I define my recovery to be much more than my not using drugs. For me, I believe that my recovery began when I got clean on January 15, 1991. Initially, I suppose that I merely wanted to have the emotional pain go away. Prior to my recovery, I always battled with a sense of inadequacy, and the numbness that drugs afforded me was a way that I could block out my low self-esteem and my growing sense of self hatred. I always remember feeling “less than” others around me. I remember thinking that I was destined to be a lifelong addict/loser, and I gave up on myself in my early teen years. I think I truly “emotionally abandoned” myself. Nothing mattered and I did not care about myself or others.

As I began to experience my new found friendships with others who had more clean time than I did, I discovered that the recovery process, as outlined in Narcotics Anonymous, was capable of taking me places, both physically and emotionally, that I did not previously believe was possible for me to obtain. That was the beginning of what I suppose was my “spiritual awakening.”

At my earliest NA meetings in 1991, I recall seeing something at those gatherings of recovering addicts that just looked healthy, as this related to the comradery and fellowshipping between the more experienced NA members. Just seeing the smiles, hugs, and genuineness there was inspiring to me. I slowly gained insight that NA was about a lot more than simply “peeing clean at the parole office.” I guess at the core of my disease, there is a deep-rooted personality problem. In all honesty, I believe that I lost the ability to form an early age, to emotionally connect with other people. Once I understood that there was more to being an “addict” than the use of chemicals, I started to unravel the emotional part of me that was hidden from my view since childhood.

I eventually discovered that my getting clean was not as difficult to do, as I always imagined it to be. In some ways, my not using drugs, one day at a time, may have been simpler to do than it has been to come to terms with my dysfunctional approach to developing meaningful relationships between me and the “entire world at large.” Probably my biggest “secret fear” all my life (prior to recovery) was my deep-seated belief that I could never be self-supporting in an honest, open, legal way. I had zero jobs skills and thought I could never get a real job and learn how to be self-reliant. I committed crimes as a method of support all my life and truly believed that I was incapable of learning a trade, vocation or skill. I internalized the belief that I was a loser! As I slowly began to examine this “recovery process” I remember thinking “...what if I could get a real job???” That was the beginning of hope for me.

During my first clean year, being in daily contact with recovering addicts inspired within me the feeling that the fellowship was doing for each of us what we could not do alone. That was a major breakthrough for me. I began exploring new concepts of “adult development” as seen in my gaining a newfound sense of maturity along with losing my lifelong paralyzing sense of fear and inadequacy.

So, how do I define my recovery now? For me, I see opportunities for self-growth and ongoing personal achievement that are only available to me if I stay grounded within recovery principles. I can “test the waters” of interpersonal relationships and develop meaningful friendships with other people. There has been an “awakening of my spirit” that has taken me to new heights of self-awareness. This is seen by my present comfortableness with myself and in my willingness to be open and honest about myself. I have not completely lost my criticalness and harshness about myself, as I still believe that in many ways, that I am my own worst enemy. However, I have a genuine sense of calmness and inner peacefulness that I strive to sustain. I believe that my sense of oneness and “spiritual connection” with the worldwide NA family is my “higher power” and that I can freely tap into this power as often as I choose to do.

In my ongoing recovery, I feel that I have overcome many personal barriers, such as formerly being undependable, unreliable and unlovable. Today, I can conduct my affairs with self-respect and dignity. I take personal pride in my recovery accomplishments and I cherish my willingness to...
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