

I CAME TO LIFE

The 80s were a great time to be a kid: middle class suburbia, rock concerts, open school campuses. This was the atmosphere in my hometown when I started smoking pot. My family had just relocated to California from upstate New York, and we moved into a nice suburb of Los Angeles. My older sister and I were both in junior high school. I was a straight-laced girl, a good student. I did not have very many friends because I never felt like I fit in with anyone. I was thirteen years old. Then one day someone offered me a hit of a joint, and my life changed forever.

Now, some say an addict is born with this disease. I believe the fact that my father and grandmother were alcoholic has contributed to my predisposition for drug addiction. Adding to that was my mother's workaholicism and insistence on perfection. I felt I could never live up to what she expected of me. The peer pressure of adolescence and my constant feeling of not fitting in or being wanted and loved also contributed to my becoming a marijuana addict.

So here I am, thirteen years old and smoking pot. At first, I did it only on the weekends, with friends, partying, having a good time. They call this a progressive disease, and soon I was buying my own weed as well as drug paraphernalia. Next came smoking after school. After all, I'd had a hard day at school and I deserved some bong loads. Pretty soon, I was going off campus at lunch to smoke. I couldn't even wait until after school. The addiction was slowly creeping up on me. One day I woke up, fifteen years

old, and I was smoking pot in the morning, at lunch, after school, in the evenings, and of course all weekend. I was a full-blown marijuana addict by the time I was in ninth grade.

For the next seven years I smoked marijuana every single day. I experimented with other drugs, but they left me feeling out of control, so I stuck to the pot. My whole life revolved around pot — how to get it, where to get it, how to avoid getting busted, hiding it from my parents, etc. I smoked on holidays, birthdays, every day. I managed to stay in school and I graduated with pretty good grades. I moved out of my parents' house at eighteen and, with my boyfriend, lived the drug lifestyle: moving around a lot, searching for drugs, never having enough money, fighting over drugs, the whole bit. From the age of eighteen to twenty-one, my addiction kicked into high gear. I was smoking more than ever. I began to drink more too. During the last year of my using, the marijuana was not getting me high anymore. I became increasingly more isolated and paranoid. Most of all, I was very, very tired.

When I got sober I was twenty-two years old. I felt beat up, broke down, and hopeless. I knew I needed to quit smoking marijuana, but I didn't know how. Then I found Marijuana Anonymous. I went to meetings. I saw people who used like I did that were living without weed. How was that possible? Could I do it too? All I knew was that I was so tired of my life as it was. The people in MA seemed to have a long-term solution to the problem of marijuana addiction. I wanted what they had. I wanted it more than anything, even more than using.

The decision to get sober was difficult. I gave up the one thing I felt kept me alive, but I didn't die. I came to life. I took commitments at meetings to give back what

MA gave to me. I can never repay all that I have received: good friends, good times, self-respect, and, most importantly, my sanity. My relationship with my family improved immensely. I went back to college, and am now working on my second degree. My external life got better right away. Internally, I felt grateful to be relieved of the nagging obsession to use drugs. However, I was left with twenty-two years of feelings, fears, and resentments and nothing to numb them out with. That's when the Twelve Steps came into my life.

I had heard of the Twelve Steps in meetings. People talked about God, turning it over, inventories, amends, prayer and meditation, and carrying the message. After a while I realized that sobriety wasn't enough...I must have recovery in order to maintain sobriety over a period of time and have a sane, happy life. There is nothing worse than a dry marijuana addict with no recovery. I needed tools for living. So I got a sponsor who guided me through the Steps. I learned that all the fear I had felt my whole life could be relieved by turning my will and my life over to a Higher Power of my choice and understanding. All the resentments I carried for years could be removed with a fearless and searching inventory. I could find my part in each situation, make amends if needed, and sincerely forgive those who wronged me. Further, I could prevent more wreckage by praying, meditating, and practicing spiritual principles in all my affairs.

Marijuana Anonymous truly gave me the kind of life I always wanted. I have wonderful friends. I can go out in the world without fear. I can communicate with people. I can function in everyday society. I meet challenges and do my best to move through them, instead of running away

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and stuffing my fear with pot. I have learned that the feelings that surface won't kill me. Whatever happens, I don't use (or drink) no matter what. I would be a liar if I said it was easy all the time, because there are painful things that will happen for everyone. However, with the help of my friends, my sponsor, and my Higher Power, I am living a life I never could have dreamed of when I was stoned. I am living life sober. Most importantly, I am living life in recovery.