

Stories of Addiction and Survival

From a physician's perspective

Dr Staci Mulcahy shares these two stories she has personally experienced.

A mom brought her 28 year old son to see me regarding heroin use. One night, a few days before his intake, the mom woke up at 3 AM for no apparent reason. She heard a "strange sound" coming from upstairs. When she went up to check it out, she found her son unresponsive with foam coming out of his mouth. He had overdosed. She says "it was absolutely terrifying." She called 911 and initiated CPR. When the first responders arrived they successfully revived him with naloxone right in front of her eyes. She was overwhelmed with emotion while she watched her only child be brought back to life. He is currently on buprenorphine, working part-time, and going to school part-time. Mom now carries naloxone and is an advocate for parents.

I also have a patient who overdosed three times and each time he has been revived with naloxone. Currently he is in college and applying to medical school. He is raising his two year old daughter with his mother's help. He is now two and a half years clean on low dose buprenorphine.

The addict's story

Stories of personal addiction and their survival – printed with permission

First – a mother and daughter experience...

Out of the 4 1/2 years in and out of treatments and institutions, as naive as I was, I never thought heroin would kill me. I was the "special case" until the night that heroin almost took my life. *I opened my eyes and I was in an ambulance with paramedics all around me, screaming "she's awake, she's awake!" I was so confused because the last thing i remember was sitting on a bed. I asked them what happened, they told me I overdosed, and they had to hit me twice with Narcan. **Narcan saved my life.** Today I am thankful for the chance I have been given to be living a life of sobriety. I AM NOT SPECIAL, HEROIN CAN KILL ME. It almost did. – The daughter, Sara Goddard*

I did not know for a few months what had happened to my daughter and that she had overdosed. She did tell me by starting out with "MOM!, I have something to tell you." That comment always sends me into instant PTSD mode. Living with a child who is an addict with heroin being her drug of choice I always knew she could die at any moment. She then continued to tell me what she remembered and my first thought was THANK GOD the paramedics carried Narcan with them. They saved my daughter!!! She was then able to realize that she needed help, and needed to get into treatment. She realized, if she continued "using" next time she might not be so lucky. I will always be thankful for Narcan! It gave my daughter a 2nd chance to change her life for the better. – *The Mother, Deanne Goddard*

The path back to a life I don't want to lose...

Back when I was 17, I quit high school for reasons I'm not entirely sure of to this day. I was a heroin addict at the time. This was over a decade ago, before it was considered an epidemic. A few of us got high at my high school but it went unspoken until you got in trouble with the law. I was in the local paper for some charges associated with an overdose where my brother revived me in 2004 or 2005. I began showing up to school high to the point it was noticeable to the faculty and other students. Parents didn't want their kids to hang out with me. I had a teacher that showed up during my "study hall." He woke me from a full on sleep, like the kind of sleep that can only be induced by something other than exhaustion or sleep cycles. He asked if I wanted to take a walk. That morning I got high before school. At this point I usually had to use something or couldn't go. He noticed I was high or at least something was wrong with me. This gentleman showed genuine concern. We did a lap around the school that day and he asked me if anything was wrong, if I wanted to talk, what he could do. I gave him some bogus excuse about medications and interactions and how I was in a new treatment program and getting adjusted to it. I think he knew I was lying but I don't think he cared. He just was sincerely worried about my overall well-being.

That moment didn't stop the destruction, but it showed me that people care. I went on for many years getting high, stealing, selling, lying, cheating, manipulating, breaking the law and so on. Moving out of town to south Florida where I shot heroin and crack every day. Drank and used sedatives. Would black out so consistently that I had no concern for not remembering how I got somewhere. Now I'm 28. I graduated magna cum laude from the University of Pittsburgh with a 3.8. I have a job where I work in substance abuse treatment. I have two children who I live with, in our own place, I have a car, I pay bills, and more importantly I have trust and respect from my community, friends, family and co-workers. I have people who rely on me and believe in me. People want to know and ask how I stopped, or what did it for me. I think it was a sum greater than all its individual parts type thing. I think it was the lap around the school, my family never turning their back, my friends, my children; and ultimately along the way I built up a life that I couldn't afford to lose. -- *Daniel J. Garrighan*

Finding Happiness....

I started smoking weed and drinking alcohol when I was 14 years old. As I got a little older it progressed to alcohol and prescription pills (such as Xanax, Adderall and benzos). I could get these from fellow students. I wanted to feel part of the crowd. At 16 I started Vicodin. When on Vicodin I could escape life. I was depressed and in an abusive relationship. Technology contributed to my social dysfunction as well. I just wanted to numb it all out! One day I called a friend to get high. They had me snort heroin. We snorted repetitively for about a week. Then I realized I was very down and depressed. At that point someone told me that I was hooked! I felt guilty when I started using. I was sad and ashamed so I would get even higher to forget those feelings. It became a cycle, when I wasn't high I would feel the guilt, shame sadness then get high again. The first time I overdosed I was 18 and given Naloxone. I was scared! I couldn't believe I had put myself in this very real situation. But, the draw of being high was so great that it compelled continued use. People should be talking, heroin is everywhere! Today, looking back Naloxone saved my life and my life was worth saving! I am now in my early twenties and starting to make a change. it's a process. I want to do something good with my life and make a difference in someone else's. Everyday the addiction lessens. You need to find Happiness. -- *Anonymous*