

LIGHTWEIGHT

I was a “late bloomer” and started smoking pot when I was not quite 29, after having tried alcohol (the only drug available a zillion years ago when I was in high school) and given it up as “not my thing.” Pot was definitely “my thing.” After all, it was a natural herb, not processed or manufactured, and it didn’t make me slur words, stumble, or throw up. What a lovely drug! It took nearly twenty years of using to finally realize that I was no longer in charge — the drug was. It hadn’t started out that way. I once thought of it as a very comforting solution to my life’s problems. In the end, nearly twenty years later, it had become a very important problem in itself.

My life’s problems were essentially fear and lack of self-esteem. I was one of those people who felt like everyone in the whole world had been given a “How To” manual when they were born and somehow I didn’t get my copy. My parents divorced when I was not quite three and they each used me as a tool to hurt the other one. I really don’t think they had any idea how much damage they were doing. They were both determined that the other would not get custody of me, so from the age of three I lived with friends, family, paid caretakers and in boarding schools. Being the center of the universe, I kept wondering what I’d done to cause all this. My childhood friends wondered what I’d done too. I realize now that my situation must have been a real threat to them. (What did you do wrong? Why doesn’t your mom love you?) Because if there was no cause and effect for my situation, it meant their world could fall apart, for no apparent reason, like mine had.

I went to live with my father's sister, her husband, and my grandmother when I was five. They lived in a very small town where I was apparently the only child of divorce. My aunt and uncle started moving a lot right after my grandmother died when I was just seven. It took me 17 schools to get from kindergarten to a high school diploma. By the time I graduated from high school I didn't even know how to make friends anymore. When I got clean and sober at nearly forty-eight, I could count on my fingers the number of friends I'd had in my whole life.

I used pot daily almost from the beginning. At first it was only in the evening. By the end of my using, it was nearly hourly. I had even started waking up in the middle of the night and having a bong hit or two (or three, or...). It was total insanity. The last year I went through so many personal crises that it seemed like one long interminable crisis and my answer was to just smoke more maybe they'll go away! They didn't. My grown children didn't want to even talk to me. My marriage was a total shambles. I had chronic bronchitis and was coughing black phlegm constantly. I hadn't been able to hold a job for six months. I was about as depressed as you can get and I was very suicidal.

By the last couple weeks of using I knew I needed some outside help. I had tried to quit too many times and failed. My method of quitting was to go to a small town in the desert, check into a motel, white knuckle it for 3 to 5 days, then come home to my same lifestyle. The last few times I had some horrible detoxing symptoms (over and above the shaking, nausea, and sweats) and was afraid to try and stop alone again. I am really glad I did get help. My third night in the hospital I had a seizure, with three

nurses holding me down and a stick in my mouth to keep me from biting my tongue. That memory is one of the most compelling things that helps keep me working my program. I don't ever want to experience anything like that again.

I would not be alive today if it were not for Marijuana Anonymous. In those early days of sobriety, I went to other twelve-step meetings and was told that I couldn't talk about marijuana in one group. In another group, I was called a "lightweight" right to my face. I don't think borderline suicide because of addiction is lightweight, no matter what the substance. MA was the only place I felt safe. It was the only place I really got help.

As recommended, I went to ninety meetings in ninety days. In fact, I actually went to 205 meetings during my first 205 days clean and sober. My life had become such a mess that I needed some real structure in it. I got a temporary sponsor at my first meeting outside of the hospital and took my first service commitment (as refreshment person) at an MA meeting four days later. This program does work if you work it.

I am not the same person I was ten years ago. It's hard for me to see that in myself. I can see it much more easily in the other recovering addicts around me. What I can see is that I handle things much differently than I used to. I learned a long time ago that recovery is not the same thing as sobriety. Some days I have ten years clean and sober and absolutely no recovery whatsoever. Some days I work a pretty good program and deal with life, on life's terms, with no argument. I may not like it. I don't have to. But I deal with it.

I've learned that Step One isn't just about being powerless over marijuana or other mind-altering substances. I've

learned I'm also powerless over other people, places, things, and time. When I allow something to start affecting me negatively, I have to shake up my thinking and remind myself that I do have power over my own attitude. I don't even always have power over my own thoughts. Lots of times they just come zinging in without my permission. What I do with those thoughts and how I deal with them emotionally is dependent upon my attitude, which in turn is dependent upon my recovery. I can recognize that I'm powerless, know that a power greater than myself can help me deal with my problem or thought, and turn to that power greater than myself to help me handle it. In the Serenity Prayer we ask for serenity to deal with things that we cannot change, courage to change things that we can, and wisdom to know the difference between the two.

For me, the turning point is my attitude. I cannot pray and meditate for serenity without first getting an attitude adjustment, nor can I start moving towards doing something about a problem without first getting an attitude adjustment. Even the request to a Higher Power to help me understand the difference between something that requires acceptance and something that permits action begins with my own attitude. I have to be willing.

I've always had a problem with cloudy days. When I prayed, if I prayed at all, it was "God, please take the clouds away." Excuse me? No, God didn't take the clouds away. Now that I've learned about adjusting my attitude, if a dreary day is bothering me so much that I have to pray about it, it's "Higher Power, please help me deal with the clouds". Yes, then my HP does help me deal with cloudy skies.

When I first got clean and sober, I had a problem with "God, as I understand God," because I didn't under-

stand God at all and didn't particularly like Him either. The God of my childhood was a punishing God who seemed to be constantly penalizing me for some unknown transgression. What I have learned, in my recovery, is that I don't have to understand what a Higher Power is. I only have to understand that there is a power greater than myself. (In fact, there are lots of them!) It helps me to believe that whatever that Power is, it is a loving Power. For a long time my Higher Power was the fellowship itself. I knew that a room full of marijuana addicts trying to help each other was certainly a power much greater than myself. That roomful of addicts is still a loving power greater than myself. But now I also have a Higher Power, Great Spirit, or Cosmic Parent. Even God is no longer a dirty word. So it's God, as I understand God, and I don't understand Her at all.

Life is still in session. There are good days and bad ones. Some are very bad. But, I no longer scream to the heavens, "Why me!" The reality is, "Why not me?" You-know-what happens, and it happens to all of us. It may feel like we're being singled out. But that's just a feeling; it's not reality.

Over the years, I've taken a lot of service commitments in MA, from those early days of bringing cookies and making coffee at meetings, all the way through to various jobs at the World Service level. For a long time, service commitments at the business level helped keep me stay clean and sober. (There is nothing to work on your guilt more than knowing your friends won't get their coffee if you don't show up!) What helps me the most, at this time in my recovery, is sponsorship.

Sometimes I think I have the nuttiest sponsees in any twelve-step program. Then I remember back and realize, no, my sponsors had the nuttiest sponsee. We have absolutely no idea how strange our thinking can be when we first walk in the doors of these rooms. We think we just have a little substance problem and as soon as we get off the weed, for a little while, everything will be simply great. The Twelve Steps are a way of life. They are tools for living life and dealing with its heartaches and triumphs. Yeah, triumphs. When I first got clean I couldn't deal with the good stuff any better than I could deal with the bad. Most of us walk in the doors of MA meetings as egotists with no self-esteem. Some of us think we're the baddest of the bad. All of us know that we're the center of the whole universe.

Steps One, Two, and Three were fairly easy for me to get through. There is no way I can tell you the relief I felt after getting through Four and Five only to find out that my sponsor had already "been there, done that" on a lot of the things I 'fessed up to. There was no judgment. Six and Seven were actually a little harder than I had imagined as I had gotten used to some of those character "challenges" (as my sponsor likes to call them) and it took some work to be willing to get rid of them. Eight wasn't too bad, but I did hang between Eight and Nine as I did some of the amends while it took longer to go back and "be willing" on others. When I was through, it was such a relief to know I had cleaned up the wreckage that I had created in my life. I felt so much better about myself.

We say Ten, Eleven, and Twelve are "maintenance" Steps, but we can start them the first day we walk in the door, particularly Ten and Eleven. It's as though I finally

Life With Hope

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got that "How To" manual I always wanted when I was younger. Now I know how to "do" life. I just don't use, no matter what, (I adjust my attitude and use my tools) and I do it One Day at a Time. Actually, we do it One Day at a Time. I cannot do this alone.