

## COMING HOME

I'm a marijuana addict. I want to share about my journey to long-term recovery. It hasn't been easy, but it's certainly been worth the effort. The whole process has been a discovery of my true Self. When I was growing up, I felt like there must have been some kind of mistake, that I must have been adopted or born into the wrong family. I just didn't understand why everyone was so uptight. My parents were nice people under a lot of stress, which led to my father being a rageaholic and my mother being co-dependent to that behavior. I was a major target of his outbursts.

When my younger sister was born, I felt left out and very much alone. I discovered that cough medicine made me feel OK and used it as much as I could get away with. When I got to be a teenager, I experimented with alcohol but didn't really like the taste or the high very much. This, however, didn't stop me from drinking and getting sick.

My first exposure to marijuana was in the summer of love, 1967, with some friends in an apartment on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley. At first I didn't get high, but after three joints I started laughing and feeling different. We went out and ate ice cream and then came home and listened to music that seemed way more fun than it used to. I couldn't wait to try it again. Within six months, I was buying kilos and dealing it at college. I had a coffee can and kept it full so I could smoke pot all the time.

When I quit smoking cigarettes, I had the bright idea to smoke a joint every time I wanted a cigarette. My habit jumped to about 20 joints a day. One Fourth of July I

## Coming Home

## Life With Hope

went to a party where everyone brought a psychedelic and put it in a big bottle of wine and we all drank it. The hallucinations I had were much better than the fireworks. On the way home, my friend and I were getting on the freeway onramp when we realized we were walking and not in a car. Due to my heavy use of drugs and dealing, my girlfriend gave me an ultimatum: either quit dealing or we were through. I told her I was really going to miss her. I never even gave a second thought to quit dealing or quit smoking dope.

I went to a May Day party under the influence of hash and magic mushrooms and met my future wife. With 20/20 hindsight, I can see that she was already an alcoholic. If I had not been using so much, I would have noticed her blackouts and erratic behavior. By this time, my dealing was serious enough to warrant a lot of attention from the police. In addition, I became concerned for my safety, given that the characters I was dealing with had guns and wouldn't hesitate to use them. We decided to do our first geographic to a small town, Mount Hood, Oregon. We thought we could leave all our problems behind by becoming country hippies. It wasn't long before we were getting drunk and stoned with the local hippies who had done the same thing we had.

Once we got married and had a child, my life started to change. I realized that I had to be the responsible one because of my wife's alcoholism. We moved to Napa where I could have steady work so I could support my wife and son. I wasn't able to drink or use as much and started to really resent my wife's drinking. After her second DUI, she started going to a twelve-step recovery program for alcoholics and I would sometimes go to support her. I heard

some stories then that were pretty close to my own, but due to all the resin in my brain, I wasn't able to make the connection.

I started attending meetings of a twelve-step recovery program for the relatives and friends of alcoholics that gave me a great deal of relief while I was coping with my wife's early recovery. After a year in that program, I did my first Fourth Step and finally realized that my near daily marijuana habit was a problem. At this point, I started going to meetings for recovering alcoholics and meetings for recovering drug addicts and was lucky to find groups that I was accepted in. Unfortunately, when my wife relapsed, I relapsed too because my recovery had been based on supporting hers.

For the next four years, I struggled to overcome my denial. My denial kept telling me that there had to be some way I could drink or use without having problems. I tried psychotherapy so I could be well adjusted and not use compulsively. As soon as I started using again, I was just as compulsive as ever! I divorced my wife as a way of divorcing myself from my problems. However, I created a whole new set of problems that gave me more excuses to drink and use. My denial told me that if I was in a twelve-step recovery program for drug addicts it was OK to drink as long as I didn't use drugs. Sometimes I became uninhibited when I would drink and would revert to my real love (marijuana). Other times, I would drink enough that I would lose control and be ashamed of my behavior.

I finally got a year clean, free of marijuana, by going to twelve-step meetings for drug addicts as well as for families and friends of alcoholics. During this time, I was working full-time and had started graduate school. As

a result, I cut down on the number of meetings I went to and met people who were smoking pot. A woman whom I had started dating offered me some pot that I smoked without much hesitation. After smoking some pot alone for two days, I felt the hooks of my addiction digging into me again. This scared me because I knew there was no way I could work full-time and stay in graduate school strung out on pot. I also learned that I could no longer get high off of marijuana — only loaded. Being clean and sober with a clear mind felt way better than being stoned on marijuana.

In spite of throwing myself back into meetings, I suffered one more slip on alcohol. After that, I was fortunate to meet the sponsor who really helped me understand how to work a program that would keep me clean and sober. My sponsor taught me that although the program is suggested, so is pulling the ripcord on your parachute when you jump out of an airplane. He told me that if I wanted to stay clean and sober I had to make recovery my number one priority no matter what. He helped me do more than just go to meetings and use a sponsor for support. He taught me to read the literature, work the Steps, and do service.

Working the Steps with my sponsor taught me about my character defects that kept me from being able to stay clean and sober. My biggest character defect was being too arrogant to be teachable. I kept thinking I could figure out a better way, and all it got me was loaded and confused. It also hurt me in my relationships with other people because I'd be mad if I didn't get my way, and take it personally if people didn't do what I wanted them to do. After working the Twelve Steps with my sponsor, I felt much more grounded in reality and confident that, if I used the tools of the program, I could stay clean and sober one day at a time.

As part of a discussion in a class on addiction studies, the concept of a program for people whose drug of choice was marijuana came up. Four of us talked about forming a twelve-step group where the focus would be marijuana. Unfortunately, all of us were too busy to really pull this off. I felt very sad that this didn't happen and that I had let my Higher Power down by not being able to do this service. About nine months later, I was at a meeting for recovering drug addicts where a marijuana addict reached out for help. While three of us were Twelfth-Stepping him, I suggested that we form a meeting for marijuana addicts.

The time was right and we were able to start MA in Oakland, California. We called it "Marijuana Addicts Anonymous" because we felt while not everyone who smoked marijuana was an addict, we sure were. For me, having MA meetings to go to was like coming home as an addict. We wrote our own literature as we went along which helped me appreciate and understand the Twelve Steps much better. This fellowship provided me with the support I needed to stay clean and sober on a long-term basis. It has helped me avoid slipping back into the denial that I am not an addict.

After being clean and sober for a few years, I came to realize that not using was only a small part of recovery. For me, I had to address other problems to stay clean and sober. The issue that I have struggled with the most has been relationship recovery. Due to my childhood issues of feeling abandoned and abused, I have had difficulties with intimate relationships. After I got divorced, I entered into several relationships with women I didn't really want to be with, but pursued because I didn't want to be alone. What I found was that if I broke up with someone, I didn't take

the time to enjoy being with myself. Instead, I felt a strong desire to avoid my feelings of abandonment by jumping into the next relationship. Then I had two relationships with women I loved, but they weren't able to be fully committed to a relationship with me. This led to me going to another twelve-step program to deal with relationship recovery. I got a sponsor and worked the Twelve Steps, in this program, which helped me understand and change this pattern. This involved staying out of relationships for a year and focusing on my own issues of abandonment, in therapy and twelve-step meetings. I was able to grieve the loss of the mothering that I needed as a child and heal my feelings of abandonment of myself. The most important lesson that I learned was that no one could abandon me unless I first abandoned myself.

During my relationship abstinence, another important aspect of my recovery became my relationship between my Higher Power and myself. I started a daily practice of meditation so I could be better connected to my inner self. This practice of meditation has led me on a path of spiritual growth that has exceeded all of my expectations. I became attracted to spiritual teachers and read about spiritual growth. I started going to a meditation ashram and doing spiritual practices there. I met my spiritual teacher and received a spiritual blessing that helped me awaken more fully to my higher Self. Since then, I have been able to meditate more deeply and feel a much stronger connection to my Higher Power. This connection has healed my experience of feeling abandoned and anxious and replaced it with a source of unlimited love and joy.

I don't always choose to focus on my inner self. I am still subject to being hypnotized by the world when I

focus on my ego's fear that my very survival depends on my ability to control and manipulate the world. I have had enough lessons to accept that control is an illusion. If I trust the inner guidance my Higher Power gives me then I will receive all I need and more. I became involved in a relationship with a very good woman after entering the world of relationships again. She was very dedicated to recovery and very supportive. However there was something missing, so after a year I decided to end the relationship. Two days later I received a message I could not ignore from my H.P. that this was a mistake and I should return to the relationship. I was then able to make more of a commitment to the relationship that helped heal some deep wounds she had due to her relationship with her father who had died three years before. A few months later my father died suddenly and I was blessed to have her support dealing with this loss. After another year it became clear I needed to have my own space to do more inner healing. This let me grieve fully the loss of my father and allowed the time to help my mother get on her feet. I then was able to feel a deeper connection to suffering that we all share as human beings and the compassion that heals this wound.

I have now been blessed to find a woman to marry who has the same spiritual interests and values. She has met my spiritual teacher and made a commitment to following the spiritual path. The love we share has made it fun, whether we are doing service or going on vacations. I have also been blessed to have work that I love — helping addicts recover. When I go to MA meetings and hear someone say that MA has saved their life, I feel so much gratitude that I was able to do my part to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. More than anything else I

**Coming Home**

**Life With Hope**

feel thanks that Higher Power saw fit to give me the grace to be clean and sober so I can enjoy all that life offers.