



Stories of recovery
from addiction:

educating humpty

I am 52 years old now. I started drinking at the age of 15 and found it helped me to cope with anxiety, low self-esteem, and worst of all the feeling of being an outsider. I was introduced to drugs at 16 and until the age of 38 I had a distinctly pharmaceutical mentality; if there was a problem there was sure to be a chemical fix for it.

After years trying to control my drink and drug use I finally threw in the towel and entered residential treatment where I was able to take stock of what passed for a life, and a good look at my relationship with mood-altering chemicals. I came to the conclusion that all my troubles were drink and drug related and if giving them up was what I needed to do to get a life, then that was what I was going to do. From the moment I took this step, my life has been concerned with personal development. This is what I mean when I describe myself as 'in recovery', and it also helps me to remember that drink and drugs are my Achilles heel. I had to work hard not to take everything to extremes.

I loved treatment, although it took me two attempts at rehab. When I finally admitted that I had to stop running and face my problems, then I managed to stand back and get some perspective on life. Group therapy was hard

work. Sometimes I'd be gripping the bottom of the seat or I wanted to shout at people or just get up and walk out, but it was also extremely good for me. I learned to open up and get my feelings out. As before, if I couldn't manage to express myself, which quite frankly we had never been encouraged to do at home. I would just reach out for an anaesthetic instead. Through the therapy I learned to recognise the conflict between needs and wants. From courage born out of desperation I learned to face up to what I needed to do, and this allowed me to grow as a person.

As part of the aftercare plan I learned to cook simple and nutritious meals, which had a seriously positive effect on my wellbeing. I'd been suspicious of vegetables in the past but now needed to change unhealthy eating patterns. The first change I made was to go out and buy a banana. I started eating fruit every day. It took me seven years after addiction to stop smoking and when I'd quit I found that my coffee-drinking went out the window too. As I quit fags I felt a terrible sense of loss but I followed the advice of the smoking cessation people: start the day with fruit juice and wait till you get to work before you have tea or coffee. I cut down at first and then used the patches. I didn't want to survive drink and drugs to be killed by fags!

After nine months in rehab, I moved into supported accommodation and immediately signed up for college. This was because I didn't want to go back to my old work as a (reluctant) electrician . . . 'the Devil makes work for idle hands' and for me getting a life worth living meant gaining admittance to university. I might be daft sometimes but I have never been stupid; I was penniless, jobless, homeless etc., but well aware that in the absence of a rich family to help put Humpty back together, the best way out of the gutter is education, education, education. So I hopped to it and spent two years at college part-time under benefit rules until I entered University and moved into my own council tenancy. I also came off benefits and over the next four years I lived on student loans supplemented by working as a labourer on building sites during the summer recess. I graduated with BA (Hons) in Psychology and a few months later started my first job with a local development company.

Some other landmarks have been getting a mortgage and moving into my home, passing my driving test first time, putting a car on the road and successfully completing treatment for Hep C (what a relief that was!) I have to say that life is pretty good as I enjoy a considerable amount of responsibility and autonomy in my professional life

and have good relationships with family, friends and colleagues. I'm planning to go in for more training, a two year diploma in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, and I do believe that where addiction is concerned there are no hopeless cases.

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You can read other stories
of recovery from addictions at
www.storiesofrecovery.org.uk

Thank you to the participants who were kind
enough to share their stories for the greater good.

Thank you to Lapidus Scotland for supporting
the project.



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