

STARTED OFF WITH A BANG

I should have known there was something a little unusual about me when, as a little kid, I discovered that I liked the feeling I got when I inhaled the smoke from my cap pistol. That particular habit didn't last long, however. Gunpowder produces one hell of a headache.

Around age ten I was doing that puberty thing and had become a "chubby" kid. My mom and my doctor decided to put me on a diet and gave me "special" vitamins to help. I wasn't supposed to mention the vitamins to my friends or my teacher. I lost the weight and I found that I started enjoying recess a lot more. After I dropped the weight, they took away my vitamins. I put the weight back on, didn't enjoy recess nearly as much, and stayed heavy well into my twenties. I always missed those vitamins.

I make a point of mentioning my adolescent weight problem because, as a kid, I never felt at all OK with who I was. I was obsessed with those guys on the "A-list." You know the ones I mean: the captain of the team, the guy with the coolest clothes, the one with the cutest girl at his side and a report card with all A's in his pocket. I wanted to be him. I was preoccupied with being him. I became a chameleon. I was devoted to the concept of being and acting like the guys on the "A-list."

I gave almost no thought to figuring out who I was. (After all, I was chubby. I was not a star.) Living like that puts a big strain on a kid. But it was the only reality I had and I wasn't aware of how much pressure I was under until one day, around age 15, the strain was suddenly lifted. I got drunk.

Instantly, miraculously, a huge weight was lifted from my shoulders. I was cool! I was good looking! I was smart and funny! And then I got sick. God, did I get sick. I've always gotten terrible, multi-day hangovers. And I didn't even stay "happy drunk" for very long. After an hour or two I'd get morose and sleepy. I'd pass out and then be sick for a couple of days. I loved that good hour, though! The consequences were unimportant.

Then, when I was 16, I made a discovery that would shape my life for the next twenty years. I found my best friend, my lover, my purpose in life. I smoked a joint. The feeling was too good to describe. It lasted for hours and I didn't get sick.

I behaved like a "normie" for a little while. Pot was a big deal. It was illegal. It was a drug. We only got high for some sort of event. You know...the dance, the party, the movie, the concert. You had to have a "reason" to get high. I quickly started looking for more and more "reasons."

Then came the day that I see now as my transition from "normie to "druggie." I was driving to school one day and I was uptight about something. I don't really remember what. Perhaps I had an exam that day or I hadn't done an assignment. For some reason, I decided to try smoking a joint on the way to school. That was the day I discovered the concept of doing ordinary life...loaded. Wow! What a concept! What a great way to live! What a "superior" state of being! I remember thinking that life was just better stoned. Period. Everything was better. Everything was tolerable. The pressure was off. I became better. I became more creative, funnier, smarter, more insightful. So what if it was expensive! Why shouldn't it be? It was worth it!

I started my “druggie” career. I don’t call it my addict career yet because I don’t believe I was an addict, in the classic sense, yet. I don’t believe I crossed that gray line into addiction and true powerlessness for a few years. But cross it I did, eventually.

During my high school years I was still living at home. Living there meant that I still had to curtail my drug use. Getting high was unacceptable to my parents and I was forced to comply with that when I was home. Needless to say, I wasn’t home much. I graduated from high school (with a full state scholarship) and was off to college. But more importantly, I was leaving home and headed for the dormitories!

College is where all controls were lifted. In my dorm, the truest testimonial to good friendship was to sneak into somebody’s room while they were asleep and put a lit joint in their mouth. What a grand way to wake up! I majored in getting high, skipping class, and partying. I flunked out during my second semester. So much for the scholarship! Oh well. I had lots of reasonable explanations for my failure in school. But I knew down deep that it was because I was always getting loaded. I never admitted that to anyone else.

Then I went to work. I had always loved music, but didn’t have the talent to be a performer. So I got a job with a company that built recording studios and embarked on a 20-year career in the “Sound Biz.” Getting loaded a lot is not a problem in that field. In fact, you pretty well have to be getting high on something to be accepted. I liked that.

In *Life with Hope*, we read about “the fantasy of functionality.” For 20 years I functioned. I functioned pretty well. I had good jobs. I advanced quickly. I ran companies. I had my own company for 5 years. I met stars and

celebrities. I had credits on albums and movies. I had company cars, an expense account, and lots of perks. I had relationships. I acquired a private pilot's license. I took wonderful vacations. All very functional. And I told myself I was doing great. But I didn't feel great and was at a loss as to why.

I did worry that on some level I was some sort of sociopath. I felt dead inside. Social issues that seemed important to other people didn't matter to me. Love never seemed to be what poets claimed it was. I rarely hated anything either. Occasionally something would seem exciting, but not very exciting. I never felt truly fulfilled. I never felt that feeling of having "arrived." I had jobs, but no purpose. If any of that stuff really started to bother me, I'd get loaded and the problem disappeared for a while. Weed was my solution to life, NOT my problem!

During those 20 years I engaged in lots of behavior that by any normal person's standards were insane. The first time I ever got high, I drove a car. How many thousands of times did I drive loaded? Remember that pilot's license? I loved to fly stoned. I took pride in the fact that I could fly with my knees while rolling a joint (and in heavy turbulence!).

If my stash was low, I would go to ANY lengths to score. I can't even estimate how many thousands of miles I drove to some distant destination only to sit for hours while somebody would go inside to score. (You know...if you didn't know the dealer, you couldn't go in. And the person that did know him HAD to stay awhile and get high. It would be impolite to just score and go!) Sometimes I would score off the street and risk arrest or assault. I would let strangers into my car because they claimed they knew a

place we could go to score. How many times did I get ripped off in those situations?

Virtually EVERY aspect of my life was determined (managed?) by my addiction. My friends and certainly my girlfriends HAD to use. If I had to go somewhere and I couldn't get high there, I didn't stay long. How many holidays did I go to my parents' house only to leave after an hour because I had to go "visit a sick friend"? I have canceled or postponed trips and vacations because I wasn't able to score enough weed for the duration. I wouldn't go to a movie or a concert if I couldn't be high. I once got lost flying over New Mexico and had to radio an airport control tower and ask them to take a fix on me so that I could figure out where I was. I wouldn't go on a long drive without a bunch of joints. I couldn't go to sleep at night unless I smoked a joint. The list is endless. Bottom line...if it interfered with my getting loaded, it was expendable.

During those 20 years I never saw pot as the problem. As I said before, it was my solution. I never saw myself as using pot as a crutch to deal with life. In my mind, pot wasn't a "reaction" to anything since I was high "first." How could being high be a response to life? I was loaded before "life" happened!

It wasn't until I was about 35 years old that I ever consciously "used" pot to not feel something. My girlfriend and I had been living together for about 5 years and she decided to leave me. I was devastated. I was totally unwilling to feel that anguish in any shape or form. I went from being a heavy user to something more. For a year and a half I used and used and used, and then I used some more. My life became ugly. I retreated into a privately defined universe consisting of me, weed, my couch, and

lots of rented movies. Nothing got cleaned, nothing got put away, bills were not paid, the phone went unanswered. I hid. I hid on every level I could.

I reached toxic levels of THC. I started to stutter. My vocabulary dwindled. I'd forget who I was calling immediately after dialing. I'd get so high that I'd have rushes where my eyesight would fail and my body would go into convulsions. I'd actually get so high I'd go blind for a few seconds. How's this for insanity: I liked to be watching myself in the mirror when it happened! It's very weird to watch yourself go blind! Then I'd go take some more hits and see if I could get it to happen again. By the way, the blindness thing also happened occasionally when I was driving the car. Fortunately, I was always on a straight road when it happened!

I maxed out 4 credit cards. I was buying \$325 ounces every 5 days and no one shared my pot. I was about \$25,000 dollars in debt. The only people that tried to call me were bill collectors. They are paid to be intimidating and I already had a pretty good case of drug-induced paranoia. I was scared.

I had reached a real dilemma. I had two conflicting realities in my life. The first reality was that I knew, in my gut, beyond a shadow of any doubt, that I couldn't stop using. I was my addiction. I could no more live life without weed than I could live life without air. My second reality (equally compelling) was that I could not continue to live this way and retain any of the "good things of life." All the stereotypical stuff that happens to "addicts" had either already happened (mental impairment, isolation, paranoia) or was about to (homelessness and poverty). I was without hope.

This was my point of “incomprehensible demoralization.” My bottom. My “moment of clarity.”

I knew this lady. I was a bit in awe of her. She represented everything in life that I wasn't. She was happy with herself and the world, most of the time. She answered her phone. She had a day planner and did stuff. She did her laundry, cooked meals and cleaned the dishes. She smiled a lot. She had friends. The kicker was she claimed that a year before I met her, her life had been in shambles. Divorce, death in the family, out of work, and hopelessly alcoholic. She said she had found a twelve-step recovery program for alcoholics and her life had turned around. I asked her if they had anything similar for potheads. She didn't know but she said she'd find out. A few days later she gave me the MA 800 number.

I sat on that for awhile. I finally called and got the location of a Monday night meeting. For some reason I always found myself feeling the worst on Monday nights (probably because my stash would be low from the weekend and I hadn't figured out yet where I would get the money for more). Eventually a Monday night came where I got up the guts to check it out. I smoked a joint on the way to the meeting. Little did I know that would be my last joint for a year and a half.

I met people like myself. I heard them telling my story. I heard feelings expressed that I could relate to. The people at that meeting managed to share their Experience, their Strength, and most importantly, their Hope with me.

Every sober addict has a miracle in their story. Because IF you are a REAL addict (if you have become truly powerless over the drug), AND you have chosen to live without dope and are clean, there HAS to be a miracle

in there somewhere. For me it was after that Monday night meeting. I was driving home. I was about to turn onto the freeway onramp. I was reaching for the glove compartment to get a joint. I stopped. I thought about the meeting and the people I had met there. THAT'S IT. THAT'S THE MIRACLE we all talk about! It was the first time in over 20 years that I had weed, and a perfectly good opportunity to smoke it, and DIDN'T!

The power of our fellowship is awesome. We walk into our first meeting in various states of despair with a disease that's out of control. We haven't taken the Steps yet. We don't have a sponsor yet. Perhaps we have some experience with prayer and meditation, yet we have found that those tools alone haven't been able to solve our problem. The ONLY difference between walking in and walking out is what the people in that room shared. Through that sharing, the impossible becomes possible. We can stop, right then, with simply the experience of a meeting, some honesty, some open-mindedness and a little willingness. That is the miracle! That's why nothing in MA is more important than the fellowship itself. Making sure every newcomer has the opportunity to experience that miracle is the responsibility of every member with any clean time. I owe my life to the fellowship of Marijuana Anonymous in a very real way. MA is the greatest thing that has ever happened to me.

As we all do, I had to overcome my own baggage and preconceptions of what I was willing to do and willing to believe. The "God thing" troubled me for a long time. I had a lot of issues about spirituality and religion from my childhood and teen years. I had left all those issues behind and didn't really want to dig them up again. The big

surprise is that now, years later, I'm a spiritual person. I believe in my concept of God. The weirdest part is that I acquired it through no direct effort of my own.

Every time I've consciously tried to build an understanding of God, I've had little or no success. I find that my spirituality and God-consciousness grows as a by-product of my doing "other" things. I think about being of service and helping another addict. I try to live by the spiritual principles I've learned through the Steps and the Traditions. I try to consistently use the tools I was taught to maintain and nurture my recovery. Those are the things that I "try" to do. Guess what? My understanding of God and my personal relationship with it grows and strengthens all by itself.

When I had about a year and a half clean and sober, a bunch of stuff happened. My twenty-year career came to an abrupt end and I had another relationship go into "meltdown." I found myself in panic mode. I was on unemployment and working an under the table job driving a taxi. The driving job went from 5 p.m. to 5 a.m. and was a really bad situation for me. I was filled with resentment and fear about my lost career and my lost relationship. I found myself driving fares to drug deals. I was driving prostitutes around town and was even pimping for them. I'd spend hours on end, in the middle of the night, sitting in my taxi waiting. Waiting for people with lives.

My new schedule made it "impossible" to go to meetings. I "had" to dump my commitments. I "was forced" to dump a sponsee. I "couldn't find the time" to fulfill any of my service commitments. I "forgot" to pray or meditate. In short...I was an addict with no program. I relapsed. Duh!

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Life With Hope

My old dealer had since moved away and I had no choice but to try and score on the street. Street pot sucks, so I thought I'd try and get a better buzz by mixing it with some of that "rock cocaine" stuff. In less than a week I had become a full-blown crackhead. A couple of months later I had a near overdose and when it became apparent that I wasn't going to die, my first thought was about burglarizing my parent's house to raise money for more drugs. THAT thought stopped me in my tracks. I had reached another bottom.

I am now convinced that my first year and a half of clean time was "arranged" for me by my Higher Power. If I hadn't had that time, that education, that first miracle, I wouldn't have known what to do. I wouldn't have known how to save my life. But I did know. I told some of my closest friends from the fellowship what had happened. Then I went to every meeting in my district and told everybody else. Once again the fellowship came through. I found myself on the receiving end of more love, understanding, and support (and purple chips) than I have ever experienced before or since. I owe my life to MA, twice! My relapse showed me that when times are tough, rather than putting the tools of the program aside, I have to double their use.

Life is good, most of the time. And, like that lady I met 6 years ago, I too am mostly happy with myself and the world around me. I smile a lot. I have great friends. I answer the phone. I have appointments and tend to keep them. I have commitments within the fellowship of MA. I have a relationship with my God. I have a conscience and have some purpose in my life. I act like an adult occasionally. I have a great deal of fun. I am no longer dead inside. I have a life with hope.