My mother let me in to her house and I slept for 36 hours. Four days later, still barely able to stand or put anything together in my mucus head, I arrived at Freedom House where my path to recovery began.

They taught me many things there about how to be considerate of other people, how to love myself, how to get honest. I had to take responsibility for my actions and pay for my fines. They led me to Alcoholics Anonymous so I could learn how stay sober. It was the single most difficult and painful journey I have ever been on and also the most worthwhile. In March of this year I will celebrate 10 years of continuous sobriety and it has been the best 10 years of my life. I sponsor several guys and help them stay sober while they help me stay sober (that's how it works.) I've met a wonderful woman who have been with for nearly eight years who is my true partner and my best friend. I got my family back. I made amends with my father in California after 25 years and we speak often, although it is long distance and we love each other very much. Freedom House helped me overcome my resentment. I have a mother who is happy to have her son back. I have repaired my credit, made amends to those that I hurt. I finally learned how to love myself. I never need to feel that awful loneliness any more. I bought a house and I have never been so happy about being part of my community and my life. My name is Chris and I'm a grateful recovering alcoholic. I learned to live one day at a time.

