



"Saving Lives and Reuniting Families"

Michael L.

My name is Michael and I'm an alcoholic. It took me the better part of five years to accept that phrase into my life, but today I'm proud to be a person in recovery from drugs and alcohol. That was definitely not always the case.

I had a pretty normal childhood with two parents in my life and an older sister. As a teen I drank and smoked pot and experimented with different drugs, but in my eyes nothing really out of the ordinary for a teenager.

When I was around 25 years old I started using painkillers at my job where I was waiting tables. At first it was an escape from reality, it made work more fun but that escape became the opposite eventually. From the age of 26 to 28 I used opiates every day to avoid withdrawals at all cost. Once I robbed myself of my life savings to meet my habit.

I came clean to my family about my addiction in March 2013, at that time I was living with my now ex-girlfriend in Philadelphia and was unemployed, losing the only girl I ever loved to my addiction and just about out of money. The day came that my ex broke up with me and wanted me gone, so I made one of the hardest phone calls I'll ever make to my mother and told her I'm addicted to pain killers and need help. A week later I entered my first detox program. At that point I thought once you got the drugs out of your system you were ok but that was not the case. I started using again and soon after that I wanted nothing to do with a 12 step program in my life. I wasn't ready to surrender to my addiction and was harboring a lot of feelings about the mess I made of my life and wanted to escape from reality. To put it simply I was lost.

In September 2013 my family sent me to South Florida for rehab and then I transitioned into a halfway house. Soon after that graduated from pills to heroin and picked up the needle for my first time, I was lost in my addiction.

In March 2014 my mother was diagnosed with lung cancer. As much as I wanted to be there for her I could not even take care of myself. My family gave me a shot to come back to NJ to be closer to my sick mother but I couldn't stop using as much as I wanted to. After about a week of being homeless in New Jersey my mother called me and said I could sleep at home tonight if I called a place someone told her about called Freedom House. Three days later I pulled up to Freedom House, I entered the program in September 2014 and spent 6 months learning to live again, cook, clean, work a minimum wage job, budget and attend 12 step meetings and even got a sponsor.

I would love to say that is the end of my story but in March 2015 I suffered a relapse when on weekend pass from Freedom House. Watching your mother slowly losing her battle to cancer is hard enough but when you are also only six months sober from a major drug addiction I was like a ticking time bomb just waiting for

the opportunity to pick up. In that moment I didn't care about all I learned about my disease I just wanted to escape again. I was discharged but Freedom House did not give up on me. They helped me get into a detox so I could come back to the program.

My mother went on hospice soon after that and I stayed clean about a month for her but when she passed in May 2015 I went on a run. I was broken and lost. I made a call to Freedom House and they welcomed me back with open arms. Freedom House is a very special place to me, I learned what true friendship is there and what it is to work a program of recovery. I graduated the program on New Year's Day 2016 and decided to stay in Hunterdon County where my sponsor and sober network is. I live with two other graduates of the program today and I visit the house at least twice a week to take residents out to meetings like other people did for me. Today I have 8 months clean, a full time job and a car. Freedom House helped get me on the path that I'm on now and I will forever be grateful for that.