



Young Addicts In **Recovery**

These are our stories
about how we stopped
using early in life and
stayed clean in the
rooms of NA.

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Introduction

Young addicts around the world have gotten clean with help of the Narcotics Anonymous program. This booklet contains stories from men and women who identified themselves as young addicts in recovery and who got clean early in their adult lives. Although their stories are different, they have one thing in common: They convey the hope of recovery for young people who think they have a drug problem and cannot stop using on their own. The message we want to communicate is that any addict, even a young addict, can stop using drugs, lose the desire to use, and find a new way to live. Also, that one addict can best understand and help another addict to recover from addiction. The Basic Text of NA mentions three principles that are indispensable: honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness. Many members who share their stories in this book agree that without these spiritual principles and others, such as goodwill, compassion, and empathy, they would not have succeeded in their recovery. However, many did fail or relapse, but they kept on coming back to NA because they never lost hope. In desperation, they found each other and a power greater than themselves, and began walking the path to recovery, guided by the Twelve Steps of NA. If you have a desire to stop using and are willing to make the effort needed to recover, we believe that our program will work for you, just as it did for us.

NA World Services maintains a database of NA meetings around the world. You should be able to find a meeting in your country on their website, na.org. If your country or region is not listed, please do not hesitate to reach out to us and we will do our best to support you in your recovery.

In loving service,
European Delegates Meeting (EDM)

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Personal stories

The following stories were submitted in 2017–2018 by men and women who identified as young addicts and who got clean at a young age. Minor edits were made to the text in 2021 due to translation. We thank these members as well as the volunteers who collected and edited the stories.





Alvaro's story

My name is Alvaro and I'm an addict. I never thought I would become one. From an early age, I was educated in the church since my parents were leaders of different church groups and this kept us going to church all the time. I was an altar boy, a scout, and part of a team of coordinators of the youth ministry. Several events marked my life. My father was aggressive and would beat us in anger and without measure. I remember being unable to breathe and collapsing on many occasions as a result of his beatings. My parents worked all day, making me feel like an abandoned child, watched only by the housekeeper. She didn't want me there and would keep me outside all day so that I wouldn't disturb her. She also hit me many times.

As a result of the aggression I was subjected to, I developed a hatred of people. The only things I enjoyed doing was getting into trouble and hitting my brothers to get even for my own suffering. At five years of age, I smoked cigarettes for the first time and we formed a gang. Neighbors would forbid their kids from playing with us. I started having problems at school. I wanted to be the best looking and the most popular kid, and it was impossible for me to accept that I wasn't. I saw myself as the most good-looking, intelligent and educated guy from the best family.

To win acceptance, I would sit next to the girls in my class and ask them, one by one, if they wanted to be my girlfriend.

Being rejected made me very angry because, in my mind, I was the best and could not accept the shame of feeling like a loser. One day, in a game, I was supposed to kiss a girl on the lips and she refused, which really left a mark on me. I started hating all my schoolmates. If they hated me back, I would hate them even more because this was my defense mechanism. Feeling rejected and full of hate, I started wanting to die more and more, and suicide seemed like an excellent way for me to get my revenge.

My uncle became a politician. Being caught up in that atmosphere made me arrogant, and my cousin would tell me that I was better than my classmates and friends because I was the nephew of the deputy. This inflated my ego and made me feel even more superior. From the time I started school, I was bullied every year. In 1996, I got to know romance, sex, liquor, and drugs. My whole life changed. I was 17 years old at the time and had found a way to ease the 'pain of living'.

In a church group, I met the people who introduced me to my drug of choice. I immediately lost all control. My life suddenly revolved around it. I couldn't do anything else but hate society and use drugs. I lost all sense of boundaries and my parents held an intervention. They put me in rehab and when I got out, one of the other patients took me to Narcotics Anonymous. I was still far from giving up drugs. I fell in love with a woman at the meeting, stopped working on the program, and used again.

At my second NA regional convention, I was high and noticed that everyone looked happy. I was there among them but suffering because even though recovery was available to

me, I didn't want it. One night, I reflected upon my life, and finally surrendered. I was fed up with hating and suffering. I decided to go back to NA and follow all the suggestions my sponsors had given me. From that day on, I have never used again and I now live a happy life. I learned that I don't need a substance, thing or place in order to change my feelings, and that I don't need to be afraid.

Today, I have been clean for 24 years, thanks to my Higher Power, the fellowship, and goodwill. I was given the gift of recovery, and it is now my responsibility to share it with others. Every time I meet with a sponsee, I feel the healing working in me and more is revealed to me. I love my life now – and the NA program. I don't know what would have happened to me without it.

Amy's story

A Simple Loving Hug – The Free Hugs Girl

Getting clean at 19 years old was a shock. I'm still amazed by this gift I got: to be clean, to be alive, and to thrive, thanks to joining Narcotics Anonymous. I'm an addict. My name is Amy. Until I found NA, I had no idea I had a disease and that there were other people all over the world that knew what I was suffering from and how they could help me. I know that I'm not the only one who experienced trauma growing up and I also know it's not a prerequisite to becoming an addict. I grew up in a very affluent city but always felt inferior and inadequate in comparison to my peers. I was never good enough at anything. I was scared to fail so I struggled and gave more than 100 percent to anything I did. This was a pattern while I was growing up, in school, in sports, in friendships. I never fully exposed myself because of the fear of rejection or abandonment.

Some of the trauma I experienced as a child was the catalyst to the self-harm I afflicted on myself and the start of my drug abuse. I survived trauma by self-harming and experimenting with drugs during my freshman year at high school. Drugs became the thing that saved me from myself for a period of time. When I used to the point of oblivion, I wasn't thinking about killing myself until the disease began to consume my whole life. My school work was affected, my opportunities to

go to a good university and my dreams of being an Olympic water polo player were slowly being sucked away from me.

I didn't suffer from many external or obviously unmanageable signs of addiction. I manipulated, justified, rationalized, and talked my way out of the concerns voiced by my family and the school psychologist. My disease has always been present, sneaky, and internally unmanageable. The low self-esteem, the utter desperation to find a new way to live but not knowing there is anything out there, not knowing about the therapeutic value of one addict helping another. The fear, the isolation, the lost dreams, the helplessness and hopelessness, and the sickening state of denial. I was lost and I was scared, but then I got a beam of hope.

I was introduced to NA through rehab, and my first NA meeting was the most important day of my life. I arrived at the meeting and got a very loving and welcoming hug from a member who had no clue who I was. Their embrace brought life back to my very being. That hug was to me, as our Basic Text says, "...a simple loving hug can make all the difference in the world when we feel alone". Coming into NA, my spirit was awakened. I got to escape my self-made prison, and one of the greatest gifts was knowing that I would never be alone, never again.

My clean date is April 20th, 2008. Some of the highlights of my recovery include being able to celebrate my 21st birthday clean, not going to a bar, and not even having the desire to use during this American 'rite of passage'. Being given a Free Hugs sign in 2010 at NCCNA changed my life. I had crossed the invisible line and had decided that I wanted more than surface-level recovery – I dove headlong into working the

steps and had the opportunity to explore different levels of service. I became more involved in our program and how I could contribute. Service at the group, area/subcommittee, and regional levels has been crucial to my recovery. All the various tasks and positions I've served have made me more dedicated to working my steps and has fueled my enthusiasm to be a member of NA. The process of working the steps has transformed my life from a tired, desperate, lonely, broken little girl to the strong, courageous, exuberant and, for the most part, selfless woman I am today and am continuing to grow into. Everything I have today is because of NA. I work on maintaining an equal balance between attending meetings, being in conscious contact with my Higher Power, working the steps with my sponsor, and the privilege to sponsor other members, building a support group, and continuously serving this incredible fellowship.



Andrew's story

My name is Andrew. I'm a grateful recovering addict.

My journey began at the age of 15. I lived a fairly normal life up to that point, with a mother who worked hard to provide for me and my siblings. For most of my life prior to active drug use and throughout active drug use, I had a strong desire to fit in with my peers. Around the time of my freshman year in high school, I remember being introduced to a substance that I used recreationally with my peers.

At no point during that time did I realize what I was setting myself up for in the long run. Throughout my high school years, I continued experimenting with substances that I thought were scientifically proven to have no physically addictive properties. When I was 19 years old, I tried a certain substance for the first time. I began using this substance recreationally at clubs, parties, and other places. I started to become more sociable and I was always full of energy. In general, I was a very likeable person to be around during this time.

Around the age of 21, I started to notice a change in my behavior. I was experiencing mood swings that were easily triggered. One minute, I would be happy and the next, I would be extremely irritated. I started using the substance more frequently until eventually I was using it every day.

In January 2017, I was told I was going to be a father. I was overwhelmed with joy while my partner was overwhelmed with fear and resentment. Throughout the pregnancy, I remember feeling as if I were alone in the world, and it took a serious emotional toll on me. Never once did I consider the toll it took on my partner. I began using stimulants very heavily to cope with my feelings of depression and I used the feeling of neglect as a crutch to justify my excessive drug use.

In October 2017, my son was born. From the moment I laid eyes on him, I immediately felt a powerful sense of unconditional love and I thought to myself, "This is what God has given me to help me get my life together". Unfortunately, that was not the case. My drug use continued and eventually, the mother of my son was so fed up with me that she ended our relationship. At this point, my life began spiraling downwards towards rock bottom at an alarming rate. I was using drugs every hour of every day, stealing money from my employer to support my drug habit, while living in the back room of my workplace. I was caught stealing, was fired on the spot and kicked out of my living space. It wasn't until I was homeless at the age of 25 that I realized I needed help. I had lost everything within a matter of two weeks.

Battered, defeated, and tired, I walked about 30 miles to my hometown of Greensboro. I remembered a place near a local bar that I used to frequent. Someone had mentioned that this was a place where drug addicts come together and help each other. I walked to this place and sat outside for a few hours waiting for someone to show up, not knowing what time the meeting started.

By 11:00 pm that night, I had lost hope and contemplated walking to my mom's house where I kept my pistol, and I was determined to end my life. About 5 minutes later, a car pulled up and a young guy got out. I thought, "surely he's not here for the meeting", but I asked him anyway. He told me that he was there for the meeting and immediately began talking to me as if he had known me my whole life. He explained to me what Narcotics Anonymous was and, in return, I told him my story. I will never forget the hug he gave me and the words he said to me that saved my life. He looked at me and said, "My brother, you are a miracle in my life and I love you". Something about that resonated throughout my first meeting and ultimately lit the fire of NA inside of me. Within a week, I was in a local recovery house where I still live today. The meeting that saved my life became my home group.

I have a sponsor whom I love dearly, I have a network of people today that I can call my true friends, and I'm a humble servant to my home group at the Greensboro area level of Narcotics Anonymous. This program has given me my life back and for that, I'm gratefully indebted. Today, I'm an active member of the recovery community, a Managing Director in my workplace, a father, a son, a brother, and nothing short of a miracle. I'm living proof that recovery is possible!

In loving service,

Andrew G.



Curro's story

Hi, my name is Curro and I'm an addict. Today, I can say this without feeling ashamed, even with some pride and gratitude. But, at my first meetings, I was barely able to say it at all (or to raise my head when sharing). Today, it feels so natural to me that when I hear someone introduce themselves, in my head, I automatically hear "...and I'm an addict", and I worry that I might say it out loud!

I prefer not to write about my using story, for the simple reason that when I got here, I just noticed differences but I thought I hadn't hit bottom hard enough. If any of your fellow members have used longer than you have lived, then you know what I'm talking about. Also, NA is about the nature of recovery, not addiction, so that's what I want to write about.

After I went to my first meeting, it took several months until I understood that I was an addict. I knew that drugs were not helping me, but I didn't see them as a serious problem, so I decided to stay clean for 3 months. On the one hand, I was curious because the people at the meetings looked happy (I thought they had learned how to use) but, on the other hand, I wanted to prove that I wasn't an addict and could stop if I really put my mind to it.

Gradually, by attending meetings and getting some clean time, the message got through to me almost without me realizing

it. I was still sure that I would only be attending meetings for 3 months, but I found that I didn't like the idea of giving up the meetings or going there if I wasn't clean. I started doing the coffee service and discovered that not only did I like it, but people thanked me for being there, doing service, and attending meetings. I even got myself a sponsor.

Nevertheless, I still had my reservations: all my friends used, I was too young to stop using, I could just avoid my drug of choice, or just use differently. Simply put, I wanted to find a way to use successfully.

However, deep down, I was increasingly sure that I had found my place and that the emptiness inside me was not as big as it had been a few months before. Since I wanted to experience recovery and the program in order to adapt it to my using, I applied the principles of honesty, open-mindedness, and goodwill, but in my own way. Of course, this wouldn't have worked in the long run, but I opened up just enough to receive the message and I started doing things the NA way. In the end, I had to be honest with myself: I had found my place. As I gradually opened up to my sponsor, I started to discover that however different our stories were, deep down, we had lived and suffered the same. The differences between us were not as important.

I think that what has helped me the most to stay clean was falling in love with the new way of life I found in NA and its steps, traditions, and concepts. Today, I know I'm not alone and that difficult moments, days, weeks, or months do pass. If I continue to follow this way of life, I will not only have nothing to fear, but I am also doing and achieving things that I could

not even dream of before I came to NA and started getting some clean time. Such as overcoming my fear of people (and reality), accepting that I have to follow my own path, going back to school, finding an activity I'm passionate about, being patient, recognizing my progress, not listening to my head, doing things with goodwill, letting go when necessary, and not trying to be perfect.

Service is vital to my recovery. It helps me to practice honesty when I give my opinion but without trying to manipulate. It also helps me to be open-minded enough to accept other points of view, to have the goodwill to help others and to commit to something in the long term, and to find humility. When I try to do things to the best of my ability (which is very different from seeking perfection) in order to get a message over to a still-suffering addict my self-centeredness disappears.

When I finally understood what addiction is, the concept of a Higher Power that NA speaks of became clear to me: it is the exact opposite of addiction. There is the destructive Higher Power, which is addiction, and the loving Higher Power, which can be anything from a potato, as mentioned in the stories of the Basic Text, to the whole universe. The difference is clear: addiction leads me to jails, institutions and death. My Higher Power (as I understand it) leads me to freedom.

Today, I think that getting to know NA and my sponsor is the best thing that could have happened to me and that, thanks to his guidance (and my effort and goodwill), today, I can say that I'm happy and free of remorse or anything like it (something that had been unthinkable to me). Almost without realizing it, I lost the desire to use and started living differently.



Lugi's story

I'm 39 years old, live in Reykjavik, Iceland, am married, a father of two girls, a PhD student, an independent IT consultant and, last but not least, a humble servant of the global Fellowship of NA.

At the age of 20, I was introduced to NA by a friend who had been clean for one month at the time. However, I wasn't completely willing to come to terms with my addiction. You see, I did not get clean because of a desire to stop using, but rather out of respect for my family. Consequently, at 15 months clean, I relapsed. My relapse is an excellent example of how the obsession of addiction manifests in the life of an addict. It led me to 'pop an E' at a large electronic dance festival in the Netherlands. Although I had 15 months clean time, I had not been very active in the NA program in the weeks leading up to the festival. I thought my only hope of staying clean was my friend who had introduced me to recovery, but on his way to the festival, he relapsed. I was in contact with him on my way to the airport, where he warned me about the 'incident'. So, knowing the risk involved, I still decided to take my chances with the potential consequences. My relapse lasted for about one year, taking me deeper into the world of addiction than ever before. When my mind became so fragmented due to drug use, when I no longer could distinguish between the 'good' and the 'bad' voices in my head, I finally surrendered.

This life event represents the rock bottom of my drug abuse, the internal struggles between my true self and my ego.

At 22, I decided to stop using drugs, go to rehab, and get clean. With the help of the counselors at the treatment center, members of NA, and the sister fellowship, as well as my Higher Power, I was able to follow the path set out in the 12-step program of NA, lose the obsession to use, and find a new way of life. In the 16 years I've been clean, I've received many gifts I am very grateful for, such as a wonderful wife and kids, an education, and a career. Furthermore and above everything else, I'm grateful that I found the ability to give back to others by simply sharing my experience of recovery with those who are in the same boat I was once in myself.

I have been given the opportunity to contribute to the growth of the Icelandic NA fellowship by taking an active part in regional service. This includes leading the team who translated the Basic Text into Icelandic and published it for the local fellowship.

The selfless act of sharing is the key to a long-term recovery, and one of the greatest blessings in my life is making a decision to stop using at a young age.

It's up to you to make up your mind!



James' story

My name is James and I'm an addict. I found recovery on 13th August, 2001 at the age of 23, and have been clean ever since. I celebrated 17 years of being clean and serene (though maybe sometimes still a bit crazy) a couple of months ago. My life started like any other and I didn't plan to screw my life up or to have to go into recovery.

I come from a small town in England. I look back at myself aged 12 and, as I see it, I was a normal kid. Life started to become a struggle after I was sexually assaulted. I struggled with reading and writing so I stopped going to school regularly. I started to mix with my friend's older brother and started smoking dope in his family bathroom. From here, I discovered a whole new world where I felt that I fitted in: getting high and getting money any way possible. By the time I was 14, I had been arrested quite a few times for small offenses. Then I got arrested outside my school for dealing drugs. This is when my parents got to know that I was taking drugs.

My mother was a teacher at a college and had sat at the back of the hall listening to members of NA doing Public Information (PI) service shares. At this time in my life, I didn't know what she knew but I've since realized that she went directly to giving tough love to fight the disease of addiction based on the experience of an NA member – which seriously screwed up my using!

At 17, I was in my first treatment center, weighing up my options: either stay there and get clean or live on the streets. I chose to live on the streets and walked out of treatment. By 19, I had lived on the streets and had been in a juvenile prison and a psychiatric hospital. I hadn't even found hard drugs yet. I had to start taking antipsychotic medication.

In the psychiatric hospital, they told me I couldn't use drugs ever again. I was determined to prove them wrong. I was a speed freak so I took a lot of speed one night – and it all went wrong. I came to the conclusion that speed was man-made and that cocaine was a natural substance. This was the beginning of the end for me.

I quickly learned to turn coke into crack and that I needed heroin to bring me down, and then I found that injecting drugs was better than smoking drugs.

At age 22, I was back to living in a car and all alone. I had the seat belt wrapped around my arm looking for a vein. A group of lads walked past laughing. I got a moment of clarity and asked myself when was the last time I had laughed or had been with people who were not dealers or addicts? I began to actively get clean. I had to go off the antipsychotics so that the treatment center would allow me in. I didn't know about NA then; there was no NA where I lived nor was there help for addicts on antipsychotics. Shortly after making an effort and getting nowhere, I felt hopeless and confused like never before, and I tried to commit suicide.

A year later, I found myself in a large NA meeting making the tea and getting to know people. I felt at home. I was just left

to be myself. During that year, I had to face myself, which brought me to tears and released bottled-up emotions. After another year, I had become a service 'junkie' doing group service. Through the years, I've served in area service, regional service, convention service, on the NA phonenumber, etc. My current service post is chairperson of an area.

I now have two beautiful daughters who are constantly teaching me about love. I have friends that I can call true friends. I have built a company from scratch. I have traveled the world. I was even given the keys to my parent's house and I support them.

Throughout the 17 years, it hadn't always been easy. I had some tough years but people in the fellowship supported me and continue to support me. I have watched people come into recovery and turn into beautiful people. Now, at 40 years old, I live with a sense of hope that everything will be ok - just for today.



Mahmoud's story

I joined NA on 19th February, 2005, when I was 18 and a half. One week earlier, I understood that I wasn't able to live my life like other people do. I had reached rock bottom, which made me try to commit suicide by jumping off a balcony. I put one leg out to jump and was about to put the other one out when one of my friends, who is now in NA, grabbed my leg so that I couldn't jump and kill myself. At this moment, I realized how weak I was, and I felt I could not continue living my life like this anymore, in this journey into darkness and loneliness where I felt there were no more ways to get rid of the chaos inside my head. I looked at myself in the mirror and spoke to myself out loud, my inner voice rose up and shouted "STOP!" for the first time in my life. I faced the enemy inside me and all my masks dropped away!

After that, I fell into a deep depression, stayed at home using, and told my family for the first time that I needed help. I couldn't go on like this. I thought I would go crazy and feared I had started to lose my mind. I was crying all the time. Then, on 19th February, 2005, my mom contacted a recovery house. Some people came over and, completely admitting my powerlessness, I asked them for help.

Right there and then, I went with them. I wasn't even able to walk. My body betrayed me. I had no strength whatsoever and felt like jelly so I collapsed. I couldn't go down the stairs

by myself so they carried me, put me in their car, and took me to the recovery house, where I stayed for 6 months.

I got to know the NA rooms in that recovery house. I started the journey of facing the enemy inside me and started writing down the 12 steps. I answered my sponsor's questions honestly. I listened carefully during every meeting, despite the many differences I found in my early days in recovery especially because, in my country, only three people as young as I had found recovery. I was looking for any hope I could find and I started working the program, hour by hour, to get through the day clean.

In those days, I didn't feel as if I belonged with the other people in the NA rooms. Although, I knew deep down that I needed them because they had strength. I started using the NA tools when I had very strong thoughts of using again. I called them when I felt that I didn't love myself or my family. I started talking about this and how I felt different because of the age difference with them during these tough moments. I got all the love, support, and hope I needed from them, even beyond my expectations.

Then, I wanted to belong to NA. One of the members suggested that I serve in order to feel like I belong more, rather than just attend a meeting and leave afterwards. So I started as a group secretary. From 2006 until now, I'm still doing service in my region. I have even served as the Egyptian regional delegate and am still doing service in my home group. When I go to any meeting, I feel at home and safe, and the best thing I am still learning is how to live each day without using and to be a productive and responsible member of my

society. At the beginning, I thought I would stop going to meetings after I was two years clean. Now, I can't live without attending a meeting every three days... maximum.

After years of struggling with my family relationships, I learned to be of service to my parents, to belong, and be loving, as I do in NA. I started by washing the dishes for them. Though I didn't enjoy being there or felt like I belonged with them at the time, I kept on doing it, just as I had learnt to do in NA, regardless of how I felt. I learned that nothing will change until I act, and the feelings will come later. I now have a son and a daughter. Both go to school and I've been married for almost 10 years. I'm responsible for my parents because both my brother and my sister are living abroad. I have learned that my home life is a mirror that gives me an honest reflection of how I'm doing in my recovery.

NA has taught me that I am loved and accepted regardless of my background, age, or how much I used, and if I have the desire to stop using, I have the right to be a member. Most importantly, they love me just as I am, without any effort on my part. I am making an effort every day to keep up the gift of recovery by doing what I did in those first months, because the disease that I had when I entered the NA room is still part of me. I still need a power that is greater than myself to keep me from using again. This is a fact that I have admitted to myself.

NA has taught me to believe in myself and to realize my dreams. I completed my Master's degree in 2012. Through a successful but tough career, I have started a company and I am still surviving with the care and love of my Higher Power

and the NA program. I believe I can do and achieve more, without limitation, and can face life's unpredictable and tough situations.

I owe a lot to the NA way of life. I have many roles now – a sponsor, sponsee, father, son, husband, NA servant, and other roles I am committed to in my life. The life I now lead is beyond my expectations and I never thought, in the best scenario, that I would have a life as good as this. The journey still continues...

Hugs,

Mahmoud



Pepe's story

Hi, my name is Pepe and I'm an addict. I'm very happy to share my story with young addicts.

I found out about NA as a small child when my dad took me to meetings in his arms. With time, years later, he was also the one that brought me back there. One of the things that happened to me when I went to my first meeting was that I asked myself, "What attracted me in the first share that I heard from a fellow addict? He was three times my age. Why did I identify with him so much?" I didn't hit people like he did; I was too much of a coward. He wore a leather jacket but that wasn't what caught my attention. I knew at that moment that those 'old guys' could understand me better than anyone ever had before. Although I had no intention to stop using, I decided to keep going to meetings ... something there convinced me to.

I could share my nightmares, my hallucinations, my 'terrible' parents, and also how much I 'loved' the substance, and they would nod with a warm smile on their faces, which filled me with life. Over time, I felt at ease.

Even though I haven't been in NA for long, I can say that the adventures I've had there are invaluable. The family I found has given me back my smile and my ability to cry (which I do

often). My sponsor says that working the steps has given me back my humanity – and I truly believe him.

I have undergone big changes. I've stopped taking psychiatric medication and have discovered that I really enjoy working out. One day I was given the opportunity to start studying online and to do what I've always loved doing but never dared to.

However, the greatest gifts of all have come from within myself. Today, I have such a long list of things to be grateful for and have come to feel a great debt to my Higher Power. It feels as if my Higher Power is tapping me on the shoulder and saying, "Be willing, it's a gift".

Through working the steps, I've discovered that my sexual orientation wasn't what I thought it was. I shared this with my sponsor. He didn't make fun of me and kept it to himself. The huge fear I carried around for such a long time disappeared. I was able to be honest with myself and another human being and guess what? I now accept myself exactly the way I am!

The gratitude I feel today is not something that can disappear easily. It's a force like that of a big river, that pushes me every day to try and do something, however small, for another addict like myself.

If I have a message for any young (or not so young) addict, it would be: "If you come here, your life, like mine, has just started. You have come home".

I have gotten to know wonderful human beings at NA, and my Higher Power guides me through them.

It's hard to express in words the hope I feel every time I remember that yes, there is an alternative, yes, I can stay clean, and yes, thanks to NA, just for today, life is amazing!



T.'s story

My name is T. and I'm an addict. When I got clean at age 17, I thought I was too young to stop using drugs. I had used drugs pretty heavily since age 13, ran 3,000 miles away from home, and ended up living on the streets for nearly a year. I had dropped out of high school, gotten hepatitis, and a criminal record under a different name and age. I became a cleaning lady at a motel, making a minimum wage. I watched my older friends go to jail or to the psych ward, overdose, or die. My future was not looking bright.

I moved back east and went back to school but my disease continued to progress. A few months before I turned 18, I got arrested in a high-profile narcotics taskforce sweep that got my name and age published in the newspapers. After that, no one wanted to use with me anymore and all the bars I went to stopped letting me in. Even my drug dealer wouldn't take my calls. So I started going to meetings because I had nowhere else to go.

At my first meeting, I picked up the Triangle of Self-Obsession pamphlet – and my life changed forever. I was blown away to find the very core of my spiritual and emotional pain written down in plain language. I didn't know that other people suffered from the same miserable patterns I did. I knew I was young and so I was pretty sure I could still use drugs for a few more years but I wasn't sure that I could

stand any more pain. Incredibly, the solution to what seemed like an insurmountable problem was inscribed in this very same pamphlet.

It didn't bother me that everyone in the meetings was older than me. I realized that I would probably come back just like they had when I was older – if I didn't die first. I had never gone to prison, still had all my own teeth, had no kids to lose, no career, no possessions, nothing. But what I had lost was hope. I had no self-esteem left. I had lost the ability to see good in the world or good in my life. I felt like a huge failure.

So I started listening to all these older people. Some were going back to school, some were artists or musicians, and while I had no such skills, I realized that these people's lost dreams had been rekindled. They were staying clean, working the steps, and pursuing their dreams. So I enrolled in college and got myself a sponsor. I made a commitment to serve in every group I joined. I saw the struggles of those who relapsed and I made a decision to stay clean no matter what. I embraced the NA literature and surrendered in order to win.

Today, I have been clean for 37 years and life in recovery has been like a fairy tale (though not without a few bumps along the way). I'm not young anymore but I have led a wonderful life because of Narcotics Anonymous. I feel the presence of a loving Higher Power who never leaves my side. I have learned how to live with gratitude, happiness, and service. And, although social acceptability does not equal recovery, it's been really good to have a successful career, own a beautiful home, travel the world, and marry a handsome man with a sense of humor. My neighbor says we wake up laughing every

day. Most importantly, NA has given me acceptance, love, and faith. My inner pain turned into inner peace and then into an inner glow. I thank God every day that I got clean young so that I could live what seems like my whole life, in recovery. I pray that I grow old slowly and die clean after many more years in Narcotics Anonymous.

Additional resources for young addicts in recovery

Young Addicts in Recovery pamphlet: <https://www.edmna.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/YAIR-Pamphlet-Sept-2021.pdf>

By Young Addicts IP: https://www.na.org/admin/include/spaw2/uploads/files/EN3113_2008.pdf

Young Addicts initiative: <https://www.edmna.org/fellowship-development/young-addicts/>



Narcotics Anonymous



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