

## I Will Never Be Like Him...an Addict's Story

"I will never be like him". Statements like this are often heard coming out the mouths of addicts long before they ever pick up a substance. This is how my story begins. My father was a "functioning alcoholic" and my mother suffered from some mental afflictions. To say that we lived in a house that was chaotic and dysfunctional would be an understatement!

I remember the first time I looked at my drunk father at about age 5 and thought how he can do this to himself. I was ashamed and embarrassed and in a mild way disgusted with him. There was one instance where we attended a Christening for my niece that was just around the block from where our house was, and my father was so drunk that he could barely walk home. He agreed to drive our cousins back home that night because we all had school in the morning, but he was unable. My cousins wound up spending the night and nobody went to school (I am sure we were not complaining). That night I watched him writhe on our bathroom floor, vomiting until he passed out. I just couldn't understand why someone would intentionally do that to themselves.

So now about me. I grew up with two sisters. Our relationships were tolerable at best. Lots of fighting and bullying and sometimes even physical violence with each other. I felt like the outcast or the odd kid out of the three of us. I felt like a stranger in my own home and often isolated in my room or would spend time with my mother where I learned all kinds of unhealthy behaviors and ways to deal with things. I was often ridden with anxiety and feelings of not belonging even in my own family!

School was not much better for me. I was bullied and picked on until I was brought to tears. I would often get off at bus stops farther from my home to avoid fighting with other girls who seemed to make it their mission to make me miserable. I had very few friends and the friends that I did have were considered outcasts. By the time I was in high school, we tried to keep to ourselves and avoid confrontation with anyone else. A few times I found myself smoking or drinking (things that I despised) or sneaking out of the house at night, just so I could feel like I was fitting in.

I was not a bad kid in school. My grades were good and that was one of the few times that I was able to feel good about myself. My self-esteem came from my ability to learn and to be praised for how well I was doing. Like most any other kid in school, I would get an occasional C and my father would express some disappointment each time. "You can do better than this." He would tell me. That does not sound terrible coming from a parent but what you need to understand is that my youngest sister would bring home bad grades and it was handled very differently from me. I wound up feeling like I could not falter even a little bit and she was always excused because "it was the best she could do."

About a year after I graduated high school, I moved from Pennsylvania to Florida. Our family had moved there half-way through my sophomore year, but it only lasted 7 months before we came back to Pennsylvania. While I was there, I met a girl who I felt that I could really have a true friendship with, so when I was told we were moving back, I was quite angry and upset with my parents. Anyway, a year after high school I decided my family was the problem, so I packed up and headed South. Things didn't quite work out the way I thought they were going to, and this is when my addiction really started to take off. I began using more frequently and more heavily. It became truly clear, very quickly that I was not able to feel my low self-esteem or self-hatred that I had for myself when I was obliterated on a substance. On my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday I wound up working late so by the time I got home no one was really in the mood to do any drinking and I was upset because this is my birthday. They had purchased a bottle of champagne and I went and grabbed it from the fridge and was told that it is birthday tradition that if I popped the cork that I would need to drink the entire bottle. I scoffed at that and replied, "I'm not drinking this entire bottle by myself." That is exactly what I did in addition to several tumblers of mixed alcoholic drinks, topped off by a few shots of Vodka. I suffered with alcohol poisoning for the next 12 hours. My friends had placed me in the shower stall that night so I would not die from choking on my own vomit. When I came too the next morning, it was an awful sight. My body fluids from both ends were everywhere, which I of course had to clean up. It was so awful! I was still very nauseous and was cleaning up in a very foul-smelling environment. I wretched and wretched for hours. Now you may be thinking that I never touched it again after that, but you would be wrong. I told

myself and my friends that I was never doing it again and lasted about three days before I was drinking again. That was my life for the next few years, a “functioning alcoholic”. Just like my father.

Eventually my life had become a complete shamble and I moved back home to Pennsylvania with my mother in an apartment in Philadelphia. At that time, she was suffering from her own addiction, so I did not wind up staying long and moved to Langhorne to live with my dad and my youngest sister. You can imagine what happened then. We were all drinking and smoking pot every day. Now I had mentioned before that my relationship with my sister was quite volatile, but she became my best using partner. We were out at bars and clubs every night after work. Driving home drunk and high on dangerous highways. One night I left the bar in the Northeast and drove down the wrong side of Roosevelt Blvd! I thank God every day that I did not kill anyone that night. Surely, I must realize that I have a problem by now, but no I did not. Once again, this had become my life. My sister was quite popular so it was not long before those old feelings of not being good enough or cool enough started to creep in and I would drink myself right into a blackout, so I didn't have to feel it. Eventually, I couldn't drink enough or get high enough to keep the bad feelings away, so I started feeling suicidal. Once again, I thank God every day that I never put a “plan” in place that I would one day follow through on. I did think about driving off bridges when I went over them or praying before I went to bed at night that I would not wake up the next morning. I found myself just as miserable using as when I was not using and just wanted it to end.

About that time, I had re-connected with my childhood best friend who talked about being clean and that she was going to meetings. I had no idea what she was talking about until one night I went to her apartment after work, and I told her that something had to change, or I was going to put a gun to my head. She invited me to a meeting, and I had no choice. I had nothing left. From this moment my life completely changed. I found a home, a place where I belonged and other people who understood me and felt just like me. I have been in recovery and going to meetings for over 21 years now, and during this time I was re-connected to a God of my understanding. I became a member of the UCC church and once again found a home and a place where I belonged. The combination of meetings and church every week has deepened my faith and helped me realize that God is a loving God who only wants what is best for me and had been with me though ever step of this journey just waiting for me to ask for help.

My life today is beyond imagination! I am married and have been with the same person for 15 years. She is also in recovery and the most amazing woman that I have ever met! I have been at the same job for over 7 years now and am considered a valued employee. I have the sweetest rescue Pitbull in the world who unconditionally loves us both very much and I cannot imagine our life without her!! Our lives are not without strife or stress, but we make the choice not to use each day no matter what happens. I can honestly say that I like who I am and enjoy my life. I have my God to thank for that and the direction that He put me in to get me to where I am today. I am forever grateful and blessed.