

# My Name is Will and I am a Recovering Addict

By Will PATE

I now make this declaration at least four times a week at 12 step meetings in front of other recovering addicts.

I will consume anything that will get me "high". I've used every drug I've had access to, to the limits of my finances and well beyond what medical science says my body should have been able to process without dying of overdose. I learned how to hide my shameful habit so well that some friends didn't even know I had a real problem.

I suffer from chemical dependency: a progressive, incurable and potentially terminal disease that anyone can catch. It is a disease of the brain, where mood-altering chemicals affect the reward pathway in a manner much stronger than normal people. The disease hijacks the brain's natural capability to remember pleasant experiences better than unpleasant ones, creating an obsession of thought which leads to compulsive using behaviour.

**I've been freed from constant obsession about using. I've been released from pseudo-friendships that were based on co-dependency.**

Chemical dependency is particularly baffling and dangerous because it is the only disease in the world that tries to convince the sufferer that they do not have it. The suffering addict lives in a world of elaborate denial systems, any justification or rationalisation that can be mustered is used. When others express concern at our using, we isolate so that we can use irresponsibly with as little interference as possible.

Even when their whole lives are falling down around them and everyone else can see it, the addict usually has to hit rock bottom before they can admit they need help.

After years of battling the monster alone, in early December I checked myself into the Mount Herbert

Provincial Addictions Centre to participate in their inpatient detoxification and rehabilitation programs. I spent a week in detox allowing my mind and body to go through the withdrawal process and then three weeks in rehab learning about my disease and its implications in my life. The hardest thing not to do that day, before I checked myself in, was to use - get one more drugging in before I couldn't do it anymore.

**Only 1 in 20 addicts will ever make it into a rehab program at least once in their life. Only 1 in 1000 will ever make it into a 12 Step meeting. Of those lucky few, only 1 in 4 will manage to be successful and live a life of recovery.**

Looking back on the difficulty of that internal struggle killed any lingering thought that maybe it was all in my head, maybe I could use occasionally, maybe I was the exception.

Rehab consists of three daily harsh doses of reality. The morning session involves facing some new component of recovery, in the afternoon your psyche is prodded and poked to evaluate your response to this new concept and the final session after supper is thankfully only about half as taxing as the previous two. You literally get bombarded with information- it's impossible for the feeble human mind to absorb and process it all.

A good number of the counselors are recovering addicts themselves, so even when in my moments of despair I could talk to someone that understood my exactly what I was going through.

When an in active addiction, we suppress our feelings and numb our emotions by self-medicating. Once clean, this means we have a large backlog of unresolved issues waiting for us - an emotional glut, if you will. A large part of rehab and the extended process of recovery is learning to iden-

tify and deal with our feelings without any chemical crutch, often referred to in recovery programs as "living life on life's terms".

The most important thing I learned is that I have a disease that I am powerless over. Addiction is not a character defect or moral weakness. An addict is no more to blame for their disease than someone with diabetes or schizophrenia. I'm not a bad person for the things I did in active addiction, I was a sick person. I was unable to take responsibility for my actions, but I am responsible for the results of those actions.

With no cure, the best a recov-

ering addict can hope for is a daily reprieve from active addiction. Every day I wake up I have to decide that I won't use drugs for that day and that all drugs can offer me are three eventualities: jails, institutions or death. I must affirm my fear of relapse, which is a reality for most. I tell myself that I am a good person and that I deserve to live my life to the fullest.

It takes a lot to stay sober: Attending 12 Step meetings frequently, working my steps on a daily basis and having a strong sponsor.

The statistics thrown around recovery meetings are frightening.

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