



All or Nothing: Life in Recovery

by Erin Abelson, Certified Peer Support Specialist at Lucet

My story started like it does for a lot of people.

Both my parents were addicts, so my grandmother raised me. The anger and frustration around that caught up to me around the age I started using. In high school I experimented with drugs, smoking pot on the weekends. ‘If it feels good on a Friday night and feels good on a Saturday night, let’s just do it on Sunday, too’—that kind of thing.

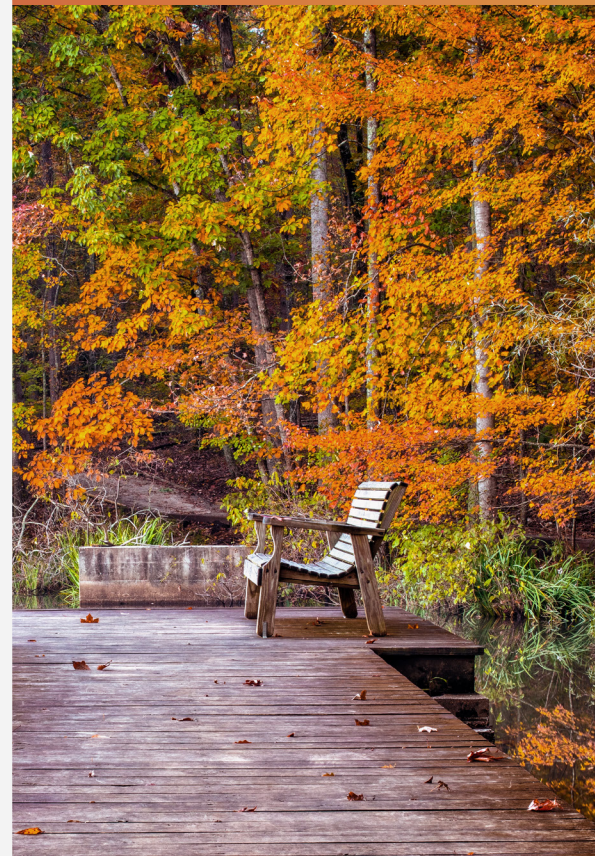
A lot of people do that and snap out of it. I couldn’t understand at the time that my brain chemistry was just different. For me, it accelerated quickly—I went from being an honor student and athlete in my junior year to smoking pot, drinking, and using cocaine and crack. Then I went to college, using opiates. I used with my family, my friends, and alone in any way I could. I was about to go to law school. I was on the mock trial team. But the lifestyle just overcame me, and I left school with three classes left to graduate. That’s the problem with substance use—it’s this “all-or-nothing” thinking. You think about it, you think about it, and then once you do it, you can’t stop.

When I was 27, I went to detox for the first time. In the beginning I would go to treatment and have a real desire for recovery, but I would not take the follow-up steps I needed after that. So I had very little success for many years. On my fourth treatment, I went into sober living. I went to meetings and finally had some success. Then after eight months, I relapsed.

At one point, I was in active addiction and received an inheritance, and I was more miserable than I’d ever been with more money and as much dope as I wanted. Then I got arrested for the first time in my life. I’d been using for 17 years and somehow thought I was above the law. I was facing some felonies but was given an opportunity to stop using and avoid prison. That’s what I would call my rock bottom.

When I got back into treatment for the last time, I finally put all the pieces together. I went to treatment. I attended an intensive outpatient program (IOP). I went to meetings, got a sponsor and worked the steps. I got a therapist that I’ve been seeing for over eight years now, and he’s been a huge part of maintaining my recovery.

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On the Other Side

When I tell my story, I like to talk about gratitude. When I'm not living my life in gratitude, I might think about how my house always needs something fixed, or I think my wife is being mean to me, or I think my kids don't listen, or I've got sponsees who keep calling me, wanting my help.

When I am living my life in gratitude, I remember that I'm so blessed to own a house outright. I have this wife who understands me, takes care of me and is a very loving person. I get to have a relationship with my 12-year-old stepdaughter who accepts me and has never once told me that I'm not her real dad. I get to have this little three-year-old daughter who is my absolute mini-me. I have a job where I can work with other people and try to help them.

It's the exact same life. I choose which way I look at it. Sometimes I'll be out with my wife and friends, and they're just having a couple of drinks at the table with dinner. And I think, "it's a shame I can't do that." But at this point in my life, I understand that it's not worth it.

What I've learned is that recovery is real and it is possible. It may take some discomfort, it may take some work, and it may take having a different perspective and listening to other people. When I got clean I thought the fun was over, but it's so far from the truth. There was a sick part of me that maybe liked the idea that I couldn't do it. Because if I couldn't do it, then what's the point in trying? But not only can you do it, it's totally worth it. My life now is dramatically better than it was. People do recover—there are millions of us. So you can, too.

#SupportSobriety

If you or someone you know is struggling with substance use or addiction, call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline at 1-800-662-4357.

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