



Stories of recovery
from addiction:

educating humpty

I am 52 years old now. I started drinking at the age of 15 and found it helped me to cope with anxiety, low self-esteem, and worst of all the feeling of being an outsider. I was introduced to drugs at 16 and until the age of 38 I had a distinctly pharmaceutical mentality; if there was a problem there was sure to be a chemical fix for it.

After years trying to control my drink and drug use I finally threw in the towel and entered residential treatment where I was able to take stock of what passed for a life, and a good look at my relationship with mood-altering chemicals. I came to the conclusion that all my troubles were drink and drug related and if giving them up was what I needed to do to get a life, then that was what I was going to do. From the moment I took this step, my life has been concerned with personal development. This is what I mean when I describe myself as 'in recovery', and it also helps me to remember that drink and drugs are my Achilles heel. I had to work hard not to take everything to extremes.

I loved treatment, although it took me two attempts at rehab. When I finally admitted that I had to stop running and face my problems, then I managed to stand back and get some perspective on life. Group therapy was hard

work. Sometimes I'd be gripping the bottom of the seat or I wanted to shout at people or just get up and walk out, but it was also extremely good for me. I learned to open up and get my feelings out. As before, if I couldn't manage to express myself, which quite frankly we had never been encouraged to do at home. I would just reach out for an anaesthetic instead. Through the therapy I learned to recognise the conflict between needs and wants. From courage born out of desperation I learned to face up to what I needed to do, and this allowed me to grow as a person.

As part of the aftercare plan I learned to cook simple and nutritious meals, which had a seriously positive effect on my wellbeing. I'd been suspicious of vegetables in the past but now needed to change unhealthy eating patterns. The first change I made was to go out and buy a banana. I started eating fruit every day. It took me seven years after addiction to stop smoking and when I'd quit I found that my coffee-drinking went out the window too. As I quit fags I felt a terrible sense of loss but I followed the advice of the smoking cessation people: start the day with fruit juice and wait till you get to work before you have tea or coffee. I cut down at first and then used the patches. I didn't want to survive drink and drugs to be killed by fags!

After nine months in rehab, I moved into supported accommodation and immediately signed up for college. This was because I didn't want to go back to my old work as a (reluctant) electrician . . . 'the Devil makes work for idle hands' and for me getting a life worth living meant gaining admittance to university. I might be daft sometimes but I have never been stupid; I was penniless, jobless, homeless etc., but well aware that in the absence of a rich family to help put Humpty back together, the best way out of the gutter is education, education, education. So I hopped to it and spent two years at college part-time under benefit rules until I entered University and moved into my own council tenancy. I also came off benefits and over the next four years I lived on student loans supplemented by working as a labourer on building sites during the summer recess. I graduated with BA (Hons) in Psychology and a few months later started my first job with a local development company.

Some other landmarks have been getting a mortgage and moving into my home, passing my driving test first time, putting a car on the road and successfully completing treatment for Hep C (what a relief that was!) I have to say that life is pretty good as I enjoy a considerable amount of responsibility and autonomy in my professional life

and have good relationships with family, friends and colleagues. I'm planning to go in for more training, a two year diploma in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, and I do believe that where addiction is concerned there are no hopeless cases.

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You can read other stories
of recovery from addictions at
www.storiesofrecovery.org.uk

Thank you to the participants who were kind
enough to share their stories for the greater good.

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the project.



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