

I would have to say my first experience with drugs and alcohol was when I was 13. That was a pretty big year for me. Ending with my mother leaving and moving to Connecticut. I went to live with my father full time in the city, but my ex step father allowed me to continue to go to school where he lived, so that I can be with my friends. That grew into a weird situation, causing me to decide to graduate a year early- which I did.

One of my best friends, her parents owned a farm. The whole top floor of their barn was a grow room. I don't think I have ever been in a room so big with wall-to-wall marijuana plants. We were used to seeing large amounts of drugs and guns come through her parent's house. This was no big deal.

How can you have all of that around teenagers and not expect them to check that all out? The funny thing is, our first time getting high was with my oldest sister's boyfriend- while we were waiting for her to get home. It was just a little pot, right? No big deal. My friend and I spent the entire night with our heads in the toilet. That wasn't so fun. Needless to say, I wasn't interested in trying marijuana again. That lasted about 3 months, the next time I smoked, I really enjoyed the buzz. I continued to smoke marijuana into my 20's.

I liked drinking. It was so easy to get people to buy me alcohol. I drank all the time. Never suffered from hangovers, so I got to have all the fun of getting wasted, and waking up bright and early the next morning to go to school with no problems. I always received high honors. Everybody was so proud of me. My teachers kept encouraging me to take advanced courses, college courses- especially in Science. I had a 102 average in that class- every year. Nope- I was all set. I continued taking my regular courses, not really challenging myself. If I took advanced classes, then I wouldn't be able to party like I did.

Fast forward 3 1/2 years- Drinking has become boring. I liked getting high, I was stoned every day. I was set to graduate in June- just turned 17. I got involved with a much older man. He introduced me to cocaine and heroin. He was an abusive man, and he was afraid that I would tell on him, so I had to do it too. I never liked needles- so I snorted the heroin. The heroin made me sick, so I didn't really get into it at that point, but he liked his cocaine. We did a lot of cocaine and pills for about 3 years. My memory isn't too great during that time. Between popping pills, drinking and cocaine. I'm surprised I remember anything at all. The best thing to ever happen to me was when I finally left him when I was 20. It was difficult, and I was miserable for a little while, but I got through it. I increased my cigarette intake drastically, though.

January 12, 2011. The day my world came to a devastating halt. I lost my rock, my confidante, my best friend in the whole world. My father died, suddenly. Then my downward spiral began. I left my son's father- I blamed him for a long time for the events leading up to my father's passing. The pain was insurmountable. I didn't think I would make it out of my overwhelmingly unbearable grief. Unfortunately, I was so wrapped up in my own grief- I wasn't there for my son. After all.. He had lost his grandfather and his father in a matter of weeks. I'm thankful that my mother was there for him- and me for support.. She could only do so much, though, because I was going to do what I wanted to do. So she just made sure my son was safe and taken care of since I was less than available..

I found myself in places I never thought I would be. Places I had no business being, some of the worst places in Hartford: Park Street, Zion Street, Mayflower Street- anywhere in the North End of Hartford. All I had to do was park my car and sit. It would never be more than 5 minutes before someone was coming up to my window. "There's only one reason a white girl would come up in this neighborhood.

Whatchu need, Mama? I got fire.” It was so easy. I went from 180 pounds to 120 pounds in a very short period of time. I was also working 60+ hours a week to support my son and I and my habit. I thought I was doing well- only spending about \$300 a week on heroin- and of course, a little coke. I had to be awake and alert at work, the coke helped me with that- I kept telling myself. How I was able to function and do my job and not hurt anyone is beyond me. One thing I can say- I cared very much for the people I took care of.

In November of 2012, when I was up for 2 days smoking crack with a cousin. She lived about a half hour away from my house. I popped 2 Thorazine before I left her place to “come down a little bit” on my drive home. When I got home, I went to my neighbor’s house. She liked to party, too but she just liked her coke. I got up to her porch and was feeling very light headed. My vision was blurry, and I was seeing purple spots (similar to when you look at the sun for a few seconds and look away). She opened her door, and said, “what’s wrong??!” I walked through her door and passed out. About 30 seconds later I woke up on the floor to her kneeling next to me and putting something under my head. I asked what happened and she told me. I obviously needed a little bump to get me back on my feet. So we did a few lines before I decided to go back to my place. I woke up the following afternoon to my mother crying her eyes out because I wasn’t waking up. She was about to call 911. I was mad at her because she almost did.

It was Thanksgiving- a few weeks after the “Thorazine incident”, when my son (who was 8 at the time) said something to me. He asked me when I was coming back. He said he missed me. Although I saw him almost every day, I was so disconnected from him. He doesn’t say much, so when he told me this; it felt like a sledgehammer to my chest. Here my little boy was, telling me that he misses me, and that he wants me to come back him. He said he knows that I work(ed) all night and that I was tired, but now I am always tired- and sometimes hard to wake up.. And that scared him.

I knew that I had to make some changes in my life. I was afraid to seek professional help- because I didn’t want to be a “junkie”. Was I really that deep into it? Nah. No way. I kept telling myself a real addict has been doing it for years. Not only a year and 22 months. Addicts don’t keep a full time job. (Like I was the only person able to function while using.) My biggest fear was once you have that nasty little label- that follows you around everywhere- forever. I was afraid that any chance of a future would be lost because I sought treatment. That would mean I have a history of drug abuse. That means I cannot be trusted.

I was a Certified Residential Medication Administrator. I worked with Medications every day. I know I wouldn’t be trusted if anyone knew. I believed that at that point in time, if it got out that I had a problem it would affect my job, since I had to deal with medications. Plus- I always was afraid to go on Methadone or Suboxone. I was afraid that I would be replacing one fix with another- more legal one. I saw way too many people stumbling out of the clinic so messed up they didn’t know which end was up. I didn’t want that for me either. Between stigmas and fear of being in a place worse than I was at that time, I didn’t know what to do.

What choice did I have? How can I save my own life and salvage a relationship that I had neglected with my son? What am I going to do? Where am I going to go?

I talked to my mother. She lived across town from my place. My step father recently had a heart attack and was out of work. She suggested that I move in with them, that way my son could get off the

bus there, I can sleep, rent would be cheaper by \$100 and it would help my mother and step father keep their house. This turned out to be exactly what I needed.

It was a rough first 3-4 weeks. I slept through most of it. When I was awake, I was miserable. I was sweaty and gross and in immense physical pain. My God I thought my stomach pains alone were going to kill me. I kept telling my mother this must be what dying feels like. I know they say that detoxing won't kill you, but boy you feel like it will. I remember my mother making me get up to get in the shower, just the water hitting me felt like a million fists coming down all over my body. It seemed like the pain lasted so long that I forgot how it felt not to hurt. That experience alone makes me never want to go through it again.

It's been almost 6 years now since I last used. Some days are tough. I quit smoking cigarettes at the same time, too. I do a lot of self-talking when I feel like I want to use. I talk to myself as if I were talking to one of my friends who was an addict. "Good God!... Don't you remember what you went through the last time? If you do one hit, you might as well buy a bag-10 bags, and you know you're not stopping."

There's one word, or name, I should say, that always brings it all together and that's my son's name. He is my reason for improving. He makes me want to be a better person. A better mother. It was just him and me for 7 years. We were so close. I just can't do that to him again. I have a daughter now, too. I want to see them grow up. I don't want to be part of sad childhood memories, with them watching me slowly kill myself.

I know that there will be difficult times in my life. I know I'm going to suffer from more losses, important ones. I know that I can seek comfort in other ways. Whether it be writing in a journal, talking to someone I can trust. I know that there is help if I need it. I know where to find it. I also understand now, that there is no shame in treatment. I am fortunate that I was able to do this without professional help.

I was able to do all of this with the support of my mother. She was the only one who knew what I was doing. She wanted to help me so badly, and did so the only way she knew how. Just be there for me, and encouraged me to get better. She'll never know how big of a role she played in me being where I am right now. I don't think I could explain it to her.