

# OUT OF THE FOG

Stories of recovery from London



First Edition | Published by CMAUK | © 2018

© 2018 CMAUK

<http://www.crystalmeth.org.uk>

Edited and produced by London CMA Book Steering Committee

ISBN 978-1-5272-2824-5

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD .....	1
Are You a Crystal Meth Addict? .....	3
STORIES .....	5
A place I felt I belonged .....	5
I thought I was in control .....	6
CMA saved my life .....	9
Brian's Story .....	13
Conversations... me and my addict .....	19
Time to walk the walk .....	21
Gradual change .....	25
The power of good-bye .....	31
Brotherhood bound .....	34
Thank you CMA! .....	34
Two and a B or not two and a B? - the daily question .....	38
At this very moment .....	42
Grateful for my rock bottom .....	48
Being a newcomer .....	50
Recovery has changed my life .....	53
My story .....	53

The best decision I have ever made ..... 59  
Late night storm to calm waters ..... 63  
I never had a problem ..... 65  
Gratitude ..... 69  
My name is Goko, I'm 47. I'm a grateful crystal meth addict. .... 72  
Miracles, one day at a time ..... 76  
Poetry block ..... 81  
Butterfly effect ..... 87  
A life beyond my wildest dreams ..... 89  
Help came in a glass pipe ..... 95  
I am an addict ..... 99  
From shame to freedom ..... 102  
I would die if I used or drank again ..... 106  
Finding hope ..... 109

APPENDICES ..... 117

What is CMA? ..... 119  
The Twelve Steps: A plan of Action ..... 120  
The Twelve Traditions ..... 123  
I Can Stay Sober ..... 125

# FOREWORD

The following pages consist of accounts by members of Crystal Meth Anonymous (CMA) in London, UK. People who through attending our meetings have found solace, support and even a pathway to a brand new life. These are stories of experience, strength, dreams, hopes, daily struggles and recovery.

We would like to reach out to people who can, and cannot, get to our meetings at present, including the ones in treatment centres, in cities, or remote areas where CMA is not available. We hope it reaches as many people who are suffering as possible.

## *A Group Effort*

In the winter of 2012, five of us – Abramo, James, Oliver, Ruars and Victor – felt that the time had come to start CMA in London. All five of us met at Twelve Step fellowship meetings. All five of us identified as crystal meth addicts and all five of us felt there was something missing in how we could share and connect. Some felt we couldn't share where our acting out took us; some felt shame for the depths to which crystal meth had taken us; some felt less comfortable with our sexuality in other rooms; some felt misunderstood when sharing about our using history, when someone suggested that there were CMA

meetings in the US; some had already been to CMA meetings abroad and learned about it.

From a winter of setting up meetings in our living rooms we arrived at our first CMA meeting in Europe on a Wednesday in April 2013. In the years since, our membership has grown so much, thanks to the service of so many that we now have daily CMA meetings in London that host not exclusively crystal meth addicts, but also people who identify chemsex and other party drugs as part of their story.

We at CMAUK do not think our disease of addiction is different to other addictions, but we do recognise how the extra identification can be very helpful when trying to connect. We hope these stories move and inspire you as much as they do us.

NB: Each story printed is personal and does not necessarily represent CMA as a whole.

# Are You a Crystal Meth Addict?

It doesn't matter what you call it. It doesn't matter how you did it. It brought us to our knees, because without exception, that's what it does.

Is crystal meth a problem in your life? Are you an addict? Only you can answer those questions. For most of us who have admitted defeat, the answer is very clear. Yes, we had a problem with crystal meth, and no, we couldn't fix the problem by ourselves. We had to admit defeat to win. Crystal meth was our master.

We couldn't control our drug use. What started out as weekend or occasional use became daily use, and we soon found ourselves beyond human aid. We truly suffered from a lack of power to fix our problem.

Some of us used crystal meth as a tool to work harder and longer, but we couldn't keep a job. Others picked at their faces and arms for hours and hours or pulled out their hair. Some of us had uncontrollable sexual desire. Others endlessly tinkered with projects, accomplishing nothing, but found ourselves so busy we couldn't get to work on time.

We deluded ourselves into thinking that staying up for nights on end was OK, that our use was under control, and that we could quit if we wanted to, or that we couldn't afford to quit, or that or using didn't affect our lives.

Maybe we saw a friend go to jail, or lose their apartment, or lose their job, or lose the trust of their family, or die, but our clouded minds wouldn't admit we were next.

Most of us saw no way out, believing that we would use until the day we died.

Almost universally, if we had an honest moment, we found that our drug use made seemingly insurmountable problems in our lives.

The only way out was if we had the courage to admit that crystal meth, our one time friend, was killing us.

It doesn't matter how you got here. The courts sent some of us, others came for family or friends, and some of us came to CMA on our own. The question is, if you want help and are willing to go to any lengths to change your life.





# STORIES

## A place I felt I belonged

I guess I have always struggled with fitting in from an early age. I was too tall, not laddish enough for my age, not good at sports and too shy. Growing up I knew I was different sexually from everybody around me. I liked boys, they liked girls. I always had a hard time coming to terms with being gay and still do to an extent.

I discovered ecstasy and danced my way happily through the late 80s and 90s with all my amazing new friends. An ex-boyfriend introduced me to cocaine and sex whilst high, which I loved. The boyfriend came and went, other boyfriends came and went, and my relationship with drugs and sex became more and more intense as time passed by.

Whilst having a threeway with my then boyfriend I was introduced to crystal meth. This sent my relationship with sex and drugs into freefall. I could not stop using and would use for days on end, trying to hold down everything which was dear to me, which I had worked incredibly hard to get in my life – my home, my career, relationships with my family, my reputation and my friends. I lost all of them as time passed by.

I have had many rock bottoms and have always managed to pull myself up from the depths of loss and despair, only to be dragged back down to an even more desperate and lonely place than I was before.

I discovered CMA after one of these such times. The rooms were a place I felt I belonged and wasn't judged, a place where I could sit with other men who had experienced the loss and chaos that addiction to sex on crystal meth had taken on them too.

I am working the programme and have an amazing sponsor to who I owe my life. His faith in me, and the life that I can have and deserve free of addiction, astounds me. When most people had turned their backs on me, my sponsor was the one who guided and led me back on to the path of recovery.

I can now see a life totally free from crystal meth and the dreadful places it took me to. I know that this is possible with recovery and the guidance that I receive from my sponsor and the other intelligent, sensitive and struggling souls like myself in the rooms. And that the life I deserve and so desperately want is within reach, as long as I keep recovery in my life.

- Joseph R.

## **I thought I was in control**

I always thought I was in control, but I came to my first CMA meeting broken, scared and alone. I'd used chems and sex all my adult life. Life was a party at first, but somewhere along the way I'd found myself unable to have sex without chems. In the end I was no longer having sex, I was using compulsively and unable to control it. Life seemed pretty hopeless.

I lived a double life for many years. I threw myself into work from an early age. I later learned I had used work to escape from difficult feelings. At the end of the week I escaped further into a secret world of chemsex. Over the course of twenty years of using, friends and family became distant, many abandoned me altogether. My behaviour, often out of control, put me in all sorts of crazy and sometimes dangerous situations that caused shame, guilt and resentment. Ten years ago I discovered crystal meth and that's where the trouble

really began. I lost control gradually, using more and more, caring about myself less and less. It had the power to cover up all of my negative feelings and magnify some of my worst behaviour. I overdosed so many times that one London hospital printed off a list of all my admissions to A&E to try and give me a wake up call. I kept using for another seven years. I knew I had a problem but I could never find a solution that worked. In the end it had complete control over me, using took over my working week and I risked the one thing I had left that was keeping me afloat, my career.

For years I'd tried to control how much I used, who I used with, where and when. I'd often switch one drug for another. I never thought of myself as an addict because a) I used different drugs each day and b) my sister was a heroin addict and my using was nothing like hers. In recovery I discovered if I was using something every day and comparing myself to a heroin addict chances were I had a problem!

In meetings I heard people who had been in my situation and had found a solution, a way to stay clean and really start living life. I decided I wanted what they had, even if it meant abstaining from all drugs and alcohol. I kept hearing "this is a program of honesty" and I really struggled with this. My truth was buried so deep it took a long time to find it.

It was hard to let go of my old life at first. It was all I had known for many years. In the early days I had to remove all the external triggers from my world. I had to clear my home of all drugs, paraphernalia and anything associated with using. I went as far as throwing out wine glasses, lube and dusty old porn DVDs. I deleted all my hookup apps and profiles. I got a new phone and deleted all my using buddies and dealers. I avoided places where I'd used, or was at risk of using again: bars, pubs, sex clubs, saunas, etc. I created a "safe space" where I was less vulnerable to picking up.

Yet the external world was only half of it. I had to take a deep look at my internal triggers. Meetings became a safe space where I learned to open up, by speaking about what was going on in my head I felt better. It helped to crystalise the thoughts that had been spinning around, I felt a sense of relief to admit what was really going on for

me after so many years of pretending everything was ok. Most of all I connected with others who had been going through the same thing.

Some of my issues ran deep and I needed help from a therapist. In fact asking for help is one of the key tools I learned in recovery. I heard many suggestions in meetings, some I embraced immediately because they were easy, or made perfect sense. Others I hesitated with and after returning from one relapse after another I decided to take them all on board. Suggestions are received wisdom from people who have found a solution.

I got a sponsor. This was key to my recovery. It took a year of daily phone calls before I really trusted my sponsor. Sounds crazy I know, but a lifetime of “being in control” was hard to let go of.

Meetings and sponsorship kept me afloat while my body and mind detoxed. The love that was showed to me in the fellowship was priceless, it allowed me space to get well before I learned to love myself.

I had to work Steps 1, 2 and 3 so many times that they are now a daily practice. I know I’m an addict; running on my own will power is dangerous so I hand it over to something bigger than me each day. I’ve made so many mistakes in recovery, what was key was to learn from them. I’ve learned to let go of my homosexual perfectionism and embrace the fact I am on a journey of recovery now. Most changes for me were gradual and subtle, but looking back over the past two years they all add up to something quite significant. I now have hope.

I could write plenty more about how good my life has become in recovery, but I’ll keep it short: Today I am living my new life to the full, I am content and grateful.

- Mike A.

## **CMA saved my life**

---

Before I started my journey of recovery, I was well aware that I was an addict. In fact, I embraced the addict. I thought it was cool. I was sure that I was never going to end up being the way I ended up. Not in my wildest dreams. I even used to hate the name “junkie”, but by the end of my using that’s what I was – the perfect example of a junkie.

I used to live in a house that was in an alley. Drug users used to sit in the alley and I would think I was better than them. I used to look at them and think, “Oh poor people!” Only once did it cross my mind that the only difference between them and me was that they were in the alley and I was in my house.

I started using drugs as a recreational thing in clubs – ecstasy every month, just to be part of a crowd of boys who I thought were the coolest, the most handsome. I wanted to fit in. My way of fitting in was to take ecstasy with them. Obviously, since I have the disease of addiction, this escalated to two pills, then ten. Then I started using cocaine and alcohol. After a few years of using cocaine and alcohol, I realised I couldn’t stop. Someone dared me to spend a day without drinking or using and I couldn’t do it. Instead of trying to seek help, I thought it was cool. “I’m an addict! Great! I want to live a life like Marilyn Monroe and die young like her – of an overdose and still fabulous!”

But things started getting worse. My addiction started taking a toll on my relationship with my partner of seventeen years. He didn’t drink, or smoke, or take drugs, or anything. So, for him, I tried a few methods to resolve the problem – hypnosis, psychologists, psychotherapists – I even went to 12 Step meetings for the first time, with my partner accompanying me. At that meeting I only heard the differences and not the similarities. I even convinced my partner that the more I went to those meetings, the more I wanted drugs. Then I was introduced to crystal meth. Crazy enough, it seemed to be the solution! When I tried crystal meth, I stopped my cravings for cocaine, alcohol, or any other drug. At the time it was not an easy drug to find in the UK. So I would go for six months, or even a year,

without other drugs or alcohol, just waiting for crystal meth. It was the only thing I wanted. For my partner, this was heaven's gift – I wasn't misbehaving for long periods of time. Soon enough I learned how to get crystal meth from other countries, crossing boundaries that I had never thought I would cross.

Then the long benders started. My sexual inhibitions were gone. so was any type of integrity. I would do anything to take more and more "tina" – and I would go for days. As this was happening, life as I knew it was crumbling in front of my eyes, but I couldn't see it. Unfortunately, my partner passed away with cancer. With his passing, I lost my love, my safety net, my home, my security; I lost everything I had and became financially bankrupt as well. He was very kind and left me quite a bit of money for me to secure a future, but as an addict I blew that money within two months – all on crystal meth. Then I found a friend who was in a similar situation – at a cross-roads. He was addicted but didn't know it; I was addicted but did know it! We got together to play and party with crystal meth, but what we really did was, without thinking, bring each other to our rock bottoms. My dearest friend went to rehab. I stayed behind in a new flat, alone, without friends, paranoid, isolated. My friend called me every day for nearly a year. We spoke for hours about his recovery and what he was doing. Then I thought – "If I want to carry on being his friend, I need to do something about my addiction!"

Fortunately – or unfortunately – when I started my journey, I was infected with shigella and was quarantined in my apartment by the Council for 40 days. By the time I went to my first meeting I was already almost two months sober. I went with a lot of reservations, thinking, "That's not going to work. I have so many problems. I have to add all these steps and meetings and sponsors and suggestions to all my problems!" I felt a bit overwhelmed, even though at that first meeting the chair spoke for 25 minutes and I identified with him for 25 minutes. I felt that someone had told him my story and that he was taking the piss out of me and everyone in the meeting was in on the joke. That's the paranoia that comes with this drug. That's the person I became – full of fear and everything was about me! The most important suggestion I heard at the time was, "Keep

coming back” and so I did. As I kept coming back, I kept hearing my story again and again, from different people and in different ways. I realised that this wasn’t my story – it was our story.

There was still something missing. There is something very particular about crystal meth and its effects which I felt wasn’t being addressed in the meetings. It felt like a taboo and I was afraid of saying the wrong thing. Then I heard from my friend in rehab that a Crystal Meth Anonymous meeting was being set up in the UK. At the beginning I felt uneasy about going to it and finding people I may know. The first day I walked through the door, there were a few of us sitting around a table. When people started sharing, I felt that I had arrived home. The secretary asked me to read out “Today I Can”. I felt every word that I read out, like it was written for me.

From that day on, I put all my effort and strength to do my suggestions, to get my sponsor, to do my steps. I did a lot of service for CMA. I love CMA as CMA saved and changed my life forever. I did all the roles of service that could be done – I wanted to be very much in the centre of the boat. I helped set up meetings. I sponsored a lot of people. I wanted to give back to newcomers what I had been given – that there is a solution, as the Wednesday CMA evening meeting is called.

Now I have done the steps a few times. I am not rich, but I have learned that I don’t want to be rich. I don’t have a corner office on Canary Wharf with a wonderful view, but I learned that that’s not what I really want. I am learning that I feel at my best when I am helping other addicts, or people who simply need help. I have a lovely home. As the Promises say, my financial insecurity has slipped away. The Promises do materialise. In my case, very slowly, but they have. Because I am an addict, I sometimes take for granted how far I have come.

Life on life’s terms is not easy. I thought that when I got clean I would meet a prince and live happily ever after. I found out that I have cancer and other health conditions that I have to address – all of them related to my using. Like, for example, when using I forgot to brush my teeth and I did crystal meth for ten years! Simple things that I have to re-educate myself to do. Over all, from the

day I started at CMA until today, no matter what life has thrown at me, I don't think about using crystal meth. I know it will only make things worse. When I start, I can't stop, but since I started recovery, life is always better, no matter what. For me, recovery is a life or death decision and I choose life. All I need to do is do the next right thing. For me, this always involves prayer – I believe in God above all things – God, address Heaven. I use the AA Big Book Step 3 and Step 7 prayers daily.

What works is going to meetings and keeping my connection with God – it's what has kept me clean and changed my life. I never dreamed that I, little me, would be sitting in the biggest meetings of CMA in California, giving my life story and helping newcomers. For me, that's life beyond my wildest dreams.

I would like to say that my head has stopped lying to me. My head, however, sometimes tells me that I'm worthless, I'm useless, I'm a nobody. I recognise that that voice is trying to trick me into using and into changing the way I feel, one way or another. And so I remember two very important things: Firstly, a friend reminds me that I have overcome crystal meth, that I am almost six years clean and sober – that's not an easy thing to do. It is a big achievement in my life. And secondly, I remember a beautiful passage from the *Drop The Rock* book which talks about an old, ugly rocking-chair – always there. The person who owned it thought it had no value and so he placed it in the attic, but one day he put it into the light and realised that the chair was made of oak wood. It needed to be cleaned. He cleaned it, varnished it, changed the cushions. Then he took it to a store to find out its value – and the owner of the store offered him over \$4000. I think of myself like that chair – I have to do a lot of polishing, cleaning up my defects of character, letting go of my resentments, being compassionate to myself and to others, most importantly having faith in me and in the program. Like that old chair, my value has always been there. I just needed the programme to discover it.

Forever grateful to Crystal Meth Anonymous for saving my life.  
- Alex R.

## Brian's Story

---

"I just don't understand how this happened," my mother said to me not long after I came out of treatment. "How is it possible that you of all people ended up mixed up in all of this?" What she meant is how did I, her well-mannered, overachieving Ivy League graduate son who was in a loving committed relationship, end up an HIV-positive intravenous crystal meth using sex addict with a criminal record? How could I have come close to losing everything I held dear? What she couldn't understand is that the same forces which drove me to be the best little boy in the world also drove a needle into my arm. This is my story, and how I found recovery.

I grew up in a privileged suburb where I was conspicuous for coming from a broken family. After school, while I let myself into an empty flat, my classmates were coming home to mothers who lunched and played tennis at country clubs. I didn't have the clothes that they had and our car had rust spots in its doors.

My parents split up when I was three years old. I saw my dad regularly, but his visits were often stressful and usually began with cross words over late child support and broken promises. My dad had found a new family, and slowly, they drew him further and further away. When we would visit my grandparents together, it became clear that I wasn't shaping up to be the little boy my dad was equipped to understand. Dad and grandpa would watch football in the lounge, but I would sneak off to my grandmother's room and help her set her hair into curlers while we laughed together at *The Golden Girls*. I was different, and even before I understood it, I felt it.

It seems to be a particularly cruel trick of nature that kids often wake up to their sexual identity at roughly the age that they'd rather die than stand apart from their peers. That was the case with me.

I was eleven, maybe twelve. All of a sudden the sensitive little boy who liked to sing, liked science over sports, suddenly became one of those boys who liked other boys. The girls in my class were putting posters of teen heartthrobs in their school lockers and I'd snatch looks at them and feel a thrill, then feel fear. I remember reasoning with myself that no one need ever know this secret of mine, and so I

imagined a box in the corner of my mind, and I stuffed my growing awareness deep inside and locked the lid.

I discovered at this age that the only way that I seemed to be able to distract people from my differences was to be the best at all I did. I was a smart kid, and if I added obsessive work to this, I was a star. In high school I joined the Mock Trial Team, the Chamber Choir, the Debate Team, the Drama Club. I excelled and succeeded, and boy did people praise me for it! Hard work made me popular, made me desirable... made me good enough.

One evening when I was sixteen we got the telephone call that my father had been killed in a car accident. My world broke open and the pain was unbearable. But, in a day or so, the pain dulled to a cool ache. I stopped crying. My grandfather, having just lost his son, shouted at me, "Why won't you cry?" At the wake my grandmother and her sisters screamed and wailed, it was terrifying. My stepmother pushed me towards my father's coffin. But I was unmoving, my insides a tight stony knot. So I put all of this in that same little box and shut the lid. Two weeks later I aced my SATs, six months later the acceptance letters for the three top universities in America arrived. Time stopped for no one.

So I kept going, going, going. In university I finally met other gay people and went to my first gay bar. I couldn't look anyone in the eye without a drink in one hand and a cigarette in the other. I never chatted anyone up, I simply didn't have the courage. Why would anyone want to talk to this short, fat, geeky loser? Not long after, the internet made its debut, and with it, chat rooms and dating sites. I had by this time found my first boyfriend, but the thrill of letting the words on the screen give voice to my deepest desires, a virtual connection, was my first brush with how sex could change how I feel. Only a few short years after this, I could easily sit for six or seven hours at my computer, looking for a local hookup. Someone to act out the things I could never say in person. It was thrilling.

When I was 27 I met the love of my life. He was handsome, broad and muscly. He went to clubs on the weekends and to the gym most weeknights. He and his friends looked like statues and, somehow, I was allowed to tag along. He introduced me to "coke". I remember

thinking, “This isn’t what a good boy does,” but I was willing to give it a go. Within an hour I was flying high, confident, chatty, catching the eyes of handsome boys and making the pretty girls laugh. I was in. I had arrived. I was part of.

From the beginning the coke was a problem. Within a few short years, my boyfriend and I had racked up considerable debt. But we were in love, the future was bright, and within six years we had bought a house in the country, got a dog, and had a fairytale wedding. We got “clean” for the wedding and managed to stay off the coke for around four months.

It didn’t last. Something new appeared on the scene, something that was “legal”. Pretty soon, I was finding both my drugs and my sex online and having both delivered to my front door. “Why not?” I rationalised, I’m gay, I’m not supposed to play by the rules. Love and sex did not necessarily need to be bedfellows and neither did I and my partner. It’s just for this weekend and the next weekend. Every weekend, in fact, for four years. Very quickly, sex became drugs became sex, until one did not, could not, happen without the other. When I first started my chemsex odyssey, people spoke in hushed voices about meth. Meth had ruined the New York scene. Meth had ruined a friend’s life. He lost his car, his job, his flat. I heard he was injecting it?! Well, I will never touch the stuff. I’m a smart guy, after all.

Never came pretty swiftly. First, it was one friendly guy with a pipe. Then he brought a friend. In a few weeks, it was eleven, maybe a dozen, respectable upstanding young men. The days became nights which were soon indistinguishable from the days. While my colleagues came to work on Monday with stories of their weekend activities I repeated the same refrain week after week, “Oh, I just met up with some friends.” But they weren’t friends, and some didn’t have names that I knew or remembered. And some were less than honest, particularly when it came to their HIV status.

So, one month into a new career, I got the news that I was HIV positive. My partner found out the day after. I knew how HIV was transmitted. I knew how stupid it sounded that the condoms just “ran out” after the second day of round-the-clock sex. I felt foolish

to have trusted the words of strangers. But, I just made room for all of these feelings in that little box in my head, just in time for the friendly guy with a syringe to come over.

The downward spiral picked up considerable momentum after I started injecting meth. I was also taking GBL every hour. The weekends now began on a Wednesday and ended late on a Monday night. The sex got darker and darker as yesterday's thrill didn't cut it anymore. I would spend hours on end in forests in the rain looking for sex, in sex clubs, online, in public toilets. Within six months I lost one third of my bodyweight. So twisted was my thinking, however, that when I looked in the mirror, I thought I must be dreaming as I finally had the rock hard abs I had always wanted.

One night on the way to meet someone off of a hookup app, I was pulled over by the police. I had two syringes of meth in my underwear and was arrested for driving while high. I was taken to a cell and compelled to give a blood sample. A reasonable person might have stopped when faced with a criminal record and jail time, when faced with a new career in tatters and a relationship on the verge of collapse. But reason had long since left me. In one of our more lucid moments, my partner and I wondered aloud, "This, it's just too big now, too much to stop on our own."

During the last week of my using and in the midst of a psychotic break, I was hospitalised with pneumonia. I swore from my hospital bed that I had had enough, but I used again the very night they discharged me. In fact, the last time I touched meth was injecting while a cab waited outside to take me to rehab.

It was in treatment that I first learnt about 12 Step recovery. Once I finally came down to earth, I landed with quite a bump. I was a drug addict. I was a sex addict. I could not manage my own life and I was having to be taken out of polite society for my own good. The first thing I learned about recovery was what lay within my control and what lay outside of it. It came as quite a shock to hear that all I could control were my reactions, my choices.

Considering I had spent my life working very hard to ensure that tomorrow went exactly to my plan and requirements, this was my first true spiritual awakening. I learnt that I could choose to worry

obsessively about people, places and things, or I could surrender to the notion that life would pan out in its own way, whether I worried about it or not. Not only this, but that there was a benevolent force at play which was looking after me. If I could stay out of my own stupid way long enough, things were not only ok, they were better than I could have imagined.

And so, for the first time in a long time, I let go of my worry over my partner at home without me. Was he using? Was he clean? Was he dead... he hadn't called today? I tied myself in knots this way and it was exhausting. So I stopped, let go, trusted and got to work on the only thing I could change... myself. I set about unpacking that little box in my head.

I found the rooms of CMA when I left rehab and in them I found love, wisdom and moreover, identification. Here were people who had done exactly what I did... some of whom had already been a part of my using. It was suggested that I didn't have sex for at least six months to a year, which was a blessed relief since I couldn't fathom how I could ever have sex without meth. In those days, anything could trigger a craving... a handsome face, a part of town where I used, anything. I changed my phone number, deleted all my profiles and rid my phone of all hookup apps. After all, I couldn't expect new outcomes to the same old behaviours.

I found a sponsor and got to work. Those early days were very tough, especially as my partner was still using. It was terrifying knowing that there was nothing I could do to help him "get" recovery. He left his job and spent well over a year unemployed and unemployable. I wanted nothing more than to control the fear out of every situation, but it never worked. One day in particular, he relapsed quite spectacularly and I thought this would truly be the end. I reached out to my sponsor and fellows who had lots of clean time, and they helped me separate my love of him from my hate of his illness, and most importantly to keep myself safe. In that great irony of recovery, what finally worked was when I let go of my fears for him, let go of my panic and found a bit of faith. Within a few weeks, my partner found recovery.

I wish I could say that relapse wasn't part of my journey, but I did have a slip. Stuck in self pity, comparing myself to others and playing the victim, I entertained the attentions of a man who wasn't my husband. I had gone six months without sex and I rationalised I had earned it. But, just like I had heard others describe it, the sex picked up exactly in the dark place I left it and I couldn't do it without using a drug, in this case poppers. But, I got honest, called my sponsor, and reset my day count.

That was nearly three years ago. Since then, my life has changed beyond all measure. My relationship has healed beyond my wildest dreams as we have learnt to recover alongside one another, but for ourselves. Both of our careers have been restored and our finances have begun to heal. Slowly but surely, true genuine intimacy has returned and we have chosen to commit to monogamy. Relationships with family have returned and connections with non-using friends reinvigorated. Honesty and integrity pervade every aspect of our lives as we try to practice the principles we have learnt in recovery in every aspect of our lives.

Today, my recovery is the most precious part of my life. I now have friends who I care about and who care about me. I can sit in a 12 Step meeting and finally feel a part of something greater than myself. Today, I have sponsees and I try to pass on what was so freely given to me. I have learnt that the only person for whom I have to work to prove my worth is myself. Learning how to love myself is a process that will take some time and cannot be forced. But I have learnt that acceptance must start from within, and I have a power greater than myself and the love of fellow addicts to help me on my way.

- Brian S.

## Conversations... me and my addict

---

Hey Buddy,

What's up Marky boy?? Long time since we've been in touch...not like you?!

It's me, your best buddy! We go back a long time you and me bro! 100% committed... that's me!

What wrong? I've been hearing rumours you're hanging out with some other people, recovery people, and distancing yourself from me. That you're sick of what been happening with us both. So excuse me, but do I not give you what you want? Ok....so I can be little heavy handed at times, and sorry about the jobs, the friends, the flats, the Hep C and HIV. But when we were in bed together you said you wanted all this to happen! You're a sick fucker too.... just as twisted as me.....no?!

No? Ok, so it's mainly me....but dude, you've kinda made it easy and we live right beside each other. I always say hello when I know you're in a funny mood. Always. I'm a nice guy too you know, not just a sick bastard.

And this shit you're doing now, seriously. Recovery. Please! Honestly it's fucking annoying. I get lonely when you do this stuff....thank god I live so close and still have a voice! And I know sometimes you let your guard down when you think I'm outta town...lol! Which is weird actually, because you know I bullshit and say weird stuff, so why do you believe me so easily?

You're so gullible! I mean that with love....seriously bro.

But fine...whatever. Go talk to God. Yeah I've been reading up about this shit. And FYI....he's trouble. I can't see him and I don't like that, and you shouldn't either. And I will whisper this to you now and again just so ya know. It's my duty as your best buddy. It just is.

But if you ain't gonna speak to me after this letter bro, then forget about me. Let me hide. I'm pissed off because I'm hearing that you want me where you can see me. That's not how it works with us - you know that buddy!

And another thing...

Was it REALLY all that bad? Crystal meth you seemed to love???  
I'm a little offended actually. And I feel isolated. And also a little scared as recovery has changed you. You've changed buddy, and not in a good way in my opinion.

So no disrespect, but hope you don't mind if I try and sneak back in disguise, using some of your other vices. But MUTHAFUKKA....  
it was the crystal meth toy I liked the best! It made such a satisfying whollop sound when it crashed into your life.

But anyway, love ya, and will always be here if you fancy hanging out.

Your best bud,  
Addiction

Dear Addiction,

Thanks for the letter. You make some interesting points. You're a smart guy, always were persuasive, I'll give you that.

So this is a hard letter to write. You've been with me for such a long time, and you're not exactly going anywhere. You've made that clear. So it's more a letter about boundaries.

You crept up on me so slowly and with such subtlety that I didn't see the impact you were having in my life for a long time. Marijuana pointed you out, we became acquainted, and chemicals brought you to the forefront of my life. Then crystal meth gave you the sledgehammer....and you used it.

You had tools and you certainly had faith and trust in those, to enable you to bring me to a place where I was lost, beaten, losing all the good thing in my life...and still you wouldn't stop. You have a twisted mind and you want me to lose everything and everyone. You also have laser like focus. You're smart, patient and cunning and that scares me. You scare me. You know what tools to use, because you know me better than I know myself.

And here's the thing – I'm not saying goodbye to you. I'm not. Because I want you where I can see you. Now it's my turn to use recovery tools to keep you in my line of sight....to be reminded of

you. So when you start whispering and manipulating, my tools will be there to stop you getting what you want from me. No sneaking in disguise anymore “buddy”. And I’m not anymore. Just to be clear.

And the boundaries I’m putting in place, with help and with support and work.....they will be in place every day and I’m going to tend to them with the same passion I used to tend to you. I was codependent. That I’m working on.

It’s tough love now buddy. You’ve had too much of me already, and you are one greedy fucker.

And by the way...I know you can hide. You’re good at that. Recovery tools will help me see you as long as I use them. Like a torch. So don’t think for one second I will forget you like I’ve done so many times before. That was my mistake. Well, not anymore.

So this isn’t goodbye.....in some ways it’s hello. On my terms.

Regards  
Mark C.

## **Time to walk the walk**

I have learned that being in recovery is not just about being sober, there is a lot more to it. Thanks to fellowships I stop using drugs; from that moment a process of healing was triggered. All human beings go through traumas, but in my case they have become core issues so deep that it’s been really hard to track the root of the problem. Since I came into the rooms there is where I’ve been focusing, I’ve been digging in the past to understand why I behave the way I do, in that path I get to know myself, trying to do corrections wherever possible, at the best of my capabilities, at the convenient moment. Being in recovery has given me the opportunity to make big changes, try to become a better person, an upgraded version of myself. This is work in progress.

I learned that I'm the result of a very complex mesh of anxieties, unresolved traumas, shame, distorted values, pride, fears, etc., all together entangled in a way that has become absolutely intoxicating. It's no surprise then I have spent my life hiding behind drugs and alcohol just not to face the reality. The key is to simplify that mesh, focussing on each issue at the time, digging deeper and deeper to find out what's underneath. It's like peeling an onion, you get rid of one layer but trust me, there is always another.

Looking back at my childhood, like many other people, there was dysfunctionality, the alcoholism of my father, there was violence at home, the poverty of my family, an overprotective mother. I always felt less than anyone else. Now as an adult is time to take responsibility and move on. As a kid I was shorter than average, very skinny. Very intellectual, more interested in reading books than playing football, I couldn't understand why I was supposed to do all these "boyish" things. All these made me a target to bullies. Being heavily bullied was a situation that escalated over the years until my teens and definitely marked me deeply. As a result I grew up hiding from people, unable to develop social skills, insecure, resentful, isolated. Around the age of eight I was sexually abused by a sixteen year old guy. I remember feeling guilty and shameful, scared of anybody finding out. Today I resent this man for having stolen from me the possibility to explore my own sexuality, it was chosen for me. All my future sexual behaviour has been influenced by this event. Being introduced to sex at such an early age made me very anxious as a teenager, about that first encounter. Therefore I ended up being really promiscuous, on one side as a way to overcome my own sexual insecurities, on the other side believing that I was the only homosexual in the world, I had to take on every opportunity of being with a man.

When alcohol and later drugs came into my life I was able to overcome my social and sexual anxieties. Drinking made me the life and soul of the party, a line of "charlie" or a puff of "tina" would turn me into a insatiable sexual monster with no inhibitions. I went for it full on. I was eighteen when I started hanging out in gay bars and clubs in Caracas, there I felt accepted, everyone seemed to want to

have me around.

I went to university and got a degree in geophysics, then went to work for oil companies for fourteen years. I had a successful career in spite of my excessive lifestyle, for me it was all about having fun, somehow I was getting away with it.

I used all sort of drugs, whatever was trendy at a certain point, I certainly was hooked on them all at a certain stage, but nothing like crystal meth and GBL. It was G&T that finished me up. I started hanging out in that London chemsex scene, going out to saunas, cruising bars, sex parties, my weekends were all about getting high and fucking lots of men. I was finding it harder and harder to stop. I was getting carried away until Mondays, and it went from there to Tuesdays, even Wednesdays. Obviously this got me in trouble at work. I lied and manipulated my employer until they said that's it and I got the sack. I fucked up my career. That was the summer of 2010. That was a turning point in my life, from that moment I started using Crystal and G every single minute, day in and day out. I was doing it to cover my shame, I didn't want to face what I was doing to myself, it was a self destructive path. I carried on like that for the next six years. I was selling drugs. I was slamming two or three times a week, sleeping very little hours. My mental health deteriorated, I was suffering with severe psychosis, I was so isolated that the voices in my head became my only company.

I was trapped in my addiction and I couldn't find the way out. It was painful not to be able to stop. It became agony to the point that I was suicidal, I tried to end my life on several occasions, unsuccessfully. I looked for help, went to detox, did counselling, support groups, nothing seemed to work for me, but I kept trying.

Until one day, I remember I was running out of drugs, I was seriously freaking out; I was really scared because I couldn't imagine what could be life without drugs. Then something clicked in my mind. I remember somebody had told me about CMA. I went to that first meeting, it was all so overwhelming and emotional for me. I felt motivated, I went back home and got rid of all drugs left there. Next day I realised I had survived 24 hours sober, so I thought perhaps I could do another day sober, this was the opportunity that I'd been

waiting for, I couldn't just miss this bus, so I went to another meeting. This is what I've been doing the last 23 months, focusing on one day at the time and I'm very proud of it.

Yet still I'm dealing with the consequences of my addiction, I still have the marks on my arms from slamming, lost a few teeth, a reminder of the abuse I did to my body, I have scars in my heart that haven't healed and a lot of shame. In August 2016 I was sent to prison for an offence that occurred when I was still using. I spent eight months there, but I was determined to get something positive out of it. I continue working my Steps over there. It's been hard work, but BOY very liberating. Along with that sentence came a deportation order, so after prison I was transferred to a detention centre where I've been for the last nine months.

So as you can see, just because you are clean, life is not going to be all pink and roses, but you have to be prepared to accept those challenges and what comes out of it is that you feel like a stronger person. I've had to face a lot of my fears, but in sobriety I've learned the skills to deal with them.

My relationship with a Higher Power, that's God in my own terms, is all very recent. I've spent my life ignoring its existence, rather it was like I was hiding from him afraid of him disapproving of my lifestyle, a way to mask the guilt perhaps. When I came into the rooms, I had to come with an open mind, I was so battered emotionally that I was willing to do whatever it takes to get out of that hole. I notice that people that have some kind of spirituality in their life were kind of happy and I wanted a bit of that. The first time that I went to a service, that was nearly two years ago, I cried my entire soul out. On that day I realised of what I've been missing all those years. I am not sure if this is what some people call an spiritual awakening, but gosh it feels good. God came to fill that void that was left by the drugs. You can't force anyone to have faith, not even yourself, but if you are willing to believe all you need to do is plant that little seed, trust me it grows. Having accepted God into my life has brought peace to my tormented soul. You reach a point when you find that connection, and when you do, you must keep exercising it to make it closer. Having God by my side makes me feel loved, protected, gives me

strength and courage. Now I know that wherever I go, whatever I do, I am gonna have God with me and I gonna be alright.

- Eduardo C.

## **Gradual change**

---

I grew up in a religious home, without a lot of alcohol around, no drugs to be seen, even though we were really immersed in codependent systems and excessive food consumption, control and types of abuse. Growing up gay in the 80s and 90s in a Jewish surrounding was no easy job, I had to hide a lot. On TV all we knew of gay people was AIDS and that terrified me. The idea of rock stars dying from that, or drug overdoses, created a certain fear and fascination, all in the same instant. I felt very lonely most of the time, found connecting with people very difficult and found comfort first in the sweets and snacks cupboard at home and later in my adolescence in masturbation, lots of it, everywhere. Then I started having sex and was looking for it everywhere too. In synagogue I would think of it as much as in my therapist's waiting room and in the car on the way back from school. I never felt good enough and always had more emotions than I could handle and they would spill all over the place wherever I was: overreacting, being aggressive, and many times in having fun. My sexual fantasies would get me out of the present but wouldn't fix anything. The pain was there, it was underneath and mild depression seemed to be my natural state.

At fifteen I also started drinking, every once in a while when I went out with friends from school. I didn't like the taste of alcohol so I had shots of tequila and they were perfect to get me drunk quick and not to have to taste it for long. Under the influence I would bully girls into kissing me, just for the sport and to show to my male friends.

At eighteen I moved to London and started going out on the gay scene, without having to hide from my parents where I was going

and having to pretend I was going home after being out with my straight friends, only to go out immediately after. I could go out as I pleased, fuck whomever I pleased, drink as I pleased and try new things as I pleased. I took my first ecstasy pill when offered it by a guy I was flirting with in a club. It was a strange feeling but pleasant (and kind of unpleasant too). Back at his he played songs and asked me to hear the words in a whole different way and it made sense. We gave our all to each other and when we woke up he realised I wasn't as attractive as he thought (my hair was all messy, as the wax wasn't just keeping it styled anymore) and I was needy. I was having my first come down on a cold dark wintry Monday, that led to a flu and laryngitis and a week to recover...and to me chasing this guy and not managing to get another date with him.

This was how the next few times of drug use would be: having a great time, meeting people, having a sensual/sexual encounter and end up sick, with no one to look after me and no one to connect with. This would happen twice a year, maybe three times as I couldn't take more. I would go out drinking often though. It was the early noughties and I discovered electro, the beat that would make me so happy, pint after pint, shag after shag. With that came a lot of low moments. STDs started pretty soon, like gonorrhoea and chlamydia. I would feel guilty, treat them and as soon as they were clear I was out again, dance and look for sex. I would also go to saunas and anywhere not to be still and to avoid whatever was in front of me. Up to here there was nothing too extraordinary for a guy in his early twenties set free from a religious background (or so I think). Only I was always out for longer than my friends and couldn't make close friendships with the ones who were out as long as me. They scared me during the daytime, because I needed my normality in the day. When the drugs were around, the nights started to spill into days and then into weeks. It was all flexible when you're a student. I had pain, but I also had a lot of fun.

When I was 20 I tried crystal for the first time, without having a clue of what it was. A man in a sauna was smoking a joint and wanted to have unprotected sex. He offered me the joint and then took me to a flat where we went on to smoke and have sex for hours. In the

morning he wanted to carry on but my body couldn't. I had contracted an STD from him, was uncomfortable and sick. I didn't encounter crystal for a few years after that, but that experience stayed in my mind as the most intense I had had and one I was terrified of. That was basically my experience on drugs: trying to get more than is available, never satisfied and carrying on and on until a collapse, praying an external force would stop me from doing what I was doing and get me to the safety of my bed. I was often glad to be physically sick. It meant I could stop, stay in and stop taking risks. After years of partying and finding and losing myself in the nightlife, having great experiences and horrible ones, I contracted HIV. To this day I don't know which of the risky situations led me there, but I'm sure I was drunk and/or on drugs when that happened. Having taken PEP before, and been on cycles of testing myself, freaking out, getting the all clear, only to start it all over again. I sought counselling on several occasions, but it didn't change the behaviour for too long and the cycles continued. After becoming HIV+ my self-esteem, which was low already, got even lower. I suddenly felt dirty from inside, even more apart from the rest of humanity and more alone. I did have friends who helped, but ultimately it was me and "it". With time I found an underworld of HIV+ people having unprotected sex and taking drugs. It was perfect for me because I didn't like myself even more. The risk taking, pleasure chasing occupied my discomfort and meant I could destroy myself even more while pursuing pleasure. I worked for a cocaine addict who was famous in his own country, but as soon as that job was done I stayed up nights and made excuses with work. I was also in a long distance relationship with a guy who did a lot of cocaine. Whenever we would meet we would drink and do cocaine. I started to do it more and more. I would be in a club with him, get high and go to the toilets and look for sex. Once I tried to have sex with his friend in his bedroom's bathroom. The next day he asked me what had happened and it really damaged our relationship. We held it off for another year but he broke up with me on Skype.

After six months of partying a therapist suggested a couple of times I consider rehab. I could see that my life was spiralling and I had no

control. If there were drugs in front of me I would do them and was surrounding myself with people who did them more and more. I was paying for rent boys, letting any Tom, Dick, or Harry inject me with crystal, having paranoid crazy dreams...the lot. One day I had a guy I didn't fancy in my flat give me GHB on its own. After a dealer brought crystal we started snorting it. We were kind of having sex on my bed when I noticed I had shit all over me. It had probably been there for the past hour or more as the guy sat on top of me. That was never my thing. After this I agreed with my therapist I needed help and rehab might be a good idea.

The first thing I came across in treatment was the love. I was welcomed and given warmth by people of all different walks of life, people whom I had never shared intimacy with. I learned that what I had was an illness, a mental condition, and the only way to remedy it was to be compassionate, loving and keep it in the day. Also to find a Higher Power that is loving and not there to punish me. Connection was my medication and I got it through prayer, meditation, meetings, fellowship. At the end of my four weeks at treatment I decided to stay two more to look further at my stuff. At the end of that I accepted to go to secondary treatment for three months. When that was nearly done I accepted to stay another month, then another and then the final sixth month. I followed suggestions even when it would make me so angry I would overreact, kick the garden chair, or the greenhouse. I've learned everything I do has consequences and as long as I can handle them I can do whatever I want. My recovery is mine, no one can save me, I'm responsible for myself – though painful, this was the most empowering thought. It's what kept me doing the next right thing to the best of my ability. Of course I didn't follow all suggestions perfectly and did self-harming behaviours, but I kept learning from all this.

I got a sponsor soon after leaving treatment. He had my best interests at heart and I'm with him to this day. He showed me that to do service to others benefits you, and ultimately it's about us feeling better. For an addict that is self-centred (the nature of our illness) this logic helped a lot. As a result I become a productive member of society. Also I don't need to feel as much guilt and shame anymore.

After leaving treatment I stayed locally, near the centre and followed the suggestion of staying around for six months to the day. As I started meeting people in the fellowship I built myself a network of recovering addicts to support me before I moved back to London and by doing this I stayed safe.

I also learned about boundaries. I didn't have sex for nine months in early recovery and was then doing it every once in a while, processing the feelings around it, as sex was also very connected to my using and took so much energy in my life. When I got into recovery I also didn't know how I was ever going to get back into my creative career. Gradually and slowly though I started getting back to that as well. I met a fellow creative in the rooms and we developed a project together. I started performing, which I always wanted to do but had never given it a proper go. From there I am today in a place I never thought I would be in my professional life.

The Steps have been transformational for me. I could only believe that I was an addict through doing Step 1 and to build proper faith through 2 and 3, to free myself from part of the past through 4 and 5 and what a relief! Then start looking at myself better through 6 and 7. At one year clean some people from a different fellowship and I (I always attended AA and NA) started to meet up to set-up a CMA meeting in London. I was terrified but kept turning up and staying connected to my sponsor. I was the secretary of this brand new meeting in this brand new fellowship in London and that commitment gave me so much: confidence, responsibility, connection, growth and so much more. Each commitment I took in the programme (the first one was greeter) kept me in recovery, moving forward and kept me in the middle of the bed of recovery as they say. Fellowship has been essential to my survival as well. Even if it felt so uncomfortable to be there at times, having coffee or food after meetings with people I didn't know well, without a drink in my system, the persistence and going back to same meetings and doing fellowship in them made me really connect to the community and make great friendships and stay clean and sober. I would speak to other addicts every single day on the phone and text them, in the messages I would write everything I was feeling and thinking. I used to call this

vomit texting. That's what I needed at the time and it got me out of so much trouble...

I started dating my partner when I was two years sober and even though it didn't start as intense and rushed as in other situations in the past (thankfully), or because of it, we kept seeing each other and got together gradually. We've got to know each other and grow together and go through hard times and amazing times and kept talking things through and being honest and open and willing. I put recovery first and for that reason we're together to this day. I don't know what tomorrow will bring but for the moment we are very happy together, in a much realer way than what I learned happiness was from films, or ideas friends threw around. When I was two and a half years into recovery I also started therapy again and for the first time in my life I could work through things and not be on a come down, hungover, drunk, or go drinking the evening after therapy. I am making changes and not just dwelling in my self-pity and difficult feelings.

I've had some very hard feelings in recovery and can still feel quite overwhelmed a lot of the time, but six years in and I haven't used a day at a time, and I've got the tools I need to deal with life and don't expect life to be perfect anymore.

I never stop learning in recovery and I am very aware that it's not just an uphill journey, but it's a beautiful journey full of gifts and love and life. When I am really stressed out and in a self-destructive place I can still think of using sometimes, it hasn't left me completely, I'm not cured. I learned that there is a saboteur inside me who wants to drive me to the darkness no matter what, to pull me away from self-love and destroy every living thing in my life. I don't need to act on it today though and I don't have that physical craving in my body driving me there like in the past. It's powerful but not as hopeless as it once was. I play the tape forward, talk to fellows, go to a meeting and it passes quickly most of the time. I have such a full adult life today, which I can cope with and do well in. I still practice a daily routine that I developed in my first year of recovery that includes meditation, a gratitude list, a daily reading and a prayer. I couldn't do life without it and it doesn't take more than twenty minutes of my

day. I still have service commitments and attend meetings regularly. Whenever I'm away from the city, I look for meetings in the places I'm going. I am so grateful for the life I have today that was only made possible by 12 Step programmes and I love CMA, I feel I can share anything here and I won't be judged. I look forward to all incredible things still to come, one day at a time.

- V. H.

## **The power of good-bye**

---

I first tried crystal meth in Australia, where it's known as "ice". Coming out of a bad relationship, after a bad break-up before that, I reveled in the fact it turned me into a sexual outlaw with no morals, boundaries, or limits. Quite soon after I started injecting I met my current partner, who was visiting from London. After a whirlwind six-month, long distance romance I moved to London to be with him. My addiction came with me. I coerced my partner into trying crystal with me and he enjoyed it. At first we would only binge use every few months, but eventually I would be secretly using on my own, finding guys to have chemsex with that he didn't know about. I was leading a double life of sorts as I was in the throes of planning for our wedding and slyly using on the side.

After we got married and settled in South London my husband asked me to stop using. He said he didn't enjoy it anymore, especially after a porn star friend of ours died due to his habit. I promised him I would quit after my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. We went to Berlin for an extended party weekend, which took us weeks to recover from, before I came to CMA. My husband's best friend was in the program and took me. At my very first meeting in Soho I found a sponsor. He's still my sponsor to this day and I love and adore him dearly.

I managed to stay clean for around 50 days, but was half-hearted about the program at best, relapsing in Chicago when I got so resentful with my husband at a dance club after a quarrel that I went

off and used to spite him. I came back to the rooms and then when we attended Tel Aviv Pride relapsed again around 50 days. We were at a sex party and I discovered some guys covertly smoking “tina” and I joined them and smoked the pipe dry. My husband was not impressed.

I stayed clean again for around 60 days and then with everything I hadn’t dealt with in my life – my father’s recent death, my loneliness at not having my own friends in London, missing my family in Australia, being jealous of people my husband was spending time with – I woke up literally possessed in the middle of a hot August night. I got on an app and quickly found someone who had “tina” and wanted to inject with me. I drove over to his place excitedly. I was so eager to hit the “fuck it” button I did the biggest slam I had ever done. Afterwards I felt like a zombie and was literally bugged-eyed crazy. The guy quickly threw me out and I drove, without managing to kill myself or anyone else surprisingly, to a couple’s place I had found on an app to continue partying.

I parked my car as it started raining heavily. I couldn’t find where the couple lived, then my flipflops broke and my shirt got soaked so I took it off. I realized I had lost my car too. For the next 10 hours I wandered around Elephant & Castle like a barefoot, half-naked, drug-crazed lunatic, unaware people were trying to avoid me at all costs. Eventually I had the sense to send my husband a message saying I was okay and WhatsApp my location. His response: “Don’t move. I am sending someone to get you!”

Our flatmate arrived, grabbed me and took me home in an Uber. My husband refused to look at me. The next day I slept and the following day it became clear I had to stop using crystal meth, or face losing everything. My sponsor suggested going to the same rehab he went to. Mercifully, they had a place free. The following day I drove myself there, feeling very empowered that I was doing the right thing.

During my stint in rehab I had numerous memory flashbacks to my childhood, but couldn’t be sure if many, or any, of them had actually happened. When I came out 28 days later I Skyped my mother in Australia to ask her about them.

“I don’t know for sure if they happened,” she told me, “but I do have to tell you that your father played Russian Roulette with me with a loaded gun to my head.” This was after he stopped going to AA and was drinking more heavily than before. My mother, who had attended Al-Anon, added that the ladies in her Fellowship insisted she take her children and leave, otherwise my father would kill us all, as he threatened to do on numerous occasions. So one day, without warning, my mother grabbed me, and my younger brother, and we went into hiding for 18 months. I realised only then that the rooms have saved my life twice, once as a child and once as an adult. Awakened then to the true power of the rooms, I threw myself into the program following what I like to call the “5S” principle – Share, Sponsor, Service, Steps and Spirituality.

I did everything I was told to, even when I thought I knew better, or my self-will was refusing to play along. Sometimes when I didn’t want to go to meetings I just let my feet do the thinking to get me there instead. It was always the wisest move. At times it was hard, but it kept the cravings away and I stayed away from triggers. I also found that my clean time day count became one of the most valuable tools for keeping me clean and stopping me from using. Not only did I never go back to using again, but I didn’t want to go back to “Ground Zero” for my day count ever again either.

After completing the 12 Steps with my sponsor over the course of a year, getting involved in service commitments at various CMA meetings and, perhaps most importantly of all, handling difficult decisions over to my higher power, I can say that I am not just like my old self, but truly a better version of me.

I am a sponsor myself too now with three sponsees in London, one of whom I even helped go to rehab. As a 50+ happily married gay man I believe I am living proof of the “pay it forward” notion of the 12 Step program and that recovery really does work, as long as you work hard for it.

- Marc A.

## Brotherhood bound

---

I was lost in a haze of perceived permissive pleasure.  
I thought it was fun.  
A new brotherhood, I thought I had found.  
High and Horny, Fun and Fine.  
Boys who will say anything for a line.

My friends asked after me.  
I was tired, I said. I am fine.  
The line became a needle  
And yet, still I was fine.

They stretched out until they disappeared.  
Much like my clarity and my work in charity.

I was gasping for air, drowning in my mental fog of fast paced fumbling.  
My story like many I had seen....  
this, when realised, it began to be humbling.

I had enough, I was not fine.  
I sat down and I listened.  
I judged and my forehead glistened.  
I kept coming back,  
My impenetrable wall, it seemed had started to crack.

My false brotherhood, over time was gone.  
Its memory indelibly marked within.  
But fulfilling its promise a brotherhood, quite new.  
That was always there, who knew?!

Today I can value myself and others.  
I do not have to be lost.  
My choice, chosen life of recovery,  
Keeps me warm from the drug filled frost.  
- Daniel W.

## Thank you CMA!

---

Before I left for university my Italian grandfather said to me in broken English, “If anyone tries to give you drugs you just say no”. My second year at university I found myself in my friend’s basement where the guys were passing around a joint. It got close to my lips and I saw my grandfather’s face and didn’t take a puff. Two years later in 1986 after graduation I moved to London. I had studied here and also came out as a gay man here. I moved in with a gay couple and at our first house party for friends I ended up trying my first hit of acid. I suppose I wanted to fit in with my new friends in my new city. A year later when ecstasy came out I tried that for the first time. It was fun and everyone felt connected on some level. I only used ecstasy a few times. When I met Peter in 1991, he didn’t use any drugs. We dated for two years and in 1992 we both found out we were HIV positive. The only treatment back then was AZT which was killing people so I refused to take it. Peter died in my arms the next year and I went into a deep depression. I blamed myself for his death because we had a huge fight on a holiday and after that he refused his medication and chose to die. Then in 1996 I had two bouts of pneumonia and a CD4 count of 20 and was preparing to die and cashed in my home. My sister and parents come over from the US to be with me. Triple therapy had just become available and my mother pleaded with me to try the new meds. In three months I grew stronger and started to feel my old self again.

I wanted to live my life and experience things I never did before. I had my life back and at the time no one knew if the meds would continue to work, or what the long term side effects were, so I decided to explore the world of clubbing and drugs. Initially I used ecstasy and ketamine to dance. This progressed to include cocaine and then in 1998 whilst in Fire Island at a circuit party I had my first bump of crystal meth. This was like no drug I had ever taken before and the initial euphoria was exhilarating. I ended up travelling to many different circuit parties around the world taking drugs at each one. To finance this lifestyle I started to sell drugs. I took many risks taking drugs with me on my travels. I ended up being arrested in NYC

in 1999 and spent four months in Riker's Island. I thought I was invincible but had gotten greedy. I was put on a gay wing and had to pay protection by buying four packs of cigarettes to the head of the wing. It was horrible inside and I couldn't have survived if it wasn't for the emotional and financial support from my sister and her wife. I put them through hell during those months and the years after with my continued drug use. I was released after four months and returned to London. I continued to deal drugs to pay back my sister and the lawyer's fees. I was arrested again in Greece and in London, but this still didn't make me quit using or selling drugs.

In 2005 I decided to stop clubbing after having a grand mal seizure in a club from too much cocaine and several days of no sleep. I also decided to stop using crystal meth as I had several friends die from it. I also didn't like the horrific comedowns from crystal. I did, however, continue my sex parties at home using coke, pills and GHB. These were fun at first and I got to explore my sexuality, but soon people at my parties started to steal things from me. One guy took all my credit cards and charged up £4000. Guys also would overdose on GHB and I'd have to play nurse and look after them. Still with these horror stories happening to me it wasn't enough to make me quit. Being off the crystal meth did allow me to engage more with the world. In 2006 I joined the London Gay Men's Chorus as I always loved to sing. This was a positive force in my life and I loved it and still do. I also enrolled in classes and workshops in the college of psychic studies as a way to get in touch with my spiritual side. These pursuits allowed me to stay clear of crystal meth for five years until 2010 when someone showed me a new website for bareback sex. I first hooked up from this site and I found myself "slamming" crystal. I told myself I was good and hadn't used it for five years and to not let it become a problem. It soon did become a problem. I was coming to rehearsals high and to class as well. I found myself hooked on this sort of using and to come down I used sleeping pills and Zanax. In 2013 I had overdosed with 78 sleeping pills and two months later found myself in a hospital detox unit for ten days to get off them.

I knew I had a problem with my drug use in 2012. I saw psycholo-

gists and had CBT. I also tried group therapy. These didn't work for me. I met with a specialist who ran a weekly drop in and I got a key worker. I also attended the club drug clinic and saw a psychiatrist who prescribed me anti-psychotics for my extreme panic attacks from crystal meth and my overuse of sleeping pills. The real turning point for me was that in 2013 a good friend told me about CMA and took me to my first meeting. It was nice to see familiar faces at the meeting as I recognised guys from my clubbing days. I felt at home at CMA and able to share my story with the people there. They were clean from drugs and prepared to show me how they did it. I got a sponsor within a week, I chose him as he had several years clean and I wanted that. What I found very difficult was that my drug use was intrinsically linked to sex. I couldn't have one without the other. I would get a few weeks clean and then want to have sex so ended up using chems again. I knew deep down that recovery for me meant abstinence, but this was proving very difficult to achieve. I did find so much support and love in the rooms, so I kept coming back after each relapse.

So how does a kid from a middle class American family with loving parents and a good upbringing fall into using drugs and the chemsex scene? Well, everyone uses drugs for different reasons. I had a lot of childhood trauma that left scars into my adulthood. I grew up Catholic and always thought I was going to hell for being gay. I was bullied badly at school and beaten up in the hallways and had no real friends. I was suicidal as a teenage, but I put all this to the back of my mind and carried on with life. My HIV diagnosis and the death of my partner from full blown AIDS led to severe depression. I was scared of life and had very low self-esteem and self-worth. I was prescribed anti-depressants and sleeping pills to cope. Drugs and the chemsex scene were my escape from reality. I was very lonely and craved intimacy with another human being. I thought the drugs were giving me that, but I was very wrong. I grew more lonely, isolated and paranoid with each encounter.

In August of 2015 I had finally had enough of it all. I was tired of the horrific comedowns and suicidal thoughts and getting ill all the time. I was finally ready to surrender and make recovery my way of

life. I knew my journey wouldn't be easy, but I was willing to follow suggestions and listen to others' experiences and how they did it. I got a new sponsor in CMA and he is someone I can really talk to and be honest with. After 90 days we started to work the Steps. Working the 12 Steps gave me profound insights into my life and my drug use. I finally admitted I was an addict and could not get clean on my own, I needed help. I slowly learned how to have sober sex again and this took time and I needed to be patient whilst my brain chemistry got back to normal. I found a deep connection to the God of my understanding and this nourished my soul. I was able to take my spiritual classes again and excel in them. I re-joined my chorus and this time was able to make friends and enjoy performing again. I repaired my broken relationships with my family in the US. I put my sister and her wife through so much in my using by my constant lying and I was slowly regaining their trust again. They continued to love and support me and stood by me throughout my using. The bonds I have in CMA with my fellows and sponsor provide me with unconditional love and acceptance that I never got in the chemsex world. I'm active in the fellowship and do service. I'm a sponsor now and as of today I am two years and five months clean and sober. I'm so grateful to everyone who stood by me and supported me throughout my journey as I could not have done it without all of you. Today my life is full and I'm happy because I'm in recovery, so I make sure to put my recovery first. My obsession to use drugs is gone and that is a huge blessing, so thank you CMA!

- Nicholas G

## **Two and a B or not two and a B? - the daily question**

In Soho there is a corner, just by the Pizza Express/Jazz Bar fusion where, when it rains, a vast puddle is created in the dip where the tarmac has cracked. As the variety of cars and mopeds go past it becomes treacherous to walk the path alongside it. The stretch evokes

a sudden raise in the heartbeat along this stretch, allows the adrenalin to rush, the eyes to dart and your feet become suddenly nimble and Pele-esque as they dance to avoid the impending drive-by soaking. Unfortunately if one is to be caught by the mucky, oil and acid rain solution as it crashes down upon your parade, it is unlikely anyone's insular bubble of routine shall be broken enough for them to even notice. It is laughable to think that anyone should assist you in this moment of degrading distress. This is London and the cliché to call it the concrete jungle, I fear this description to be rose tinted, at least the Amazon's perils are forward enough not to befriend us, fill our heads with dreams before eating us alive. More often than not they'll cut to the chase.

The walk from Pizza Express to the Heath Centre is a short one, probably under a hundred meters – the variety of circumstances one will see is intense. From chanting monks seeking liberation from material world being passed by a chauffeured oligarch in a Bentley, to a homeless person, dirtied and bamboozled asking for spare change from a paparazzi-stalked film star, leaving one of the film studios in £20,000 trainers.

I remember the streets of Soho from my using days as a constant disappointment; the gear was expensive and weak. The clubs full of beautiful boys who always seemed to be taken and on the tease. I'd often wake up in the morning wishing that I'd taken a pile of notes and set fire to them, for I would have saved myself embarrassment, a come down, or a thick head and that awful moment of pulling back the bedsheets to some cadaver which the previous night took an almost Adonis form.

As I got older, the novelty of the club scene wore off – the notes became drug tokens with no use for anything other than eventually: heroin, mephedrone and crack. The daily pleasantries at the needle exchange: the highlight of my routine. The beautiful boys would no longer flirt with me, but just check their possessions were close, for fear of light fingers. The dealers had run out of patience for the posh boy and favours had run out. The boundaries got hacked away at until eventually everything had been crossed – the nose collapsed and the veins in the arms were no longer viable. I was no longer

chipper, nor the life and soul of the party. i was helplessly addicted, broke and dying.

Looking back on pictures of my later addiction, the thing which I find most terrifying is the lack of any form of insight into how bad things had got. I was wafer thin, traumatised and although I had wit and intelligence, as well as being talented, I was unable to put that to any use further than deceiving anybody who'd show me kindness in aid of the next fix. Sadly, I had convinced myself each and every time that this would be the hit, or the drug, or the strain of drug, or the combination of drugs, or the method in which they were taken that would save me from my inner struggle and extinguish my pain. I had lost my friends, family, home and self-respect. I had ripped off countless dealers, dodged several murder attempts and had a higher power intervene on many rooftops, or unsuccessful overdoses. Of course drugs weren't the problem and as soon as I got myself well enough I'd be right back playing the game. The prize being the one true hit that would make everything ok. The mission that had me turning into a carcass in front of all of those who loved me.

I had been splashed by the puddle of life and it had soaked all the hope out of me, taking with it my vibrantly coloured dreams. At a nauseatingly slow speed I was watching them drown, listening to them gargle as they were swallowed through a grate by some hole in the ground. The word fucked went from being a description of intoxication to the definition of every aspect of my life.

How funny, with hindsight I stood outside the Health Centre in Soho and many other places of recovery waiting to pick up. I probably pranged out at a congregation of addicts who looking across the street saw their past selves, lost in some madness - as I do now, when someone gaunt and broken eyed barges past me with that double speed walk. I was lucky that one day a security guard at a club befriended me on Facebook and posted some status about his recovery and after exchanging some messages I ended up meeting him one day and walking into that Health Centre.

I've not taken mephedrone, or derivatives, for over two years, not taken opiates or heroin, or any form of cocaine, nor drank alcohol in just under a year and six months. I've not smoked cannabis in

four months and not even a cigarette in three. To me each morning I wake up having gone to sleep sober is another miracle. Between 2008 and 2015 I couldn't consider going a single day without relapsing. I WAS drugs, it's all I would talk about or think about. It was the driving force in every action and being without some kind of crutch would have been fear inducing.

To give the impression that I just went to one meeting and it was all ok would be a complete fallacy. I was using through the time I was going to meetings, although I stopped all else, I was still smoking cannabis for a long time. I would sell myself the idea that it was harm reduction, but the truth was that I had underlying trauma that I wasn't ready to deal with. I didn't feel safe enough to deal with it, nor trust anyone. It took years of support from the fellowship for me to be completely clean, years for me to trust anyone, especially myself. The dye which comes out of you when that tidal wave hits you takes years of hard work to recreate. The brainwashing that class A drugs do takes years of patient support to undo, but I live each day as it comes knowing that any day of the week somewhere in London I can go and meet with people who are living proof that I don't have to pick up. I can call one of my many friends in recovery who can tell me the truths that I need to hear – be it hard, or be it easy.

The greatest gift of my recovery so far is the peace of mind that everything will be ok, that by working a programme, not taking drugs one day at a time and practicing the principles of honesty, open mindedness and willingness I can overcome any challenge which comes my way.

The other day, I was at work and one of the kids came out of tutoring. He shook my hand, he had read one of my poems and said that he wanted to be a writer because of it (and I just cried writing that). I have friends who have started to go to meetings and have stopped drinking. I've gained the respect of the peers in my industry and I'm acclaimed in my art form. This time three years ago I was selling everything I could for drugs. I have friends who respect me for who I am, not for what I'm smoking.

Each day I pray for, and my higher power grants me, the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I

can and the wisdom to know the difference. For this I have gratitude that language is far too limited cannot express and I pray that every addict who's sodden by the downpour to have the opportunity to feel as I do now.

Thank you to the fellowship for being the support with which I have been able to have an alternative ending to jail, institutions and death.

- Adam W.

## **At this very moment**

---

My name is Natasha and I'm an addict. I am also an out and proud transgender woman, an immigrant from Greece to the UK, a psychologist, a good daughter, sister, and friend to many. All these latter attributes would be irrelevant however, if I failed to make that one admission right after my name: I'm an addict.

I don't know how, when, or what made me an addict. All I know is that I made this life-saving realisation after coming to the rooms of 12 Step recovery, in a state of despair and disrepair. In fact, this might well be an understatement. I was broken; mentally, physically and perhaps what was causing me much of the distress – spiritually. I just couldn't stop using. What started many years ago as “fun” eventually turned into a living nightmare. I didn't want to die, but life seemed less and less appealing. Every use-up, every chaotic weekend, each uncontrollable binge... was slowly chipping away at my soul.

I had just lost a friend to what I believed was an intentional overdose, someone very dear to me. That person was a colleague, a friend, one of the first people I came out to as trans, and he was the one who first told me about the rooms. He said there was a place for us – warm, accepting, where trans and gay people were welcome; a place to stop using drugs. He is now an angel, always by my side, never forgotten. His name was Stuart.

I had no idea I suffered from addiction, although a part of me suspected that something was “off” for a long time. My whole life

revolved around some form of excessive, almost out-of-control activity ever since I could remember. Intense fantasizing as a child; playing the Nintendo for days on end and getting lost in colourful worlds of pixelated bliss. During a very difficult puberty, induced by an unwanted mix of sex hormones in my body, I found myself immersed fully inside the early world of online computing. Nineteen nineties bulletin board systems and chat rooms became my home and I found solace in flickering computer screens – my best friends for years to come.

Progressively, at age 16, I discovered drugs. Alcohol first, then weed. In drugs I found what I had subconsciously been looking for during my entire life – a way to shut my mind up. Drugs made it... quiet. Pleasant even. They gave me calmness, confidence; the ability to socialise, to laugh, to dance; to have uninhibited sex. Drugs really worked wonders for me for a while, and my deep internal discontent seemed cured every time I smoked a spliff, or sniffed, or took a pill. I thought I had found the solution to life, a way to connect with myself and others. I promoted drugs openly to my friends: “What,” I’d say to them, “You haven’t tried X? You are really missing out, it’s absolutely magical!” Little did I know that I was looking for connection in something that would eventually deprive me of my sanity, my integrity, key people around me. The exact opposite of connection gradually manifested; I ended up hiding inside my flat, by myself, using in order to merely... sustain existence. Drugs morphed from a fun thing to a toxic habit; and finally to an almost daily necessity. Even on days I wasn’t using “hard” drugs, I still needed a few drinks to “mellow down” and be myself. My addiction resulted in experiencing a half-life, garnished with drama, chaos and deep mental anguish. I felt desperately lonely; disconnected from self, life and everyone around me. Life did really seem like hell. I didn’t want this anymore. I was trapped.

My first ever recovery meeting came in January 2012. I remember that evening vividly, as it fell on the first spell of winter freeze. Snow was slowly engulfing London as I made my way to a local 12 Step recovery group I’d looked up on the web. What happened in that room, at that meeting, is a bit of a blur. I remember sitting down and

listening to people share about their experiences with using, their chaotic lives and all sorts of horrific repercussions... but also most importantly for me, I heard about how they managed to stop, and stay stopped. If anything, that was what I needed; a sustainable way to curb my drug use, that did not involve moving to a remote island, joining a convent, or ending it all prematurely. I was all out of ideas, but those stories shared by these people felt incredible. Was that even possible? Were they lying? Was this perhaps a cult, a deeply esoteric group of weirdos? I knew instinctively that it was not a pretence, because of how these people looked; their eyes had a glimmer and flair that can only be seen when a spirit is alive, fired-up. They seemed happy, but in a grounded sort of way; was that... contentment? And at that moment, without fully realising what had just happened, I got something I would later recognise as priceless: I got hope. Hope that I could stop as well.

Walking back home from the meeting in freezing temperatures, I felt strangely but pleasantly warm inside. The snow all around me looked beautiful; I knew I had experienced something powerful. Something real. I didn't manage to stay clean straight away. I went to only a few meetings, thinking still that I knew best how to control it all – recovery included. 20-odd days in, I relapsed. I honestly thought it would just be for the weekend – my mind convinced me of that. I didn't understand then, that it was the oldest trick in the book of addiction; my disease was rationalising my decision to use, minimising the repercussions and ultimately denying what I know today, that: any is too many...

It took four months of living hell, with interludes of light that became gradually more and more sporadic, until the pain of using became equal to the pain of living. In early July 2012 Stuart H., my good friend, was found dead by overdose. I was devastated. I knew that this was going to be my fate too – not in a matter of months or years, but possibly weeks at this point. I felt it in my gut, or whatever was left of me that was not completely numbed out by the extreme use of chemicals, cigarettes and alcohol, that the abyss was now in full view. Undeniably so. Encouraged by my therapist, I went back to the rooms. Broken, desperate, with only a tiny glimmer of hope left.

My new state of mind was finally fertile enough ground for suggestions to be implanted and serious action taken. I started doing a meeting a day – my initial goal was to do as close to 90 as possible in the first three months. I was working full-time still at a demanding job – a miracle in itself. Hence my weekdays revolved around working, and then going to a meeting after, followed by fellowship. It was evident that the power that attracted me to 12 Step recovery was the people I was meeting – people who welcomed me, hugged me, and – hurrah – seemed to accept and love me. If only they knew, I thought to myself many a time at first. However, after tuning-in to what was shared in meetings and many long, deep chats with people over fellowship – as they curiously called it – made me realise one thing: we were all so different, yet so similar. Cunningly similar, in fact.

I heard my story in the rooms many times. Not by one person, although sometimes the amount of identification I would get from a single addict's share would be immense – especially from people of trans experience. It seemed that every story, every struggle, every share somehow resonated inside me, not always understanding why. The honesty of the things I heard baffled me, but felt important and exciting. What if I too could share about my deep, dark secrets; my transness, my intense self-hatred and body-dysmorphia; my driving under the influence a thousand times and nearly killing people? My psychotic breakdown and the running around naked in Maida Vale; the selling my car to my dealer for a few grams of drugs – a lovely Italian coupé. Or how about my diving accident, when I was transported by helicopter from an island to an operating table in the city? I was semi-drunk when I front-flipped those 30 feet of rock, landing onto a shallow seabed. The list of repercussions, drama, chaos and questionable behaviours was endless. But it didn't feel damning, like it used to. I felt that I wasn't being judged when I shared, but rather encouraged to be as honest as I could – breaking the wall of denial that harboured my addiction, they told me.

Getting a sponsor and working the steps was truly transformative. What meetings gave me in the short-term, instant relief breaks from my crazy head, the Steps did to change my thinking and behaviours

deeper. Working closely with a few different sponsors to whom I will always be grateful to, I went through the work systematically. That involved putting pen on paper – a magical combination with direct healing effects for my tortured soul. All that was suggested was to be as honest and thorough as I could be and willing to do it all at my own pace.

My Steps involved admitting I was an addict and that if I asked for help I could arrest my addiction. I worked on lifetime resentments against God for making me transgender. Resentments against my family, myself... countless other people, institutions and bad situations I blamed others for. I looked at all the transphobia I suffered from childhood to now; I was still carrying it, externally and internally, which was potentially a major influencer in my overall malady. Detailing the missed opportunities, failed relationships, money burned... and most important, the way I was treating myself and others, as a result of truly disturbing cognitive and behavioural failings. All that wasn't easy. I often struggled, rebelled against it all. These were all the things I was trying to avoid by using, right? So why would I even want to do that to myself, and go there? Was I turning mad, once more?

The opposite, rather. It all slowly, started making more and more sense; I gradually came to realise that I wasn't that bad a person. I was not responsible for my addiction, although its consequences nearly broke me and people around me. I was responsible for my recovery – my spiritual, psychological and physical fitness and well-being – today. My immediate actions took centre stage as a result of the 12 Step programme – all I needed to concentrate on was the day ahead. I didn't need to stop using drugs forever; that sounded scary and an almost impossible feat. I could not even grasp what that meant, let alone control it! I just needed to do what I had to do, so as not to use inside the hours I would stay awake today. Tomorrow, who knows; a new decision would need to be made. The power of deciding, the newly realised choice I had in my immediate actions made sense in other ways too. What was the point of losing sleep for nights on end, regretting past behaviours, choices, wishing things had gone differently. Or worrying and obsessing about a future that

wasn't even here – and yet, mostly terrified me. Just for today, I needed to look at my next 24 hours and be responsible for those, in a groundbreakingly gentle, self-loving, yet firm and consistent way. And it worked.

I still use the past to avoid repeating similar mistakes and I often make plans for the future, but I don't live there anymore. I started being more and more present, embodied, able to sit still. The obsession to use has all but been lifted. Feelings turned from being overwhelming to mostly manageable; some, dare I say, enjoyable at times. Not savouring just the happy, exciting feelings, but also understanding the purpose of things like anger, sadness, and tiredness. Emotions gradually started finding their right place and size inside me, for the first time ever. I was now using the programme, instead of drugs, to help with self-regulation. It was a blessing, and it finally felt like one too.

My life today isn't perfect, but it's good enough. I managed to transition my gender socially and medically through HRT and life-affirming surgeries. The relationship with my family is flourishing. Although I lost friends, I made new ones, and finally understood concepts like boundaries and codependency. I went into a great, loving relationship; and then ended it, consensually, without dramas. Something was definitely changing. I was living life, as it was meant to be.

In 2015 I was made redundant from my job after a long stint in advertising. Instead of resenting my luck and turning it onto me, I trusted my higher power that something better was out there for me. Using the rooms as a major support, I went back to university. Today, I am transitioning my career into something that feels amazing, and fills me with purpose. I came to the rooms to stop using drugs and ended up finding myself, transgressing gender and societal norms. I became mobilised politically, socially, spiritually and was liberated sexually. And I now know the importance of looking outwards, helping others who struggle like me. Giving back some of the love I have learned to accept for myself, and being of selfless service to the world. I am convinced that this is what keeps me clean today. All this cannot be priced, the same way that life itself cannot be

scripted. Just for today, I believe all is exactly where and how it should be, at this very moment.  
- Natasha S.

## **Grateful for my rock bottom**

---

I will start with saying: “Hi, my name is Chris, and I am an addict”. To me, addiction is across the spectrum: alcohol, crystal meth, GBL, mephedrone, gym, shopping, caffeine, codependency, sex, love... basically anything to get that fix to feed the disease which is addiction, to get that temporary high. In other words I am a very dysfunctional addict that knows no limits to feed the illness inside me, which I have learnt to call “sneaky bitch”. In reality, it really did have “no limits” to murdering my soul and self on 22/12/17, but thank god my inner addict (sneaky bitch) failed and I had what I consider a “rebirth” just as my phoenix tattoo suggests “rising from the ashes” to learn a new, different way of life, a “sense of being”, or more commonly known as spirituality.

A familiar quote is “I came to the program to get sober, but I stayed to get spirituality”. The latter part of this quote is the “maintenance” which is an everyday task. For me it only requires to listen; listen to my sponsor, listen to myself and listen to others in the meetings and gradually lightbulbs start alighting, even today... I dropped my daily sober count from 82 days (drugs) to 31 days (alcohol and drugs) today, because I was still lying to myself. My inner addict as always likes to enter through the back door (no pun intended), via ABC (Alcohol Becomes Crystal), but it goes further than that, alcohol is still a drug, still a mind altering substance which allowed my “sneaky bitch” to follow its path of self destruction. My sobriety can only be achieved through abstinence from both alcohol and drugs. Admitting defeat in this way is my journey to winning. I can honestly say, I am 31 days clean and sober today, but I would be lying if I continued saying I was 82 days clean and sober, how can I accept myself if I

continued lying on such an integral part of my recovery. Perhaps this is a “lapse” instead of a “relapse”, what is 51 days lost in comparison to 39 years of my life.

I remember once, my friend Nick naming me the “Ice Princess”, I had built this incredibly thick wall or “Fort Knox”, in other words I had blocked out feeling any kind of emotion until two years ago when I fell in love for the first time ever at 37 years of age. It was doomed for disaster from day one, one addict lost in the disease of addiction and codependent on the same. What followed after the break up was a year of self-isolation, self-harming and finally attempted suicide. I call it self-harming; in other words injecting poison into my veins, not caring for myself, losing 30 kilos in weight, being sectioned, hearing voices, to what I thought would be the final act of attempted suicide. This is why my “sneaky bitch” is a murdering, insane, stealing, lying lunatic on the run, not from others but from myself. This was the physical sense of one year in isolation, but in reality I had built a prison cell inside me, my so called safeguard or boundaries, whatever you call it, it was hell. However I am so grateful for that rock bottom, because quite simply I felt love, which more recently I felt anger and said I felt anger to the person I felt that toward, but in a positive way (never did I know anger could be positive), without the chaos and bitterness fuelling around in my head. This for me is the start of freedom, to begin feeling emotions and feelings in a positive way.

I take “one day at a time”, currently awaiting news on my “application to homelessness”. I was once employed by an investment bank, took a degree in politics, but quickly the slippery slope of drugs and alcohol has led me to homelessness, I went to food banks today and met some wonderful people who give service to others. What I am trying to say is that I was once regarded as a so called “functioning” addict only using on weekends, but quickly that led to being unemployed, no home, no friends, and family (three fabulous, loving sisters) who needed me to hit my rock bottom, to allow myself to realise the true devastation which I was causing myself and others, I was lost in the blackness of mental health, or as Step 2 suggests, insanity. A sink or swim situation, but thank God my higher power

sent me a life jacket to allow me to come out of the darkness and recognise the subtleties in life that bring the sunshine of a new day. I now consider my higher power(s) as my mum and Darius G, my soul mate who relapsed but never returned to the rooms and thus did not receive the welcome chip. However he is still working the rooms with me, because it can only be a force greater than me that can maintain my sobriety, and thus brings the harsh reality that this disease can kill, my soul mate Darius. I have consequently collected the welcome chip on his behalf and currently it resides on his grave with his favourite bonsai tree.

I could continue and explain more about my story – parents dying, paedophile father, uncle and aunt – but in order to break that loop I needed to start feeling. So far I have felt love and anger, and for today that's a great start and I'm blessed for being 31 days clean and sober today. I am so very grateful for the program, allowing myself to live life and so very grateful that I continue to grow and personally develop from what life's lessons may be, and as my personal story title states, I am so very grateful for my rock bottom.

- Chris M.

## **Being a newcomer**

---

Hello, my name is Zuheir and I'm an addict.

I started using drugs at the age of 17. Soon after my father forced me to go to Pre-Med School in Lebanon, but I decided to take the money (\$17,000) and spend it on drugs.

He found out and I was in trouble.

I had decided to go to a film school because filmmaking was always my passion, still is...

In 2012, I had a fight with my father and stepmother and went to Dubai to find a job, but they arrested me and put me in jail and I was deported after three demeaning days because, well, I'm HIV positive and I had no clue!

I went back to Beirut to stay with my father but he kicked me out because I'm gay and HIV positive and his religion (strict Muslim) didn't allow him to care...

Yes, I'm the bad Muslim, well, at least to him and many others I'm sure.

At that time I was doing a lot of drugs, specially freebase.

I decided to deal drugs to pay for my university fees, but unfortunately I didn't get enough customers because I was using all the poisons.

In 2014, I took a course in documentary filmmaking and I decided to come out as a gay and HIV positive man in the Middle East.

The documentary went viral. In the festivals I was interviewed by all the TV channels in Lebanon, literally all of them and I was even on "BBC Arabic" and "France 24".

I was bound to face so much verbal harassment. People on the street recognised me and they were like "the gay guy with AIDS".

Drugs fucked my life .

My life became unmanageable.

I graduated finally after 7 years and I decided to come to London to claim asylum in the UK.

I arrived on June 17, 2017 and I abused drugs, specially crystal meth. One day I got gonorrhoea. I went to a sexual health clinic in London and they told me about their chemsex support clinic.

There I met a great person who helped me a lot and introduced me to the rooms of CMA.

I can still remember the first CMA meeting I attended. Recovery wasn't really on my mind, but something told me to go there.

A lot of people there suggested to get a sponsor and to work on the Steps but I told myself:

"They're fucking sick addicts, I'm not."

After three relapses (15 days, 22 days and 50 days) I began to realise that I couldn't make it on my own and I needed help.

Well, yes, I got a sponsor .

Today is my 66th day clean. I did my "Step 1" and I'm seeing my sponsor at night to help me along "Step two" and towards starting the third one.

I'm connecting with a Higher Power .

You know I always feel there's a great power next to me who protects me always, especially when it comes to my recovery the Higher Power is getting to me everyday .

I'm so proud of myself, yes, I'm a great person and I know it .

As an addict, I believe that when I was using I was disconnecting from the four elements of life: the air, the water, the fire and the earth and here I got disconnected from myself through the invisible, so I'm disconnecting myself from the system in the visible.

Yes, I do believe we're the reflection of what we are in the invisible . The invisible is dangerous like the unconscious. We are afraid of the unconscious not the conscious.

I know I need time and I know I'm not gonna be like before, but what matters is that I know I'm gonna be great with what is left of me.

A goal without a plan is just a wish. My goal now is to stay sober and the plan to make it happen is to work the Steps.

Just For Today, I'm grateful for being sober

Like my great teacher once told me: the universe needs sober filmmakers. She's totally right because art is all about sharing and connecting and if I'm not connected with myself how the fuck am I going to connect with the universe?!

Just For Today, I'm grateful for this program.

Just For Today, I'm grateful for having a sponsor.

Just For Today, I'm grateful for working the Steps.

Just For Today, I'm grateful because I'm alive.

Just For Today, I'm grateful for making friends from the fellowship, not chemical friendships.

Just For Today, I believe in me.

I'll leave it at that...

- Zuheir K.

## **Recovery has changed my life**

---

My experience with drugs, and particularly with meth, didn't take me long to get hooked. I'd dabbled in other things before finding my choice of what I liked, what kept me awake for long enough and allowed me to escape my own reality. It wasn't really until three months into my recovery that I realized, and I was ready to admit, that I had a problem with crystal. The addict part of me even after all this time likes to try to convince me that my addiction was a series of misfortunes.

I was and am very fortunate to have friends and family that supported me through hell. Especially my family has been my rock and my strength when I thought I couldn't take any more therapy, any more meetings, or any more days clean. I've managed to find hobbies that kept me clean and positive that showed this was the life I wanted as well as the life I deserved; a life free from drugs and addiction. I've managed to create my own support system, one that works for me when I am too far from a meeting. People I can call when I'm down. I owe my sobriety to those who stood by me, no matter what I put them through. My strength now comes from within, knowing my life is better, the things I can do, the places I have been, my job. I am very grateful particularly to CMA. I now love to spend time with my family. Recovery has changed my life and I hope to carry on in the new world I have come to love and appreciate.

- Marie L.

## **My story**

---

London, 8am in the morning. Still in my dressing gown, I step out into the garden. Looking up into the morning sky, I take a deep breath of fresh air.

Each morning smells different, exciting and new and every time I feel gratitude for being alive. It's my favourite part of the day, full of

possibilities and energy. Nowadays I take enormous pleasure in these little things.

Yet, it wasn't always so.

I grew up in Germany. My background is of a broken home, abandonment, and plenty of physical and psychological abuse. My mother left me and my dad for another man when I was four. My dad turned to alcohol and social services placed me with my grandparents, followed by several foster families.

Being pushed around from such an early age affected me badly and was probably not very helpful in developing a healthy personality. Wherever I ended up, it left me feeling different and somehow not good enough. I was always attempting to gain favour in order to be liked and accepted in my ever-changing and often cruel surroundings.

Survival mode turned me into a "people pleaser" and a child with very little self-esteem. Fearful of my own shadow and often withdrawn into a fantasy world.

And as if things weren't difficult enough, the developing realisation that I was gay only added to my mental anguish.

Leaving me feeling isolated, unworthy and with very little to like about myself.

At the age of 17 my mother kicked me out to make space for her next partner in line. I ended up staying with my best friend's family for a year before returning to my hometown where my father and his side of the family saw me through until I finished my education.

As soon as that was achieved in 1990, I left Germany for the big world out there.

In my case that was London. A city vast and bright where I could be anonymous and throw myself into a hedonistic lifestyle of parties, carefree indulgences and sex. Something I had craved so much during my angst ridden, repressed, secretive and torturous teenage years.

I was like a child arriving in a sweet shop. I had to have absolutely everything. Sexual partners were plenty and without me realizing, mainly to validate myself. Safe sex was something I easily ignored in the heat of the moment. As a matter of fact, the heat of the mo-

ment seemed what I was living for, with very little regard for the consequences. Intimacy was something that made me uncomfortable. I didn't like myself enough to let potential partners love me. Compliments on my looks or personality generally left me in disbelief.

Quickly I was drawn into the dance party scene of the 90s. Drugs like ecstasy, speed, acid and ketamine entered my life. With cocaine often filling the gaps in between. The first time I took an ecstasy tablet in a nightclub surrounded by "fabulous people" and awesome music. I experienced a high never imagined possible. For once I was happy and free from the negative voices and all insecurities inside my head. It was a complete mystery to me why people wouldn't want to be high all the time – free from myself, loved, appreciated, desired and accepted by everyone around me.

Due to my occupation I spent half of my time in the United States during those years. It was in San Francisco around 1999 when I was introduced to crystal meth. Always on the lookout for something new and better I did not hesitate when it was offered. I quite clearly remember how it took me to a whole "new universe". By that time I was already hooked on chemsex. Sex without drugs was no longer enjoyable to me and seemed boring and complicated. Crystal meth combined with my sexual acting out became the "perfect storm". I immediately entered into a steady downward spiral. Slow at first, but then faster and faster.

I cared less and less about my personal safety and well-being. Before I knew it, two or three day binges of meth fuelled sex became the norm and all I cared about. Everything I had build for myself was suddenly in jeopardy. My employer began to question my increasing absence. My old friends fell by the wayside because I ignored their phone calls and messages, until many of them simply gave up. Leaving me feeling more isolated and desperate during those horrific comedowns.

My health, appearance and weight showed clear signs of what was going on in my life. Through my reckless behaviour I contracted one sexually transmitted disease and opportunistic infection after another. It left me feeling ashamed, hopeless and convinced that I didn't

deserve any better; wanting to die without having the courage to kill myself and hoping that a drug overdose might do this for me sooner rather than later. During those days my drug and sex binges were my only escape from a world that seemed dark, hostile and miserable. All my hopes and dreams appeared destroyed and smashed in front of me. I was heading for my “rock bottom”. There was a real possibility of losing my job, and my finances were an absolute mess. My health had deteriorated so badly I seriously believed that my days were numbered to a year or two at best.

And then something happened. When I came around from yet another long binge, I woke up in my apartment. Lying naked and frozen on the wooden floor I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. What stared back at me was terrifying. And then it hit me, I had had enough!!! I decided that no matter how uncertain and scary the future looked, or even if I might die, I did not want to continue going on like this.

A good friend of mine had joined the AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) two years prior and I had caught a glimpse of how it had changed his life for the better. I reached out to him and within a day, or two, found myself attending my first NA (Narcotics Anonymous) meeting.

That was 11 years ago. It wasn't always plain sailing and I had my doubts in the beginning. CMA didn't exist in Europe in those days and I felt isolated in many NA meetings. No one there shared a story similar to mine and like many addicts in the beginning, I looked for the “differences rather than the similarities”. I felt a real sense of shame that my using had also involved sexually acting out in ways I did not dare admit in those meetings. It left me feeling different, not a proper addict like most of those “unfortunate people” in the “NA meetings”, whose stories often sounded so unlike mine. Well, at least to me.

My first year of recovery was pretty full on. Good friends invited me to live with them, in order to get myself back onto my feet financially. With hindsight that was one of the best things I could have done. The first year pretty much consisted of meetings, eating, sleeping, going to work and helping my friends with their kids. This safety net

enabled me to stay focused on recovery and away from my previous drug using “friends”. My sponsor advised me not to have a relationship for a year and to refrain from sex for as long as possible. Given the history and what I had done and seen, that was not very difficult. I needed a complete reset in order to discover my true sexual needs, on a level that was sustainable, loving and intimate.

I did my “90 in 90” (90 meetings in 90 days) and did what the program told me to do. My life came back together, my health improved and I developed a positive outlook again. It wasn’t always easy, but I stuck to it. The place I had come from seemed too awful and soul destroying for me to want to go back there.

It all worked well for about four and a half years, by which time everything seemed back on track. I had bought a house and landed a new job, I felt in control again.

The meetings began to feel like a chore and I found it harder and harder to connect with what was being said in there.

Basically, in my head I had decided that I wasn’t an addict anymore and convinced myself that I no longer needed the program.

What happened over the next nine months was a “textbook relapse”. At first it was just a few drinks, leaving me feeling like I deserved it and life seemed so much more fun that way.

I had drawn all these lines in the sand that I swore I wouldn’t cross. But before long I did anyway. A month or two later I was offered drugs. I stupidly thought that as long as it wasn’t crystal meth (my drug of choice), everything was fine. Then my sexual acting out started again. And soon after that I was back on the apps and the hook up websites. In no time crystal meth reappeared.

The first time I managed to refuse it, but the second time I didn’t even try.

And the time after that I was back where I had left off and worse. This time I let people slam (inject) me with meth. Something I had never done before. Luckily the next “come down” was so terrible, I clearly saw where this was heading.

I called for help and went back to a meeting.

The knowledge of recovery was still embedded in my head.

So, after a nine-month relapse I was back in the rooms of recovery.

Sat in the last row of a meeting, I was crying and admitting to being an addict.

Yet I felt no shame or fear. Only a sense of safety and relief, from being back in a place of hope. I had faith that by returning to the program, things would get better again. Looking back at it, I am glad for this relapse because without any doubt it proved one invaluable truth to me: “I am an addict”

Exactly like the ones described in the literature and talked about in the meetings.

After that I threw myself back into the Steps and together with a few other guys we set up the first “Crystal Meth Anonymous” meeting in Europe, right here in London.

We wanted a place where we could openly share our experiences, without feelings of shame, or being judged. Surrounded by people who could identify with what we had been through. I also sought help with a psychotherapist and found an amazing new sponsor. Through a combination of my sponsor’s help, counselling and psychotherapy, I discovered something I had been lacking all my life: self-love and self-care.

Once these started to establish themselves in my life, everything began to change.

No longer was recovery something I grudgingly accepted. It was something that I needed and wanted. It wasn’t simply about keeping away from drugs. It turned out to be the key to healing myself, to letting go of negative self-held beliefs that had limited and held me back for as long as I could remember. Love and light entered my life. I began to realize that I too was a lovable and deserving human being. I no longer depended on the need to validate myself constantly. By working the Steps and beginning to see my true self-worth I became free.

Having been suspicious of the term “God” in the early days of my recovery, I suddenly began to feel a connection to something.

On the path to healing myself I began to realise that my “Higher Power”, or “God” if that’s what you want to call it, was always there! It was always part of me. Except, I had no awareness of it.

Now I have a connection and as long as I keep it alive through work-

ing the programme and “staying connected”, I feel safe.

My “Higher Power” is not of a religion. I don’t even quite know what it is.

All I do know and believe, is that it is good and in all of us.

It’s been well over five years now since the last time I have used or had a drink.

And I cannot see myself ever going back to where I came from. My feelings of self-worth, values and expectations have changed.

I am in a loving and committed relationship, which I truly hope will be my last.

Today I am happy and content with what I have got, no longer consumed with what I haven’t got, or haunted by demons of the past.

I am grateful for this continuing journey of self-discovery and enlightenment.

I find joy, happiness and fulfilment in passing on what I know and helping others to find what I have found.

- O. H. S.

## **The best decision I have ever made**

I walked through the door of my first CMA meeting in Soho London on the 30th December 2017. That was my first step to recovery, I didn’t know this at the time, but it probably saved my life. I was powerless over crystal meth, chemsex and my life was unmanageable. New Year’s Eve was the following day and I had no plans in place. I was desperate, lonely and feeling very suicidal. I did not trust myself, and I did not think I could get through the next three days, other than a return to crystal and chemsex via gay hookup apps. It was a frightening place to be. I was ashamed of myself and felt very guilty. I was seriously depressed and unable to make any rational decisions because of anxiety.

I cried quietly during that first meeting, but it was a relief to know I was not alone, and others were suffering like me. Up until that point,

I had internalised so much guilt and shame about my drug taking and sex addiction with men. My mental health was extremely poor.

I was made welcomed and encouraged to go to 90 meetings in 90 days. I didn't understand how the meeting worked, but I liked the idea of peace and serenity, as there was very little of this in my life. I listened to the stories of the other fellows and picked up a small piece of paper which listed the times and places of all the meetings, fortunately there was a CMA meeting every day in London, even on New Year's Day. I was given supportive hugs and tea and biscuits. Over the next week I went to CMA meetings nearly every day and I have continued to go three or four times a week ever since.

I reached total rock bottom during the summer of 2017. My sex and drug taking was completely out of control and I had no boundaries. I had been using crystal, G and viagra, poppers and drink to self-medicate. I developed chronic intrusive tinnitus in 2011, which lead to many sleepless nights and serious anxiety and depression. I had been on a series of antidepressants, sleeping pills and been sick on and off from work over this six year period of time. My husband of 30 years did not cope well with my depression and chronic ill-health. He was not supportive and had limited patience. When I discovered he had slept with another guy I asked him to leave the bedroom. He never came back into my bed although I was ready to forgive him and I missed him deeply. I was heartbroken.

I frequently had suicidal thoughts and had to stop some antidepressants because of how they made me feel. Eventually I received early medical retirement from my job. This meant I had plenty of free time to feed my sex and drug addictions. I had the time, opportunity, money and motive, all of which kept me in the cycle of addiction. My ex-husband threatened to move out many times, but didn't actually do so for two years. It was during this time that I became addicted to chemsex. My addictions started off innocently enough. I took viagra initially to compensate for the effects of the antidepressants. I used gay hookup apps to have lunchtime sex with tradesmen and office workers. When I stopped taking mirtazapine antidepressants I continued to take the maximum dose of viagra. This rapidly fed through to a strong sex addiction and I would have sex with three or

four different men over a long weekend, often in hotels. When my mother died, and my husband issued divorce proceedings, one of the guys offered me crystal meth and G and this was the start of my crystal meth addiction. I became so depressed that I did not care if I overdosed or not. This was a very dangerous position to be in as a drug user. I eventually took a cocktail of drugs, which led to much unsafe sex. My mental health deteriorated rapidly, and my tinnitus was unbearable, which made me want more crystal. By chance one of my gay friends mentioned he had previously volunteered for a HIV support service, and I phoned them for help. They told me about a website that facilitates access to PREP. I ordered some the following day. Two weeks later it arrived and I started taking it each day, just in time. I was very lucky.

At the end of August 2017 I took lots of crystal and G, drink and poppers in one session and almost ended up in a coma. I was suicidal again. I had unsafe sex several times that night with several men, some of whom were HIV positive. I ended up at the GU clinic and fortunately because I had just started taking PREP, it was decided that I could avoid a four week course of PEP. When I was high for three days on crystal and G, I could not hear the tinnitus in my head. This made the drug taking very appealing; especially as the tinnitus tormented me 24-hours a day. However the come down was unbearable, with terrible headaches and the tinnitus screamed louder than ever. I had uncontrollable anxiety. I was not sleeping and started to hear voices in my head. I told the staff at the GU clinic I was mentally ill, vulnerable and registered disabled. They were very kind to me and I saw the manager for an hour. She persuaded me to get help for my crystal meth addiction. She was very wise and told me that if I continued to get high on crystal much longer I may find it very difficult to go back to sober sex. I had all the tests for STI's and HIV. Although I was not ready to admit I had a problem I rang the HIV support service again who suggested a LGBT support group in Kings Cross. I decided to go there and ask for gay counselling. When they interviewed me they suggested that I sign up for a drop-in service to get my drug taking back under control. I started going every week to the drop-in because you had to show commitment

for at least four times before you received help. There was so much demand for drug key workers there that I was referred to their structured weekend action programme about controlling your drug use in the meantime. It was excellent and I learned how the crystal altered your pathways in your brain and released much greater levels of dopamine than during sober sex. Once your brain had been overloaded with meth it was hard to feel normal and pleasure again without it. I had to relearn about intimacy because as a sex and drug addict I had no concept of what this was. Afterwards I went regularly to the service's Thursday drop-in for acupuncture to try to limit my drug cravings.

By this time I had many regular sex buddies all around the UK and abroad and my sex life was fairly extreme. I just saw men as sex objects and I had lost all sex with intimacy. I was very depressed and anxious about attempting sober sex, but did get good news that I was HIV negative. By now I also had a social worker and eventually a psychiatrist, although initially all they offered me was more antidepressants. I was very reluctant to go back on antidepressants after my previous two years experience of mirtazapine. I spent two months trying to cope with the withdrawal symptoms of this prescribed drug and I had suffered weight gain, headaches and lack of sex drive whilst taking it. Just as I had lost all hope in the gay sex world I met a great guy who wanted more than casual sex and was not on chems. I managed sober sex six times and enjoyed it and I was much more in control. Sadly his visa expired and he had to leave the country. This was when I found CMA, after a friend told me about the Saturday lunchtime Soho meeting.

I have just celebrated 60 days clean now at CMA with no mind-altering substances. Going through those doors to my first meeting was the best decision I have ever made in my life. I had become totally powerless to sex and drugs and, combined with an addictive personality, I could not stop on my own. Every day is a challenge, but fortunately there was always a CMA meeting to go to. I began to make some friends and exchanged telephone numbers. I felt less alone and did not have to explain myself, all the fellows just understood drug and sex addiction. I was too upset, and not brave enough to share

initially, but after a few meetings in newcomer's time I did. It was a relief to admit that I was powerless over crystal meth. My mind was so messed up and I now believe that only a greater power other than myself could restore me to sanity. I picked up the free literature and started to read it. After hearing a share from a guy who had many years of clean time I asked him to be my sponsor. He is kind, considerate and helpful and we have met several times so far. I get to ring him if I think I might use again or feel upset. He encouraged me to write a gratitude list everyday, which I try to do. I am learning to become a better person again who can enjoy life, without drugs. Being in recovery with fellow addicts has been very therapeutic for me and my mental health has improved as a result. CMA is making this possible for me and soon I will start working the Steps.

- Steve D.

## **Late night storm to calm waters**

---

When I came into recovery in April 2016 I thought I was not an addict and that I was different to those in the rooms, so I didn't return. My view was I picked up at the age of 27 so I have control – what a fool I was. It was only through the summer of 2016 where serial using, weekend after weekend, led me to having health issues and overall low morale. It didn't help I was living with a G and coke addict either.

After having an operation that led to a painful recovery period, I was using crystal meth as a way to forget about the pain – and it worked! My stupidity led me to a lack of control of my use and thus using became more about the “slamming” and forgetting my issues, than having fun with the person I was to engage in sex with. Another reason for using was that I only realised I was gay at 25. Not out, I was meeting men who were comfortable in their sexuality and knew what they wanted from sex, while I was still exploring and was willing to do/try anything.

I came back to the rooms in October 2016 when I was on my knees begging to stop this cycle of using. I would only use if I could “slam” – my focus became all about this way of using. This led me to be engaged in more risky sexual and non-sexual behaviour and using in places which I now see as dangerous, inappropriate and damn right stupid. I am very lucky I never got caught, or led anyone to believe I had a problem.

Not being out, I felt alone/isolated and using came in handy. It allowed me to not care about hurting anyone and gave me confidence to engage in sex. As soon as the high disappeared the paranoia started, however, the anxiety went through the roof and I started to feel like I wasn't good enough, or that my cock wasn't big enough (yes, the gay community is very judgemental and I felt it – regarding my ethnicity being Indian and my body image). But, I kept on using because it was the only way I knew.

2017 was my year; I had a sponsor, I did service and I attended meetings regularly. I never managed to do 90 in 90 due to my work schedule, but I tried to keep connected with fellows. This led to me having eight months of clean time by October 2017.

I have a boyfriend who lives in Brazil, I always thought I could handle a long distance relationship, but again I started to listen to the wrong people, and doubting my partner and also wasn't honest with him about how I felt. Another key part of the programme I didn't engage with was the Steps and regular communication with my sponsor. So what happened in November of that year?

I relapsed, not only once, not twice, but five times over a period of six weeks. I was at a point of no return, when I had an epiphany with the person I last used with. He put my potential consequences of my using into perspective.

So in December of 2017 I made a pledge to engage with my sponsor more and to take the Steps seriously. I had a lot to look forward to in 2018 – starting my dream job (all thanks to those eight months of clean time), a new home and that I had friends and family who loved me. I have a lot to be grateful for. I moved to a small coastal town of Broadstairs from London – a big change for me who still to this day loves his city life, but the waters of the North Sea have been a

blessing to me. I am back on the recovery wagon and completed my Step 1 and continue to keep engaged in the programme, whether it is through my sponsor, the rooms, or gratitude lists. This is my last hope, I may not have another chance again.

- Dipesh M.

## **I never had a problem**

Throughout my life I never thought of my drug, or alcohol use, as a problem, I believed I was just that little bit more fun or outgoing. I would occasionally not remember the end of a night, or there would be unexplained incidents that had occurred like coming round miles away from London (home) not knowing how I'd got there, or why, but I thought that was just normal and everyone had incidents like that. Plus I was always able to spin it into a funny story I was able to tell friends.

I never had a problem, contrary to what lots of evidence pointed to. I could nearly always stop when I wanted to, it was just coincidental that I hardly ever wanted to. I also used to drink more alcohol than everyone else because I was a big guy, so it played to my logical mind that I needed more drugs than anyone else because of the same.

It was only after I had lost my job that I found myself taking crystal meth and whilst not thinking I even liked it that much, found myself taking more and more. I remember saying to someone how I didn't understand how some people get addicted to it, whilst ever gradually increasing my consumption levels. After being offered an injection of crystal many times, often by guys I believed I trusted and who I thought had their use under control I eventually said yes. A couple of days after that occasion, I remember telling myself "Now I understand how people get so addicted to this stuff, I'm going to be really careful the next few times I do it".

Throughout the following two or more years that I used crystal meth, my life gradually changed from sleeping every night to sleep-

ing about once a week or less, I saw my family and old non-crystal using friends less and less and my new crystal using friends more and more. Very quickly I stopped seeing anyone who didn't inject crystal and spent most of my life using and having sex, or what eventually was a lot of planning, arranging and organising to have sex and very little actual sex.

One of the massive positive aspects of using this drug for me was my weight dropped massively, and as I was always the fat kid and have wrestled with my weight most of my life it was so good to lose weight without trying, I thought I had perfected my using as I always stayed hydrated, I regularly brushed my teeth and washed, I ate something every day, even if it was just a piece of fruit, or a yogurt, and then about once a week I ate whatever I wanted and slept loads. All these aspects I believed would stop the horror stories that I had seen or heard about crystal meth happening to me.

I was somewhat aware of all the boundaries I used to set myself, only to very quickly go past them and find myself tweaking my previous boundaries, or coming up with completely new rules that I was then determined to stick to and fully believed at that time I would. In the shortening moments of sobriety I would look at what I had just been doing and figure I was moving further and further away from my moral compass.

Luckily one friend of mine who at the time was about five years sober and on more than one occasion had tried to point out the dangers of crystal meth and chemsex – and even after I was adamant that I had it under control – saw my progressively worsening appearance and called me every day for a week to ask how I was doing in regards to my drug use.

Eventually many months later he saw me walking out of our local supermarket and commented how bad I was looking. He took me for breakfast and then gave me the number of the local drug service. At this point of my using I didn't understand addiction and because I was apparently choosing to take what I took and do what I did, that I didn't need help, but as enough people by this time who I mostly trusted had expressed their concern for me, I went along to a drugs service and was determined to prove everyone wrong. I believed I

could stop if I wanted to and I didn't have a problem, however at this point I thought if I could get help to not inject, but to still do everything else, then that would be perfect.

I called them, went for my initial assessment and then went home. Over the next few days I took every last drug I could find in my flat, which was a lot as I always bulk bought to reduce the chance of ever having to go without. I was immediately directed to CMA by my keyworker where I managed to stay sober for five months with the help of daily meetings and a wise sponsor and also my sheer bloody mindedness. Having managed this length of sobriety and not believing most of the things I had heard in the meetings and thinking I was doing it all on my own, I decided that I would go out and have one small use and not tell anyone. This "small use" very quickly turned into a massive three-day session where I ended up in a very dirty flat in Kensington with two guys I didn't like the look of, desperately trying to inject one last gram and failing miserably, eventually making the kitchen look like a scene from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Once I had managed to inject most of the drug I felt like I needed to leave and then it took me hours to get the couple of miles back home where more dramas happened and I ended up in hospital. The main outcome of that final use was my total belief that I couldn't just use a bit, I WAS an addict and that I came very close to killing myself. So I was honest with my Sponsor and friends and I committed myself to doing 90 meetings in 90 days, I got commitments in a number of meetings and I started working the Steps again with all the honest reflection I could manage at the time. The commitments gave me another reason to get to the meetings every week and they helped get me there on the occasions that I really didn't want to go. They encouraged me to talk to others as part of my differing roles, helping me rebuild my confidence and then eventually I helped start up four new CMA meetings where I, at one time or another, have held every commitment available. These helped grow my feelings of self-esteem and also helped teach me the importance of helping others and many times during meetings I heard the answers to some questions that I didn't even know I wanted to ask.

I gradually set about trying to change my life, and although I hadn't

seen my alcohol as a problem, I knew that it often ended with me doing things I had little control over. The readings in the meetings were very specific, “Alcohol is a drug”, so I fully accepted that, along with drugs, alcohol had to remain off the cards.

Every meeting I sat through, I listened and paid attention to everyone else’s story trying to see how any of them could help me, I learnt to look for the similarities and not the differences. I soon learnt that the more honest I was and the more I opened my mouth and talked about what was going on in my head, the less power my thoughts then had over me. I learnt that just because I had a thought come into my head, it didn’t have to lead into a negative action. I eventually had many tools in my imaginary toolkit that helped me initially not pick up and then changed the way I thought so the number of times I was triggered or tempted to use reduced to practically nothing. I lived one day at a time, not feeling shame or guilt for any past behaviour and not worrying or stressing about the future, just keeping it in the day and getting to the end having not used. I slowly rebuilt my life differently and more healthily and if I’m honest, a lot more slowly than I really wanted, however it was at the speed at which was required for a steady and sturdy base from which to grow. And now with over four years sobriety behind me, I am incredibly grateful for such a journey.

Ever since I was a year alcohol and drug free I have had sponsees to try and help guide through their Steps and help along their recovery journey. It is often shared in meetings that you only get to keep what you have by giving it away, so I try to pass on my knowledge and experience of addiction, as well as everything I’ve gained from being in recovery to others, in the hope that my life continues to flourish and grow like it has done. All of them have helped teach me so much, although not always in ways I would have expected. I feel very privileged to have been allowed to share many people’s recovery journey with them. Some have gone on to live amazing lives and others were not so lucky and whose lives were cut tragically short, but through them all I have continued to grow and learn and feel better because of them having been in my life.

Eventually I started adding more and more things into my daily/

weekly routine outside of just meetings and 12 Step stuff. I volunteered at other organisations that are connected to addiction, I had therapy where I was able to work through my past issues that I hadn't dealt with properly like bereavement, coming out, illnesses, as well as body/food issues that I have held my whole life, so now my thought process is I NEVER am not enough, or don't have enough. I am enough in every aspect of my life and by spending time at the start of every day being grateful (and writing my gratitude list) for what I am and have, I am able to live in a very positive place. I still have hopes and dreams for the future but where I am and what I have right now is enough and I couldn't be happier. I started studying a masters in addiction psychology and counselling and I also started working again, initially part time, progressing to full time when I felt ready and then quickly getting promoted to the point in my life I am currently where I believe I am the best version of myself that I have ever been.

- Robert F.

## Gratitude

---

“My name is Tim and I'm an addict”. It was devastating to hear myself saying these words in my first CMA meeting. I had no idea, at that point, how life-changing those words were going to be. I was 62 when I first picked up crystal meth and it didn't take very long for me to realise what a terrible mistake I'd made. Yes, at first, it seemed exciting, feeling part of an exclusive sub-culture and yes, for a while, I enjoyed the almost constant stream of beautiful young men. Living in Vauxhall was like living at Ground Zero – all I had to do was wait 'till the clubs closed and then put up H&H on the apps and the boys would pour in, but very soon I was sickened by the way I was dealing in human flesh. One young man who came over asked if he could invite his friend along. He explained that they usually played separately but that, if I didn't mind, he would like him to join us. He showed

me a pic and I swiftly agreed. He then showed me a pic of someone he was chatting to online – we invited him over too and then another and very soon I had the first chemsex party in my flat. The next morning when everybody had left I passed out and slept for twelve hours. When I woke up it was dark – I didn't know what day it was or how long I had been asleep and my place was a mess – the aftermath of a chemsex party. I switched the TV on and discovered it was Sunday evening at 10pm – I then had the sickening realisation that on Sundays my sons usually visited and that they had keys. I rang my younger son and he confirmed that they had been to my flat that day. They were devastated, disgusted and furious and both stopped talking to me. They ignored me in the street and my younger son sent the police around to my place to look for drugs. I promised my sons that I was getting help but couldn't stop. I saw my therapist – I spoke with a psychiatrist – I worked with a drugs counsellor, but still kept on finding myself heading towards the cashpoint and calling my dealer. I hated the comedowns so I stayed high for days on end. I went to work high and was very soon called in to see my supervisor who knew there was something seriously wrong but didn't know what it was. I resigned my job and got out before I was kicked out. Things got worse. I left people I didn't know in my flat whilst I drove to have sex with someone else, returning the next day. One night a young guy overdosed in my flat and completely flipped out – screaming, stamping, speaking in tongues and knocking pictures off the walls. I tried to calm him down but he was totally psychotic. My neighbour from downstairs rang and asked if everything was ok. I asked him to come up and I called for an ambulance. Just before my neighbour came up the guy passed out stark naked on my sofa – I didn't cover him as he was quite a trophy. The ambulance arrived with the police. They asked if he had taken anything. I had already placed my pipe and lighter in the spare bedroom and told them that he had slept there as we had argued the night before when he had produced a pipe and offered it to me. I told them I was opposed to taking drugs and that it was only because it was so late and he was unfamiliar with the area that I had let him stay. They asked me to check the spare room and I “found” the pipe and lighter and gave

it to them. When they carried him out, about ten of my neighbours had gathered to see if everything was ok. Later that day I saw him back on the apps.

I lost about two stone in weight and my gums started to bleed but I still couldn't stop. My drugs counsellor was an angel and consistently encouraged me to attend a CMA meeting but I kept telling him I was hopeless with groups which was the truth – always feeling “less than” or “better than” other people and too easily relying on my sharp tongue to defend myself from perceived attacks. One day, however, I turned up at one of our sessions high. My counsellor said that he would have to send me away and again suggested I attend CMA. I reluctantly accepted his advice and took away the contact details. The following Sunday I attended my first CMA meeting. I was blown away by the warmth and acceptance I felt. Here were other fellows who understood. Here were people who shared their experiences that sounded so familiar. Here were addicts who had got free of crystal meth and seemed happy. I tried to speak during that first meeting but could only garble through my tears. I was given some literature, lots of the men exchanged numbers with me and three men asked me to join them for coffee after the meeting. I read the literature that night where I was advised to get a sponsor and work the 12 Steps. The next day, Monday, I rang the person who had given me the literature and asked him to be my sponsor. He said he would meet me the next day, Tuesday, to discuss it. On the Tuesday we met and he agreed to sponsor me. On the Wednesday, after the meeting, I told my sponsor that I wanted to get the 30-day chip to prove to my kids that I was clean of crystal meth, but that I didn't want to stop drinking, or taking other drugs which I then classed as recreational. He very kindly told me that “the only requirement for CMA membership was the desire to stay clean” and that I would be welcome to keep attending meetings. If I wanted to collect the 30-day chip, however, I would need to be sober of everything i.e. no drugs, no alcohol and no poppers! At that time this seemed ludicrous and I said “This programme is not for me”. I didn't go to meetings on Thursday, Friday, or Saturday. On Saturday evening I was out, at a party, with a dear and much respected friend of mine who told me

that she was now a manager with FDAC – the Family Drug and Alcohol Court. She knew my situation and said that she knew very little about crystal meth, but what she did know was that FDAC would only advocate for children to be returned to their parents if the parents were sober of everything. That night I went to bed before midnight and woke on Sunday morning with the realisation that, for the first time in a very long time, that day I was sober of everything. I went to the CMA meeting that night and proudly and tearfully announced I was one day sober. One day became one week – I engaged intensely with my sponsor and the Steps – one week became two – I could hardly believe it. I completed Steps 1-3, I got my 30-day Chip and I felt like I had been reborn – the phoenix was rising from the fire!

At first I counted the days, now I treasure every day in recovery. I discovered that being grateful for what I have is a powerful spiritual tool – I say thank you every morning when I wake up. Meditation and prayer are central to my recovery – honest fellowship is essential – “Personal recovery depends upon CMA unity”. I have found my way home to a loving family of fellow addicts in recovery. I have never been so happy and content. On 19th March 2018 I shall be two years clean and sober. I am grateful to my Higher Power and every recovering addict in CMA and all the other 12 Step fellowships throughout the world. Thank you!

- Tim F.

## **My name is Goko, I'm 47. I'm a grateful crystal meth addict.**

I come from a family where we all have to be perfect – my mum is a pleaser and my father a workaholic and control freak. They did everything to let me and my younger brother have the best life possible. From a very young age I knew that I have an addictive person-

ality – eating extreme amounts of ice cream, “shopaholic” later and then a “workaholic”.

Was I happy? – what did I understand as happiness: mostly I saw the material world as a black and white road, not seeing black but only some bumps on the road here and there which I coped with, or so I thought.

I was fixing things with addiction to shopping ,working, and then later with sex.

This continued until six years ago when I found drugs and started from using a little till last using when I woke up on my bed with extreme seizures and a pain, like my muscles were made of crystals and any movement would break them followed with strong pain; I felt frozen, couldn't move by my own will. That lasted for four days. Seizures made my head move extremely to the left. It was not possible for me to stop my head from moving, even if I truly tried by hands to bring my head back. My uncontrollable head was going painfully to the left because of these seizures. (12 years ago when I was leaving Macedonia for good my mom told me “Remember this!!!: You never lose your home – home is where you keep warm and safe“) that's the moment when I saw myself on the street. I felt total despair.

My accountant called me asking why I was calling him at 3am. He took me to a meeting – I had warm tea, all of my life was going on and on in my head – I couldn't focus – every next second I was on a different planet. I couldn't see or hear properly. At the end of the meeting I heard someone who was six days clean and that gave me HOPE and COURAGE to stay alive and not to overdose and finish myself, because I couldn't accept myself being on the streets.

I felt somebody give me a hug to welcome me, I was so cold (emotionally and physically) and he asked me to come back. I stuck with him every day all day and he was the one who become my sponsor. I asked how you stay clean, he said: whenever you feel different – uncomfortable – or something is going wrong, then don't wait, run to a meeting!!! If there are no meetings then call people.

I did 98 meetings in 30 days. No meetings would have led to my death I believe – thank God I live in London. The eighth day after

the second meeting at a fellowship on Thursday evening, I felt different (weird), so someone suggested one more meeting. I made my way and arrived in Holborn but got panicked as I couldn't find the entrance and it took me an hour going around the building to find the entrance. At the meeting I felt a desperate need for drugs – my first craving – I remember crying and writing with a permanent marker 'No No No ...' on my veins, even on the smallest veins, to try to stop me injecting. I shared "Please help me guys I don't like to use but I can't stop myself. I feel like there's a beast inside me who is not going to eat, apart from drugs". People approached to hug me and stayed till my craving pass; I stayed alive! Exhausted I went home to sleep. That's the moment I learnt what total powerlessness is and unmanageability meant I couldn't stop my drive for drugs. I saw "Me, Goko, I'm a crystal meth addict" and you guys helped me to stay alive.

On the 28th day I felt my jaw clench and I felt so high at the beginning of a meeting – I knew I hadn't used – I felt so afraid. All my muscle function switched off when I felt high. At the end of the meeting I had heard all but couldn't lift my head. I shared after the meeting about this feeling and someone said that it will pass – it's euphoric recall they said – and the following ones will be less powerful. The body and muscle remembers the traumas of the past they said. My second sponsor said to me "Goko, love is not enough", "Respect", "Trust", "Honesty", "Care" – don't fix others, fix yourself, to make an example of how to slow yourself down and get stable. (My mind was for seven seconds in seven different planets at one thousand miles per hour). "Pray for your higher power and GOD's will" (Gift Of Desperation) for some, "and start to meditate to quieten your mind to become able to hear god's will".

My prayer is the serenity prayer – the third Step prayer asking for forgiveness of everyone, and well being for all, to live in joy and happiness and for the world to become a paradise. All I do, I forgive those who did wrong to me because I wish to love all, as God loves all. My understanding of Higher Power is the love of the universe. When I was a child, I had experienced the love of my mom – the hug she gave to me – so warm and long like eternity making

me to feel safe and protected. I felt this same feeling with my first sponsor – I saw the same in all of you guys. Now I know love or Higher power, or however you choose to name it. I accept to take the name of Higher Power as God is within you and in me and in all of you guys and in everything and everywhere – it doesn't matter if you see or not – I know God is there.

Everyone is unique with unique capabilities and all are like one equal part in the same universe. It is a space-driven, connecting and moving all – including you and me.

After going to the meetings, then prayer and meditation to me have been the next most crucial things in my recovery. This is my understanding of meditation (I have 16 years practice of Hatha Yoga and Sufi practices) and how I do it. To refresh the electrostatics I have to do a preparation to purify and intensify the experience – I consciously wash with water three times each: I wash hands to be clean, I wash the nose for the body to open channels for purification, I wash eyes to see the truth, I wash ears to hear the truth, I wash the mouth to talk the truth, I wash the face to remove my masks and defects of character, wet the hand and go from back of hair to front to keep my mind clear, I wash the arms to release of earthly attachments, I wash the feet to stay on God's will path (if it is not possible to physically carry out this washing process then I imagine water running and do the purification preparation process in my mind). Every morning before sunrise and at sunset the energy is very strong, therefore this is the best time to I do it: in a comfortable position of Lotus – or with crossed legs, or sitting on a chair, or lying on the floor. I close the eyes (window of the mind) I'm conscious of life giving breath and of the quality of the universe (Love, Compassion, Peace, Purification, Healing) when the universe breathes out, I breathe in through my nose, the deepest I can, from the bottom of the abdomen. When I exhale then I exhale "I"; "Me Goko: My Ego"; "Fears"; "Toxin"; "Stress" "Illness"; and all the negative elements – I say to myself all of this: " OUT!!!!"

... ..

Breathe in the Love, Purification... etc

Exhale my Ego, Fear and Stress... etc "Out"

When my meditation is two hours and thirty minutes in the morning and two hours thirty minutes in the evening I feel great. When my meditation drops down, then this means that I am doing something wrong and this tells me I have to do more meetings, or speak with my Sponsor, or Fellows.

This takes me to a place of Peace, Acceptance, and Clarity during the day. A lot of clarity with what's going on in my life, especially helping me to do things in my Step work. Steps have helped me to see myself and the Traditions have helped me to deal with others.

I'm now on Step 7. I will ask the God of my understanding to remove my defects of character. I'm now 19 months clean THANKS TO YOU.

I'm grateful to know you guys, and fortunate to be part of this family – you are not alone – welcome home. Huge Love. Hugs.

- Goko S.

## **Miracles, one day at a time**

---

As I come to another milestone in my recovery, it's a time to look back, reflect and also look forward to what lies ahead.

Had you told me as a child I'd become an addict, someone who found himself in situations which were both dangerous and thrilling, I'd have probably laughed in your face. Had you told me I'd be an addict for the rest of my life; had you told me my addiction would take me places where I could so easily have died; had you told me my addiction would also lead to becoming HIV positive; I'd have probably pointed at one of my other relatives, most likely my brother and said – it's him you're talking about, NOT ME!

I hear the same story so often in meetings – as a child I felt different, I didn't feel I fitted in or belonged to this family. I searched for weeks, trying to find another copy of my birth certificate – I didn't really trust the one I had could be the right one. How could I come from this “normal” family and yet feel so crushingly abnormal? I

supposed I might have been adopted. I come from a middle-class family from the North of England, a proud Yorkshireman, my parents are still together after over 50 years of marriage, there was little in my childhood which might suggest I'd find myself in addiction. I'm the youngest of four boys. I'm also a twin. I got the gay gene, he didn't. My twin was the one who I always thought was obsessed by things – cricket, then cycling, or food, or girls, or golf. I was the clever one of the family; we were the first generation to go to university in our family. I remember going to a cousin's 18th birthday party and seeing my brother smoke a joint with my cousin. I felt disgusted with them both. It also scared me a little, but excited me at the same time. The danger of drug taking felt edgy, it felt forbidden, it felt bad. I was a good boy, I was working hard, I was studying, I was not going to try that filth.

I came out quite late – in my early 20s. It was an excruciating period of self-discovery. When people ask what would you tell your younger self, I'm always stumped by the answer. Part of me wants to say that your life won't turn out the way you planned, and that what you will go through will be hellish; but part of me wants to say that you will come out the other side stronger, more you. I first needed to come out to myself. I did lots of things like cottaging, always in the dark at night, random encounters with guys whose names I didn't even know. I was crippled with shame at what I was doing and what I'd become, at how weak I was and fearful that I'd become some sort of monster and that people would find out. I came out to a select few friends.

I spent a year in France, where I fell in love with a deeply wounded guy. When he was young his mum and dad split up, and he would sit with his suitcase packed, waiting for his mum to come and pick him up and take him away, but she never did. He was cruel and manipulative and nothing I could do allowed him to feel that I really did love him. From somewhere the idea came to me that the only way I could really show him I loved him would be to kill myself. I finally broke away from his clutches, but at the same time as that I was being stalked by a student. Those two deeply wounded guys coloured relationships for several years.

I came out to my parents when I lived abroad. I was working and living on a different continent, so it felt safe enough if they ended up rejecting me that I was far enough away. I wrote to them – my way of controlling things. They emailed back a couple of days later and were very supportive, but we never really talked about it much for several years after that. My family are not really ones for discussing things of importance.

When I came back to the UK, that's when I used class A drugs for the first time. I thought the guy I was about to have sex with would like me a little bit more if I used the drugs he was using. He'd not told me what the drugs were, what they'd do to me, whether they were dangerous. That was a habit I got into very quickly – not asking, not knowing, not caring. I moved down to London and that's where things really started to go downhill. I was doing a job I really enjoyed and was, in hindsight very good at, but I always expected someone to knock on the door and say, "I'm sorry, we've made a mistake, this job isn't for you." I expected to be found out as a fraud. Then I met a guy who I really liked. He and I used the very first time we met and lots of times together. We were both having sex with other men outside the relationship, though again we didn't talk about it, we weren't open or honest with each other. I then discovered apps, sex parties and inevitably got diagnosed with HIV. It was around this time that I used crystal meth for the 1st time. I figured – I'm worthless, I've been infected with this shameful disease which will probably kill me, I'll just say yes to anything, anyone, anyhow. I also crossed the line I thought I'd never cross. I injected, or rather I got guys to, inject me. Even the language we use around it shrouds it in reflected glamour – slamming "tina". I only did it four or five times, but that doesn't matter. It was the one thing I said I'd never do. I had sex with people I found repulsive, including my dealer, so that they would give me free drugs. I used alone. I used for no reason – mostly at the end because I was bored.

It all came to a head when my boyfriend who I'd been seeing for almost three years came over to spend the weekend together on one of his weekends off. I'd been using for most of the week. I'd been to Clapham Common. I'd lost count of the number of sexual

encounters I'd had that week. I'd not been to work that week and felt wretched. He stood in the doorway to my bedroom with tears in his eyes as he handed me back my keys. I cried too and begged him to keep them. He did, but the condition was that I get this stuff sorted. So, I went to my first meeting. It was an NA meeting and I remember sitting outside for what felt like forever. It was probably 10 minutes. I eventually pressed the "fuck it" button and made a decision that I couldn't do this on my own and couldn't go on like this. I walked in presuming a meeting of druggies would be full of homeless people, of people selling drugs, of useless no-hopers. I sat down, and introduced myself as an addict and something miraculous happened. It felt like I'd come home. It felt like I was in a safe place. It felt like these people understood me, had been where I'd been, could relate to what I was saying. And I could identify with them too, even though I'd never met any of them before, they were mostly straight guys and we had different backgrounds, used different drugs etc. As each person spoke, I felt like they were reflecting me back at me. It was such a relief to find.

And so I got to work. I got in the middle of the boat. I did service – my first service was making the tea. When I used I wasn't reliable. It helped me get to talk to people too, something I wasn't good at. I did meetings – lots of meetings. I didn't quite manage 90 in 90. I was ill the last week and working full time, but I think I did 89 meetings in 90 days. I even did 1 day where I went to 4 meetings from 4 different fellowships – NA/CMA/SLAA/SAA. I now realise I don't have a drugs problem, I have a "me" problem. I got a sponsor – asking him was one of the most nerve-wracking things I've ever done – what if he rejects me, or worse, laughs at me? He didn't. So we started working the Steps. All I'll say on the Steps is that it really helped me to work them to the best of my ability. I didn't edit what I'd say, I didn't leave things out, I was as honest as I was able. And things started to get better.

Then I hit a bump in the road. After almost six months clean, it was the last Friday before Christmas, I had finished work for the holidays, had a fridge full of food, had been for a swim and felt really good about myself, really proud of myself. How could I reward all my

good work? How about a use up? So, I didn't call anyone, I didn't go to a meeting, I didn't pray or meditate around it – I drove to a group sex session and used again. I stayed up all night and drove home high, falling asleep and could have easily crashed the car; but I'd not wanted to drink alcohol as it's not safe to drink and drive. How insane is that?

I came home, laid on the sofa feeling like I'd messed everything up. I texted my best friend who is also in recovery. He called me straight back and told me to call my sponsor and get to a meeting. Which is what I did. I knew I had to fess up, pick up that white keyring and start again. I won't deny it was tough going back to meetings and admitting that I'd relapsed. I felt so ashamed, but I know we don't shoot our wounded.

I was at one of the very first CMA meetings in the UK. I've been to most of them, but because I live outside London it's not always possible to get there. It has been amazing to see this fellowship grow from one meeting a week to one every day. In those early days, there were few people with even a year clean. Now there are loads of us and more keep coming all the time. The added identification of being among gay men is so powerful too. Some have had similar experiences to mine. Some are HIV+. Some struggle with sexuality. Some struggle to get clean, but there is a deep camaraderie in the meetings. It is so powerful to know we have fellows by our side. It is truly wonderful to see addicts get recovery, to start to connect with themselves, with each other, with a Higher Power, with family, with society, with the programme.

Yes, life can be excruciatingly difficult at times. My ex passed away in recovery (he was in recovery too and died clean); I've been jobless and almost homeless; I've had some mental health issues; but I've stayed clean and that is a flipping miracle. Getting my head on the pillow after each day is done is still a miracle to me. For that I am truly grateful.

- Michael W.

## Poetry block

---

### *Rock bottom*

How do you know when you've hit rock bottom?

When you're crying your eyes out in frustration?  
When you lie to yourself about what you're doing?  
When you end up in hospital for being dumb?

Rock bottom is as unique as a fingerprint,  
As a snowflake  
And as the love of a mother for her child.

Some pick themselves up easily,  
Some it will take time and some will need help to find their legs, even  
themselves again.

For me?  
It's hard.

Been fooling myself into believing I could do this all on my own.  
With help from friends  
Who cannot understand  
Or will not understand.

To understand, you have to know how I feel  
What I have been through, and where I come from.

Rock bottom  
Will be a climb no one can see  
Feel  
Or touch.

It will be in your mind  
Heart and soul.

But you know when you get to the top  
You've done something you can be proud of.  
The strongest person  
The cleverest  
Or the one you've looked up to all your life  
May not be able to handle this journey  
If it was them.

Mine has just started.

My mind is my enemy  
It will trick me to believe that I am fine.

“One more time will be okay” or “what the fuck can I do as I am not worth anything”.

But I will surrender to the kindness,  
The love,  
And tenderness,  
The right people can give me  
To help me on my climb.

### *The Broken People*

Broken people's heartaches,  
Socially fixed by the comfort of love,  
Over food we break bread, and stories told,  
Of lovers lost, and dark pasts.

Broken people's selflessness,  
Solving problems unmanageable,  
Over world issues, and small weekday problems,  
Of work issues and a brighter future coming.

Not so broken anymore we leave one another,  
Each with our story to tell and be heard,

With lighter steps we walk into the night,  
Of a memory of a heart feeling free.

### *Candlelight*

In the dark, we share our stories,  
By a small flame of hope.

Some stories play on heartstrings,  
Some stories play on joy,  
Some stories play on desperation.

We all come for the same, for a sense of understanding,  
Fellowship,  
And not to be alone.

By candlelight, we create a better person  
And a better tomorrow.  
We lift one another up, when others fall  
With a deepest felt  
And unconditional love.

In the dark, the light will guide the way,  
For we will all be one another's candle  
In the pitch black,  
Showing the path.

### *Steps*

To take a step, to learn for yourself forgiveness  
Your feet and legs will ache from the strain.  
Your soul will be raw, and your heart exposed.  
Reborn if you let it, and start seeing again.

To take more steps, with help from your guide  
You will cry and laugh without knowing why.

But your mind will be free,  
You can cut off the cast, to show bones unbroken.

To just keep walking, on the path life has given you,  
Your hands will lift the weight of your hard labour.  
Your bones will still have cracks,  
But you will have the strength to run fast.

*Never again...*

I would like to say never again,  
I would like to think I am strong enough,  
I would hope I can do it for the people I love,  
But the truth is, I don't know.  
And it's just one day at a time.

Right now I am good,  
Right now I am better,  
Right now I can smile,  
But if I am honest,  
I don't know what I would do  
If IT was in front of me.

In the future I see myself happy,  
In the future I see myself content,  
In the future I see myself being a good person,  
But in my past, I will still see my sadness and despair.  
So I keep remembering and understanding,  
That it will always be a part of me.

I am doing my best,  
I am listening to my people,  
I am no longer dumb and blind,  
But it will take very little  
For distrust to creep back into my ear.

Sometimes I am angry,  
Sometimes I am sad,  
Sometimes I am lost,  
But my feelings are valid,  
I just have to open my mouth,  
And speak my truth.

I will have to work,  
I will have to trust,  
I will have to let others love me, till I can love myself,  
But I should never forget  
To reach out.  
The help is there, if I want it.

### *Second Chance*

Second chance,  
Second coming,  
Or just  
Back.  
We come back, from the abyss,  
A journey or just a full stop.  
Back to reality of life,  
Sight,  
And mind.

We perish  
In a world of second chances,  
It's how we leave it,  
That shows courage.

With a second chance,  
Come gifts unknown,  
Some teach,  
Some tears,  
Or, for some

Just a token of welcome back,  
Keep these gifts  
Close to your heart.

We live  
In a world of second chances,  
It will be how we use it  
That defines us.

### *Words*

The power of words is unparalleled,  
You can destroy or build with little effort.  
“I blame you”, or “I see you”,  
Can cut deep beyond blood and bone,  
But what would we be without words?

The kindness of a stranger saying  
“You have good energy, I like that”,  
Given carelessly and freely from the unknown,  
But will stick in the mind of the one who needs it,  
Like a blanket of comfort, that I am good enough.

We all need words to speak, to make sense,  
And feel a part of something,  
Sometimes it is also the things unsaid, but understood.  
Like looking across a crowded room,  
Speaking with your eyes,  
With that person who can see past the bullshit,  
And see beneath.

I can be grateful for someone actually seeing me,  
It costs nothing, but it is priceless to me.  
I am not invisible, cellophane or broken glass,  
I am a person who needs kind words of understanding.  
- Ralph

## Butterfly effect

---

“How are you doing?”

My therapist asked this simple question and looked thoughtfully.

“I am fine!”

I could not recognise myself. My body was covered with scars and bruises. I felt overwhelmed, angry, sad and anxious all at the same time.

“Do you have any problems? Anything?”

“Everything is alright... I just smoke crystal meth sometimes...”

There are many situations in my life story which could define the moment when my recovery started. From those therapy sessions many weeks had passed and I was slowly coming to the realisation that therapy alone was probably not enough and I needed more support. A few months later I went to my first CMA meeting. I was so painfully shy I couldn't enter the room at the Wednesday night meeting. I stood outside; sweaty, hot, anxious, desperately wanting to connect and ready to run a mile if anyone came up to me.

I was struggling quite a lot with understanding the concept of a Higher Power. Of course, I was from a former Communist country and believed all this stuff was just for not well-educated people. Also, the fellowship was too scary. I was paranoid that someone would chase and blackmail me.

It turned out that the fellows were friendly and cheerfully supported my little achievements such as picking up my first tea commitment, staying clean when I was triggered, doing my art classes and meeting my parents etc. Even though there were moments when I was expressing lots of anger, or confusion, after multiple relapses in the meetings, these people never ceased to amaze me with their love and support. Soon I learned that I could trust my fellows and I found my sponsor.

I was trying to stay clean in the rooms, but after a few weeks there was another relapse. My using got even worse and everyone was puzzled why recovery didn't work for me. I was one of the lost cases. My last using was somewhere in Vauxhall. On the way to that guy I had only one thought – I don't want to feel anything. Life had gotten very complicated; my long-term relationship had collapsed, I was

facing being homeless and I was utterly tired and sore. I remember that day, it was bright and sunny. The drugs ran out and we were waiting for a dealer when suddenly his phone rang.

“Why don’t you pick up the phone?”

“It’s my boss calling.”

“Tell him you are sick and not able to come.”

“I did. He’s already been calling me for two weeks.”

I will never forget that sobering moment of clarity. This was going to be me in a few years. Sitting in my trashy living room, waiting for a dealer, the phone would ring and I wouldn’t be able to pick it up. Immediately I got dressed, went back home and admitted to my ex that I was a drug addict and had a problem – I don’t know how to stop using.

That was my true Step 1. The next day I asked my therapist what else could stop me using and if anything on earth could arrest my compulsion to pick up crystal. My therapist suggested now was time for me to go to rehab. That was my Step 2.

When I went to my rehab I thought the therapists there would just give me new drugs. I was ready for all sort of treatments from hypnosis to dancing with drums, but the rehab psychiatrist told me I was an addict and should work the Steps if I wanted to survive. It was a shock! I was confused and there was a moment of realisation – I was still missing a piece of the puzzle. There was a massive fear of what if I don’t have my own Higher Power and will I be lost forever? That day I prayed for a sign. Anything! What is my Higher Power? Please! Suddenly something shifted, I rushed to my bedroom and as I walked in saw a beautiful butterfly sleeping on my pillow. It was the sign I had been desperately seeking. I knew my Higher Power would love and care for me all the time. I understood that now I had the chance to recover from my despair and suffering was no more my only option.

I practice Step 11 every morning. I surrender my will when I pray and meditate. I practice self-care everyday which requires discipline, meaningful work with my body, like eating on time and practicing

physical activities such as going to the gym, swimming, jogging and yoga etc. I also take care of my emotional state. For example, I watch a comedy once a week, or engage in something fun with the fellowship too.

Since that moment everything changed. I left rehab a few weeks later, then went to Thailand to learn to practice my yoga and meditation. I finished the Steps. Now I sponsor my wonderful and amazing sponsees. I started my MA at uni, found a new job and started dating guys that I like.

To sum up, I learned the default position of my inner addict is to survive. It pushes me into the corner, sucking out the whole joy of life, so using is left as the only option. These days I am not surviving anymore, but living freely beyond my wildest dreams.

Now my life has meaning and purpose, I have my unique voice and I can proudly say,

I am enough and my story is enough.

- R.S.

## **A life beyond my wildest dreams**

I'll never forget my first Crystal Meth Anonymous meeting. I remember feeling a relief that I was in a room where I knew that a large proportion of the people present had done exactly the same things I had done. However I derived very little comfort from this. This was just over four years ago and CMA was very much in its infancy in London. There were at that time only three meetings a week and the Thursday night meeting in Camden was sparsely attended. The Wednesday night meeting in Pimlico was much busier and seemed to me to be brimming over with positivity. Even so there was very little clean time, I think at that time there were perhaps a couple of people with two years but the majority were like me right at the very beginning of their journey. I remember sitting next to a man at my first meeting who was picking up his 30 day key ring. It seemed

to me an impossibility to be clean that long. How had he done that?!? I had no hope at all at this time. Not only did I think I couldn't stay clean, but the crystal meth that was still coursing through my veins made me think I didn't even want to stay clean. In truth, what did I have to stay clean for? I had lost my home, my career, my partner of 18 years, my friends, my passion and my hope. I couldn't quite see the point of staying clean. I certainly didn't for one minute have any hope that sitting around in a circle talking about ourselves would stop the intense desire I had to jam another needle loaded with crystal meth into my veins. In all honesty there wasn't a huge amount of evidence in the room that this was an actual possibility.

So how did I get there in the first place? In my twenties I had had a drink problem that caused me a lot of grief. I think I had a hang-over for about ten years. There were lots of things that hadn't yet happened to me. I retained a roof over my head, I stayed employed and despite some pretty dark feelings and thoughts I managed from the outside at least to keep things together, but I really couldn't stay stopped. I managed a few days here and there, but once the hang-over cleared up I couldn't remember why I had wanted to stop in the first place. Eventually a doctor told me I should stop. I had high blood pressure, (despite only being 28), I was thousands of pounds in debt and I really wanted to stop. I felt like I was on a hamster wheel and I desperately wanted to get off. The doctor somehow gave me permission. The next day inexplicably the usual obsession with drink was not there. Much later I started attending AA meetings. I attended them diligently for about 12 years but always with the sneaking suspicion that I wasn't really an addict. I compared my story to others with far more lurid pasts. I went through the Steps several times and came to the conclusion that I was a pretty faulty person and that everything was my fault. Given how out of place I felt I am amazed I lasted as long as I did. One day I made the momentous decision I was going to stop going. No more meetings, no more sponsees, no more feeling like a fraud. I can't tell you the relief. I didn't run straight out the door and pick up drugs. I stayed drink and drug free for a good few years.

One of the things bandied about in AA meetings was that if you

stopped going to meetings, you picked up..... eventually. And so it transpired with me. With bells on!! I had been chatting to a guy online and he suggested I come over to “play” with him and his partner. It was a Friday night and just before I set off he texted me and said they were thinking of getting some cocaine in and would I be happy to split the cost? At this point I hadn’t had a drink or a mind-altering drug for about fifteen years and yet I texted back that I was happy to chip in. Not for one minute did I think given my history with alcohol, this might not be a good idea. It just didn’t occur to me. I remember during that long night having the thought, “My problem was with alcohol not with drugs”, and that was the beginning of the lie I was to tell myself repeatedly over the next disastrous few years. I remember being amazed that all of a sudden it was 8am and I had to leave in order to go to work as unusually I was working on Saturday morning. I had no idea how on earth the time had flown so quickly. From that moment I was truly hooked. The lies to myself continued. I told myself that I was in control of it all. My “using” after all was always planned. But from that first Friday night things moved on very quickly.

I got a profile on much more extreme sex websites where most of the profiles made oblique references to drug taking. It was the drugs that I was after by then and not the sex. Within a few weeks of that first session I had my first encounter with “tina”- I remember the first time I had heard about this drug. I was attending an AA meeting many years before in New York. A guy came into the meeting all staring eyes, white faced and dripping with sweat, a look I was to see in the mirror a few years later! He talked about a new drug that was on the streets – and he said it was the most addictive substance known to man and it was ruining people’s lives – called crystal Meth. I barely gave it another thought. I remember thinking, “Well, that’s something I’ll never do!” But when the cute guy standing in my kitchen offered me a pipe I didn’t give it a second thought. In fact I couldn’t get it into my lungs quickly enough. Before I knew it it was 11am the next morning and my flat was full of people I hadn’t invited in and whose names I didn’t know. I found the comedowns excruciating, particularly once I had started “slamming”. Again I

could never have imagined myself doing this in a thousand years, but it became normalised so very quickly. I became an expert at it and was a dab hand at finding veins, and ordering the syringes, antiseptic wipes and all the other paraphernalia that went with it online.

Not surprisingly my life fell apart very quickly. I am an actor and I found I lost the confidence and passion required to act any longer. In truth the thought of work got in the way of my using and my career dried up there and then. This left me with the problem of what I was to live on, so I started plundering the joint account I shared with my partner of 18 years. Pretty soon he became surplus to requirement. Without any thought of the happy times, the shared life and family I ended our relationship. Like my career he simply got in the way. I broke his heart.

We sold our beautiful flat in Belsize Park and divided up the spoils. I hadn't earned enough money to get a mortgage because of my using so I was very limited in my choices. I opted for a tiny grubby flat in Camden. My thinking had been that I would pretty much be able to open a window and flag down a dealer from the flat. No sooner in the flat and I set about dismantling it. I'm not sure if it was the mania of crystal meth addiction, or grandiosity, but pretty soon the place was uninhabitable. It was at this point that I decided I wanted to stop using. A guy I had used with several times told me that our session would be his last. Somehow through the haze of "tina" I heard the sound of someone throwing down the gauntlet. I admitted to myself that my using was totally out of control and I couldn't actually stop. So I decided enough was enough, the time had come. Three days later I was beside myself with cravings. As well as the mother of all comedowns I was also battling a huge indifference to the process. I started wondering if I could release some equity from the flat and just take a six month "holiday". Instead (thank God) I went to my first NA meeting and it was there that someone told me about CMA.

That first year was hell. At about six weeks clean my mind cleared sufficiently to see the mess I had got myself into. At first I had thought I would attend meetings for two weeks just to "break the habit". I found after two weeks I was crawling up the wall for crystal.

I was obsessed with my (and everybody else's) veins and the desire to use seemed to overwhelm me several times an hour. I ranted and raved at meetings about how badly I wanted to use. I decided I would stay another two weeks by which time surely I would have returned to "normal". One thing for sure I was NOT going to do any of the suggestions. I wasn't going to get a sponsor, believe in God or do the Steps. I would stay for 90 days and that would be that. Before I had reached the 90 day mark I had got myself a sponsor and God bless that man. I called him every day and I couldn't have stayed clean without him. I ranted and raved down the phone at him, sometimes several times a day. At around two months clean I was able to start taking on board just how I had ruined my life. Not least my dad had died during my using and I hadn't in anyway dealt with it. The grief poured out of me like a torrent. Also I finally grasped that I had ended a relationship with my partner, the kindest and best friend I had ever had. My poor sponsor. I just thought he was there to do that. That it was his job or something? Much much later I came to realise he was only one year clean at the time. God I was lucky to have him.

Before long the next thing that became evident was that I couldn't survive much longer without getting some sort of job. But what was I to do? I had no skills or experience other than acting. I certainly was in no condition to do that anymore. I wasn't even sure whether I wanted to. My whole identity had been bound up in my job and my partner and here I was without either. My flat was almost uninhabitable but I lacked the skills and the finances to put it right. Miraculously a job materialised through a friend of a friend. I was to sell advertising space for a magazine in Croydon. In truth however much I hated it I was grateful for the money it provided.

I loathed the meetings and was very vocal about it. I could get Step 1 – I knew my life had become unmanageable, I only had to look at my flat, my career my future. I eventually began to understand my powerlessness. But I was stumped by Step 2: "Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity"- How was I going to do that!?! I simply did not believe in God and I wasn't about to pretend I did. It seemed a deal breaker to me. Months past.

I just thought I would never progress beyond Step 1. I remained as miserable as the day I had walked in, full of resentment and self-pity. Then one day at about eleven months clean I sat next to a guy at a meeting. He looked very unhappy, so at the end of the meeting I asked him how he was. He proceeded to tell me his story. Like me he had lost his partner, his career, his friends and all hope.

Suddenly through this poor man I heard my own story reflected back to me. And I heard my own insanity for the first time. As soon as I heard that I knew categorically that if I didn't want to return to that insanity the solution was to do the program and at that point I surrendered to the program. I stopped hating the meetings. I stopped wondering when I could stop attending and I became grateful that the meetings were there. In fact I started to love them! I had found my first glimmer of a power greater than myself. It was the program and the rooms of NA and CMA. At that moment I did my Step 3: "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a God of our understanding". For me this meant simply committing to a new way of life. The 12 Step way.

Now over four years later lots of things have changed. I no longer live in that horrible flat in Camden. By diligently saving and working in the office I was able to restore it slowly to quite a nice place to live. Once it was finished I rented it out as the unhappy memories made it unpleasant living there. My acting career slowly but surely returned, I love it and I'm so grateful to be an actor again. Everyday my confidence and ambition grow and I have no doubt today that I am in the right job. All the friends that I lost in my using are back in my life. One of them touchingly said to me not that long ago: "Please don't go away again". My ex partner is very much in my life and as kind and thoughtful as ever. Last month he accompanied my 90 year old mother to Naples to watch me perform a huge and taxing role in their beautiful opera house there. But I guess the most significant thing that has changed is how I view my life today. Apart from feeling so very grateful that I have been given a second chance, I have a general feeling that despite things frequently not going to plan, everything will be alright.

- Rob H.

## Help came in a glass pipe

---

I began doing crystal meth regularly when I moved to America to do my PhD. Prior to this I had, looking back, slowly increased my drug intake in the UK: cocaine, ecstasy, ketamine, G, and mephedrone. I had also seen a TV documentary about how addictive meth was but, having on occasion tried it when on holiday in the States, wasn't persuaded by this argument since I had managed to pick it up and put it down without consequences. Also, just before moving to the US, my drug use had changed. Early on, I used for social reasons: to stay up, to be more relaxed, to dance, to chat, and so on; later on, my drug use became increasingly tied to sex, and I was hooking up with a couple once a month for all-night chemsex sessions.

Arriving in America to begin my PhD, I was lost: without family, friends, or support networks. The assigned workload was unmanageable. I was petrified of lagging behind, making mistakes, or looking stupid. Moreover, I found it impossible to switch off and rest. And so, at the end of the day, I would drink a bottle or two of wine so that I could blot out my anxiety. Unfortunately, the alcohol was ineffective and my mind would churn drunkenly throughout the evening. I would wonder repeatedly why I couldn't manage, why I couldn't stop worrying, and why nobody was helping me. Help eventually came in the form of a glass pipe.

I can't remember where or when exactly I first did meth. It seemed that it was everywhere. Whenever I hooked up with someone from the internet, it would be the same situation: one man (or more), a baggie, a pipe, and a dose of G. Unlike the alcohol, the drugs took my mind completely away from my present circumstances. I had found a solution.

Coming into recovery I realise that my usage was fairly typical. Meth was a fast but fickle friend. As one of the CMA readings we have in the US goes, what starts out as occasional use becomes regular use and soon becomes daily use. I was lucky – my moment of grace came just before I had become a daily user. At the end my using, however, my weekends would start on a Thursday evening and often end on a Tuesday morning. Yet in my two years of meth use, inevita-

ble incomprehensible demoralization of course ensued: I frequented fleabag motels, hung around with armed criminals, gradually lost any moral code and finally surrendered my will to live.

Nowadays the war stories seem to me like clips from a movie: G-ing out while on the freeway; being asked to leave by people I would never choose to hang out with in my right mind; playing Russian-roulette high, and trading my body for drugs. None of these things made me even consider stopping! The most humiliating experience was that by this time I had teaching duties as part of my doctoral program. Somehow, each day I would show up (usually high or coming down) and manage somehow to get through my lesson. When I returned to my tiny student-teacher office I would cry thinking about how different I was from these bright-faced enthusiastic students, and how I had once, too, been just like them.

Even in hindsight my moment of clarity seems inexplicable. This much I know: my meth use was ramping up, most of my using buddies were shooting up around me, and I had the sense that I would be soon to join them. It was also my summer-break and so I had three months with no reason to be in touch with anyone and had my summer stipend in the bank. I also realized I couldn't stop. The realization that I was an addict had come a few months earlier and without much soul searching I just accepted that fact. My Step 1, I guess.

I was scared and life was getting smaller and smaller. A couple I had used with told me about a meeting they went to; it was at a meditation center and although I went once I kept on using.

One day, fairly out of the blue, I remembered about Alcoholics Anonymous. At high school, some members had once come to give us a talk. And I knew that a good friend of mine back in England went to meetings, but he never told me any more than that. I looked up AA meetings on the internet. Remarkably there was a gay recovery centre five-minute's walk from my flat where there was a meeting starting in fifteen minutes. I took the plunge and headed over.

My first experience of a recovery meeting wasn't great. I only made it five minutes in. The meeting was packed full of people who were smiling and who seemed oddly friendly. A stranger reached out their hand and welcomed me to an empty seat next to them. Someone else

began to read from the podium and they said a word that startled me: “God.” I don’t know why it upset me so much – I don’t come from a religious family and have no issue with religion – but it did. So, I stood up and left.

I don’t know quite what was more remarkable: that I came out of that meeting and instead of going to use directly (which was my first thought), I followed my second thought and went straight to another meeting; or, that since that day, I haven’t had to pick up a drink or a drug of any description. My second meeting was exactly the same as the first, and five-minutes-in again they said the word “God”, but something in me must have been different and, although uncomfortable, I made it through the rest of the meeting.

A couple of days later I went to my first meeting of Crystal Meth Anonymous. It was a small group of guys sat in a circle. The leader shared and then the others spoke. I had never ever heard a group of men speak so honestly and openly in my life before. The speaker’s story was crazy, funny, tragic and, for me, totally relatable. Something in my heart broke open that day.

My summer became devoted to recovery. I soon found that my emotions sober were all over the place and that my head was really busy. When I was in a meeting, however, I was able to focus and the noise in my mind quietened. I am so grateful that where I live the social element of the program is really rich. I soon learned, through flipping burgers at a pool-party fundraiser, that my nerves abated when I had a purpose and a job to do. That is the power of service. By going to the same meetings each week, I started to meet trudging buddies. That, for me, is fellowship. Some of these guys I still call and see today, some went back to using, others - far too many - died.

After a month or so, I found a sponsor whom I felt comfortable talking to and whom I called every day. I went to our weekly sponsee family meeting held at his flat, and met with him on alternate Saturdays to read the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous and work my Steps. It was through this kind and loving man that I met my British sponsee brother. He, like me, had got sober in the States but was now back and forth across the ocean. Before one of our “family” meetings I remember him complaining to our sponsor about there

not being a place for us tweekers (as we're known in the States) to go in England. Without missing a beat, our sponsor told him to get into the solution. "Why don't you start a meeting?" "Remember it just takes two addicts and a coffee pot!"

Not that it happened immediately, but a seed was planted. Some months later and with the help of some other addicts, my sponsee brother set up the first meeting of the London CMA fellowship. I have since gone to meetings whenever I'm over in the UK and have been honored to speak there, be of service, and experience for myself how the London fellowship has found its feet, attracted members, and changed lives.

One of the sayings that I heard early on in the rooms of recovery was that I had to be willing to change everything. Luckily, I was. In the end, very few physical things actually did have to change. I just didn't know what they were. Therefore, I had to be willing to follow the suggestions of others. For instance, I wasn't sure if I would need to leave my PhD program and consequently move home to England. I certainly still blamed University for my mental, physical, and spiritual breakdown at that point. I was taught not to worry about the future, however, but rather to keep taking the next indicated action and just carry on.

The autumn term started a week or two before I took my 90-day chip. The clouds had cleared a little and I was willing to give University a try sober. What I wasn't willing to do, though, was put my sobriety second to my study. It certainly wasn't easy – I guess no PhD program is meant to be (with or without all that comes with early recovery). Somehow, I learned to balance both: to get a B on papers and live with it, to go to a meeting daily and stay connected to the fellowship. Bit by bit I gained time, passed my exams; then sentence by sentence, page by page I completed my dissertation, graduated, became a Doctor of Philosophy, and got my first post as a University Lecturer.

There are days when my journey through recovery seems completely unreal. I went from the depths of despair, smoking meth in sleazy motels, to presenting my work clean and sober to experts in my field. Some days I'm lecturing at my current University and my brain total-

ly fails me. But even then, I know it's going to be OK. I have tools. I breathe, pray, and call my sponsor, or a fellow addict. Through meetings, the friends I have made, being fully involved in service and the 12 Steps, I have truly been given the help I needed to live a life beyond my imagination.

- Tom S.

## **I am an addict**

---

I am an addict. I never imagined I would ever accept that and make peace with it. It is however the truth and however painful, knowing I suffer from an illness has allowed me to deal with the shame and guilt I carried for years. It has meant that while I am not responsible for being a crystal meth addict, I am responsible for my recovery. Many times I have wondered how I got here. That was not in my plans. I was a happy child. As a teenager though, I was taken by a sense of inadequacy that led me to strive for perfection and do anything to fit in, to belong and to get over the feeling of being “less than”. I still remember the feelings when I wasn't picked for a team in sports, or was not popular with girls.

I came out in my mid-20s and discovered the gay scene in London. Clubs, men, drugs... I felt like I had arrived home. I no longer suffered from social anxiety, or low self-esteem. I was getting the validation and acceptance I had longed for. I could not get enough. Then one day, to my utter shock, I was diagnosed with HIV and my world fell apart. For the first and only time in my life, I did not want to live. I found myself depressed and suffering from severe anxiety. I was also alone. I found crystal meth and I saw the light at the end of the tunnel. Little did I know that I would end up being in an even darker place.

At the time however, I felt invincible. Suddenly I regained my confidence and thought I could deal with anything thrown at me as long as I had drugs. Not only could I get the sex I wanted, dance for days,

and work harder, I could also face life. I could get up in the morning and face my HIV doctor without fear. I could deal with the rejection I encountered. I could relieve the pain and bury the shame and guilt hoping they would all disappear. I was happy to be alive again. Or so I thought. I was what I call a functional addict.

Fun stopped being exactly that. I was having sex I didn't want, with people I did not fancy, or was just spending hours and hours watching porn or looking out for a bit of validation online. The connections I thought I had vanished. The isolation took over. The using got worse and it escalated in a way that when I wondered if I was losing control, I had already lost it. I got arrested, I saw people die and friends go to jail. None of that stopped me. In fact, I would use drugs to deal with it all and mostly by myself.

I would go to any lengths to get drugs. I hid it from the people that loved me. I remember the sweats. I would use while driving, in trains, planes, hospitals and even at my parents' house. I would look at myself in the mirror and see my mother's disappointed face. Her perfect, smart and beautiful boy was gay, HIV positive and a junkie. I blamed myself for it. At that point, it was clear I was unable to live life on life's terms and that was a very scary place to be.

At first I wanted to get back to the good old days and it took time to realise and accept that I could not use successfully no matter how hard I tried. I did seek help: psychology, psychiatry and drug services. While they all helped in some way, none was enough.

I was using daily, from the time I woke up until I went to bed. I became dependent on GBL and crystal meth, as well as benzodiazepines. I was a master at mixing, having a different substance for each moment of the day, activity or feeling. I did my utmost to survive. I managed to keep a job being self-employed, a flat and earn money to pay for my drug use but the money and energy I spent on my using was truly embarrassing.

I was also very good at masks and putting on a façade. The dreadful feelings I had whenever I was starting to run out of drugs were unbearable. I had become a slave. I got to a stage where I knew I could not continue using, but I didn't know how and if I could live without drugs. That was very scary and perhaps the rock bottom I

needed to hit. The fear of losing everything was greater than the one of quitting. I got given the gift of desperation.

I remember going to my first meeting, reluctantly, while I was still using. That was the first time I saw people that had managed to get and stay clean. Before that moment, I had never met anyone able to do it. I doubted myself but found hope. It was perhaps possible in the end. After going through detoxification, I got back into the rooms. It was scary and uncomfortable being surrounded by gay men, sober with clothes on and talking about feelings. I stayed. For once, I could make a decision not to use. I committed to go to any length for my recovery.

I did everything that was suggested. It took awhile for me to share, to open up and get vulnerable. I was too broken. It was hard but yet very simple. It was about letting others believe in me when I didn't believe in myself. I had to let others love me – expecting nothing in return – for as long as I could not love myself. As the drugs started to wear off, my recovery began. Then there were the feelings. I had spent too many years avoiding them and now I had to deal with them clean – no crutches. By suppressing the difficult ones I had also prevented myself from feeling joy. I started working the Steps and my recovery rose to a level I wasn't expecting. I started to enjoy life. I discovered true connection and friendship. I found compassion for others and myself.

Today I look back, nearly 18 months clean, and I see I did things in my life I never thought I would. I also, however, overcame things I never thought I could. I work on my recovery every day to stay clean and become a better version of myself. I don't use apps, alcohol, drugs, or anything that brings up the worst of me. It is a small price to pay to live free of obsession and pain. I am scared of a relapse. Once I start I cannot stop and I know it would only take me back to the last time I used. Just for today, I am no longer risking my own life.

- Dom A.

## From shame to freedom

---

I was the kind of kid who did not like to ask for help. If I didn't understand anything at school, I wouldn't ask the teacher. I would feel ashamed that I would look stupid. Instead I would find the answer for myself. I think I always felt different from other people and compared myself to them a lot. I knew from an early age that I was gay – and I didn't like it since no-one else seemed to be and I felt it was wrong. Maybe a lot of this had to do with being abused physically as a child by a cousin when my mum was in hospital for a long period. It left me feeling different, feeling on my own, that I needed to look after myself – better to suffer in silence than ask for help.

Whatever the reason, I grew up not really liking myself. I hated being me. Everyone else looked better, seemed better, had better opportunities, better families, better friends. I was incapable of seeing what I did have – I was always thinking about what I didn't have. And being gay was a real problem. It made me hate myself even more.

I did believe in God. I grew up believing God is Love. But I didn't think He liked me terribly much. My Faith was important to me – and while it helped me to love other people and look after their needs, I also used it to judge myself and to be harsh towards myself. I would help people a lot – not realising that I was often doing it to feel good about myself. Maybe helping them would please them, they would like me, and then I might feel good. But the more I did it, the more I found nothing was really filling that space inside me, nothing was dealing with my hostile feelings towards myself.

Gay sex was a trial. I loved it – but then when it was over, I hated it and myself even more. I wanted connection, but again I was really using people to feel good about myself.

Early on, I began drinking. I thought I had a huge capacity for alcohol. I had no idea that I was an alcoholic. But it somehow would numb the pain I felt inside. It also numbed the shame I felt about sex. I would drink it before sex, but the shame would still return, sober or not.

Then I discovered poppers and from poppers I progressed to cocaine and one or two other drugs. I would only use them with sex.

I thought that because I was using them just for sex, and not every day, I wasn't an addict. I couldn't see that I could only have sex if I was drunk or high and, little by little, all my boundaries around sex began to tumble. I began to experiment and ended up doing unsafe sex. I swore I would never inject a drug. "That's one thing I will never do!" I declared.

Then, one day, a hook-up offered me crystal meth. I smoked it from a pipe. It was the best high I had ever had. It made me forget about everything else, about who I was, and made me concentrate on the sex. It felt great, but still, after everything was done, the same shame would return and I would then throw away my pipe, swearing I would never do it again. I was back to it within a week or two.

Then someone offered to inject me. Each time someone offered me drugs, I would just say yes. I would take whatever was offered. And so I said yes to being injected. After this great boundary had crumbled, I just wanted to inject crystal for sex. I was also involved with a guy for a year who did the same. He told me I was an addict. All I thought was, "Well, he would say that. He's such an addict!" I was in a state of utter delusion – I thought addicts were people who used every day. I certainly was not like them! I didn't need help! After all, I was the one in control – I only used crystal for sex. I couldn't see the fact that I couldn't have sex any more without crystal. I was lucky I was mostly with this one guy who is now a great friend in recovery – I am pretty sure things would have ended more horribly if we hadn't brought each other down as quickly as we did.

I hit my rock bottom a year later. I was already feeling desperate with mounting debts, failing to turn up to work and family and friends – and alienating them and the people I worked with. I felt as if I had become nothing – I was just skin stretched over nothing inside. I lost my work, my home, my car. It felt like a disaster. And yet, when I owned up to what had been happening, I suddenly felt God was there. God had been waiting for me to get to that point so that He could rebuild me. I had fallen a long way – but God was there to catch me.

I went to rehab in America. Again, I still believed I was not an addict. I was not like other people. Pretty quickly I began to see that I

was. I began to go to Crystal Meth Anonymous meetings. As I heard other people's stories, I realised I wasn't so different after all. I was an addict like these people, but I didn't have to stay in addiction. Like these other addicts, I could find the solution that they had found. It wasn't easy to be myself in a meeting with gay men. For years, I had used apps and websites and pretended to be someone I wasn't. Now I was having to be just me, without the made-up identity. But once I started saying my real name, admitting I was a crystal meth addict – suddenly I found it wasn't so bad. It was OK to be me and that the other men in the room were warm, loving and accepting of me. I could be the same to them – and to myself.

For the first time, I began to ask for help and to realise that I didn't have the answers. It felt really good. There was something liberating about no longer believing that I had to sort out my life on my own, without anyone's help. Indeed, the wisdom of the meetings declared that none of us could stay sober on our own – it is a We program and we stay sober and change our lives together.

I realised too that God did like me after all. He loved me enough to be there when I hit rock bottom, but He was also there in the CMA meetings – in the other people in the room who shared with me their love and their wisdom. It made me realise that my Higher Power also included the people in the rooms, my brothers and sisters in recovery. I was told again and again, that it didn't matter what my Higher Power is – as long as it isn't me. On my own I don't have the power to deal with my addiction. It controls me. I don't control it. But with the Higher Power of the group, or of God, we gain real freedom from the tyranny of addiction.

I was encouraged to find a sponsor. I wasn't sure who I wanted. I listened to the guys in the meeting and I heard someone I liked, respected and identified with. I was scared of asking him, fearing he might not want to work with me. To my surprise he said yes. It helped me begin to see that my fears are not as real as I think they are. They're just part of the madness that lives in my head.

I asked my sponsor how often I should ring him. He asked me, "How often do you think of crystal?" "Every day," I replied. "In that case," he said, "call me every day." And so I did. I began to do the

suggestions he and others gave me. He told me that as an addict I will want to figure things out, but if I want to get better in recovery I have to just do what is suggested, even when I don't understand. It made me realise that we have to do recovery before we start to feel recovery.

I started the Steps and I did service and called people and my sponsor every day. I did fellowship. All seemed to be going well. Then I relapsed nine months in. I was devastated, but I was also grateful for it. I experienced and felt my own insanity during it; I wanted to stop but just couldn't. It convinced me of my insanity, my powerlessness and the unmanageability of my life. My sponsor took me again through the first three Steps. I realised I had not been convinced before that I had no control over the crystal. I knew it now and I also began to learn how to take things one day at a time – to learn to live in the present moment, to be grateful every day for what I have, don't worry about what I don't have and stop trying to control life. My Higher Power was now the one in charge – not me and not my addiction.

I began Step 4 – “We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves”. People had often said how difficult it was. My sponsor helped me see that Step 4 is not about shaming or judging ourselves. It's about understanding why we do what we do as addicts – diagnosing our disease's spiritual roots. It's an exercise in compassion. That's what the Steps are about – learning to understand ourselves and, through our connection with our Higher Power, putting our lives on a happier, freer footing. We can change our lives and how we feel about ourselves without using a single drug, or drink, or person. So, it was my Higher Power, meetings, fellowship, service and step work which helped me to get sober – and to stay sober – and to experience a happiness, self-acceptance and freedom I had never experienced before. I remain grateful to those CMA meetings in America which started me on the road of recovery.

When I came back to London, CMA was just beginning. There was one meeting and a second was beginning. I felt scared at first about meeting many other gay men in London – where I had done most of my using and acting out. Doing service helped me overcome my

fear and create connection with others – greeting at the door and making tea and coffee was where I began. I have done many other forms of service in CMA since. I also made sure I found a sponsor and finished off my Steps and now I am a sponsor with sponsees – it is great to be able to hand on what I received. I know if I don't hand it on, I won't keep what I have. And it is amazing to see how people's lives really change when they start doing what the fellowship suggests to them.

As the Promises say, I have found a new freedom and a new happiness as a result of the Steps. I made amends to family and friends and have rebuilt my relationships with them. I have returned to work and am also doing training to help me further the work I do. There are still challenges in life that come my way, but I know I do not have to face them on my own. I can ask for help. With my Higher Power – which is God and all the people in the Fellowship – I know that I will get the help I need.

- D. B.

## **I would die if I used or drank again**

When I got clean from meth (and other substances) the term “chem-sex” didn't exist, “slamming” was “shooting up” and CMA itself was almost brand-new and so the meetings not accessible to me. I didn't actually know they even existed until I'd been sober a couple of years.

Day one I knew, without question or any doubt whatever, I would die if I used or drank again. I weighed 70kgs (despite being 6'6” tall – I was cadaverously thin) and suffering from constant illnesses. I had no idea what the future held, but I knew that I had to do whatever it took to leave my old life behind and create something new and that I really had no idea how. I didn't know how to live and I didn't know how to have sex clean and truly enjoy it, but I was determined to figure out how. There were no books about the physical

effects of meth on the brain, on how it twisted and perverted your sexual self, how long it took for the receptors in your brain to recover, or the steps you could take in early recovery to avoid using again. For many parts of recovery I had NA and AA, which are invaluable, but as an openly gay man there was something missing: a way to deal with all the classic impacts of chemsex-related addiction. I had no tools to deal with the catastrophic damage “tina” had done to my sense of myself as a sexual being. I had to work out how to be intimate, on any level, with anyone; how to love myself enough to take interpersonal risks to let people know the real me (including myself). I set about figuring this out, more or less by trial and error. I discovered there was a little inner voice that would quietly, and over time more loudly and frequently, tell me when something was a good idea and when it was not. I started out knowing I didn’t know how to live. I came to realise I didn’t love myself, didn’t love anyone else, was desperately lonely and hiding it. Recovery gave me the tools to see it. Men came along who helped me see that intimacy was not hard-wired to romance; that great sex did not necessarily have any meaning beyond the experience, that lust and love and infatuation were all separate things. Men and women came along that helped me remember how to be a friend (drugs and alcohol took that away; recovery gave it back), and then learn for the first time how to be a good one. Men came along to show me what love is, how to let it in, and what behaviours were actually keeping it, and people, at a distance. One of them I met when five years clean, and we were together for the next 16. I wasn’t looking for him when we found each other, but recovery allowed me to recognise how special he was and accept the gift of love, just as it allowed me to see when we were unhealthy for one another in ways that couldn’t be fixed. Sobriety helped me learn the lessons from this, too, and from many other triumphs and tragedies in my life.

Looking back, comparing what resources are available to meth addicts cleaning up now to what I had, I did my early recovery very differently than is recommended today for chemsex-affected addicts, mostly by trial and error. I had little choice: I had to figure it out or die. It is pretty miraculous that I didn’t go badly astray, many

times. Looking back, I can see that somehow exactly what I needed came along when I needed it, in the form I needed it. The number of times this happened, often from quite literally the kindness of strangers, exhausts the vocabulary of wonder.

The fact that this worked out does not mean I'm particularly stronger than other addicts, or otherwise different: it means I had a Higher Power working overtime, even when I didn't recognise or even believe in it; that belief was very hard to come by. It took several years, and finally I realised that this long sequence of "coincidences" was anything but. I also realised that little voice led to all kinds of life choices entirely different than my "plans" for myself, and that unlike my plans, the little voice's suggestions were never, ever, wrong. By contrast, my "plans", especially when in conflict with the little voice, were always wrong.

All I needed to do – then and now – was listen to that little inner voice and follow it – and never use, no matter what, no matter how hard sobriety or recovery or life was – just for that day. I didn't always do the right thing, but I did it often enough. If I can do it, anyone can.

22 years into this programme I learn new things about recovery every day. Sometimes I have to relearn old things too, sometimes multiple times. No mistake really matters as long as it doesn't lead to using, and as long as I clean up the messes I make in others' lives along the way, and as long as I forgive myself after I have made amends (if not before). Going to meetings makes me realise how spectacularly remarkable it is that I got this far and grateful for every clean day I've had. Grateful that I can be authentic with total strangers and not care whether or not they accept or like me, that I have left behind the shame that clouded every part of my insecure using self.

I got clean to save my life, never expecting that recovery would give me a completely new life that was better in every way than anything I had even imagined (despite having a very good imagination).

With every clean day that passes, the days of recovery that came before matter less than the day I am in. It is said that yesterday is history and tomorrow's a mystery. In the end, all of us only have today and if I make the best of it, to the best of my ability at the time, that

will be good enough; my Higher Power will ensure that the mistakes don't kill me. Until tomorrow comes.

- Nick A-H

## **Finding hope**

---

I am grateful I know I am an addict. It explains a lot about my life. The years of turmoil, destruction and negative behaviours. Today I am aware that isn't how life should be and that I don't need to live my life with my finger firmly pushed down on the self-destruct button. I know this because in recovery I have found hope.

Nine months ago I came into recovery. I was scared, lost and lonely. Life had become desperate.

Luckily, recovery provides many powerful things, including being able to look back on my life and understand what I've done, why I've done it and how I go forward, leading a better life.

I believe addiction is with us from birth. Life events and trauma may exasperate our addictions, but it is there, waiting in the wings for its opportunity to take control.

From an early age I was attention seeking – I remember being a child, faking stomach pains so I could get a drink of squash and two paracetamols. This went on for over a year until a hospital consultant told my parents I was fine. Of course, a miracle also happened at this time and I never had a stomach pain again.

I was a complete fantasist – I truly believed I was adopted, as my brothers were much older, and I hoped my real father (who would of course be a major celebrity – I had a certain pop star in mind) would one day come and rescue me.

And I was full of self-pity – my life was full of “why me”, “poor me” type thoughts. This often majored on why I was gay growing up in a homophobic Welsh valley.

In many ways I have the story of a stereotypical addict. I thought I never fitted in – I had friends, but others bullied me; there wasn't

much emotion at home – I thought families who said I love you were odd. I was shy and unconfident – I now understand I have low self-esteem issues.

That first drink gave me some confidence. The first time I acted out sexually it got me the attention I craved. I now see how I've used anything (alcohol, drugs, sex, shopping, food) and anyone throughout my life to try and make myself happy. I was trying to fix my feelings, but it didn't work.

I escaped the Welsh valleys for a university in the Midlands. That didn't take away my fear of coming out and I stayed firmly in the closet. Maybe growing up in Wales wasn't the issue. I drank a lot as most students do. I now understand the term blackout and much of university was spent waking up and having no clue what happened the previous night.

I was feeding the addict in me with alcohol and secret sex. These were the days without mobiles and apps – so public toilets and bushes in parks were the way to meet men for sex. I thought this was how life should be. I'd let men use me as I thought this made me happy. On reflection, I didn't have any self-worth, I didn't value myself at all.

After university and now out as a gay man, I fell in love with a guy my age and moved in with him. Now life could be normal. I had a job, a relationship, a social life, a home, but I was scared I was missing out (not sure of what), jealous of my boyfriend whenever he talked to another man, wanting a better job (though I barely knew what I was doing in the one I had) and I wanted more sex (with random men not my boyfriend).

This became the pattern for my life; get a new job, move to a new area, meet a new man. The jobs I would usually do well at. The new man I'd usually get tired of, and cheat on, but would be too scared of being alone to leave the relationship.

I couldn't always get the man I fancied of course, but I'd try, especially when fuelled by my lifelong friend, alcohol. My behaviour would put the most successful stalker to shame as I created drama and manipulated to try and get my way.

Along the way I started experimenting with drugs – cocaine, ket-

amine, pills. Whenever someone said do you want some of this, I'd rarely hesitate. I had no idea what ketamine was the first time someone gave me a bump. Hence a very large bump and no memory of what happened after that.

So, this was life for many years. I had long term relationships, including a civil partnership. I had a brilliant career – I was at the top of my profession. I lived in lovely houses, in amazing towns and cities. Of course, wherever I moved to, whoever I was with, whatever job I had, my problems remained – this was because all these things were not the problem. The problem was me.

But who was me? There was work me – professional, intelligent, creative. There was the person my friends saw – kind, gentle but guarded. There was the person my husband saw – loving and then slightly crazy when alcohol fuelled my jealousy. There was the person I saw – sad, angry, lonely, lost. No one, not even me, knew the real me. But I thought I was ok. This was life yeah? Then I entered a new phase. I was no longer pushing the self-destruct button – I was now punching it, and hard.

My husband couldn't take the lack of emotion from me, the arguments and my cheating. We separated. My father died unexpectedly at the same time. These circumstances exasperated my addictive behaviour.

I now lived in a big house, in a sleepy town, just outside of London. I had a lot of spare cash. It was time for me.

Weekends would involve apps, guys, sex and then a guy said I've got some G. I had no idea. I drank it.

G, M, cocaine, MDMA, ketamine became a regular weekend diet. I'd throw in a splash of booze too when laying off the G. Drug friends would come for the weekend and we would take all the above and meet countless men. Sundays and Mondays started to blur.

I always wanted more – more men, more drugs. I'd often say; "Fuck-ing lightweights" about guys leaving a two or three-day party. I was just warming up.

I'd found "tina" by this stage. I loved "tina", probably the only time I've truly loved, but Tina hated me and was out to kill me. I was blissfully unaware of how "tina" was changing me.

“Everyone else is paranoid!” “They are dirty junkies!” “I am having the best time!”... This was the bullshit that often came from my mouth. I didn’t see how my substance misuse progression had now sped up. A 20+ year career of misuse had now hit fast forward for a final four-year finale.

“Want to slam?” a guy I barely knew said. “No way, I don’t inject.” I said. Ten minutes later he injected me with crystal meth. I remember little of the next 24 hours. I know multiple people had bareback sex with me and activity that I had never really done before such as fisting took place. When I started “slamming”, I only wanted bareback sex; fisting, watersports, outdoors became regular activity.

If I had no self-worth before I had totally lost it now. I left my job (to freelance) – and never did a day’s work. Instead I chatted to guys, got them to come over, inject and have unsafe sex. One of the location-based apps would light up in the early hours as I could see guys on the edges of London. I’d often say let me get you an Uber. Many would.

I’d get a dealer to come over and inject me whatever day or night of the week it was – and often I’d be alone. I’d search on apps for sex, but often just being high and talking about filthy sex was all I did.

“Tina” then took a final push at my sanity. I was convinced there were cameras in my house, my phone had been cloned, my email infiltrated and strangers in the street were talking about me.

This built up to me believing that everyone knew what I was doing because my life was on TV. My life was a TV show and the final episode was coming up – and this would be about my death.

While this is sad enough to reflect on, it’s even worse that I do not remember much of the last few months of my using. I know I’ve been in dangerous situations from passing out at parties to being injected with the same pin others had used. I didn’t care. I just loved “tina”, but I also persuaded people to inject for the first time, to have bareback sex, to share needles. I played the victim and the perpetrator.

I had lost my phone while hiding in bushes in South East London. With no contacts I thought, ok this is my last bit of crystal. I spent a few hours trying to inject myself. Apart from being severely dehy-

drated, I was terrible at injecting, but it didn't matter. I knew the high would be short lived. I was taking extreme amounts of crystal, often mixed with M or cocaine, but there was no high anymore – a quick buzz if I was lucky.

I didn't really want to sit there trying to get a pin in me for hours, watching it get blunter as I tried, watching my veins disappear, but I had to do it. I was obsessed with “tina”, even though she was killing me.

I returned home, opened all the windows as I thought my house was full of flies that would kill me. I thought everyone outside were people I knew, or had met. This was the finale of my TV show. I wrote suicide notes and popped them through a friend's door.

I stood on the edge of a bridge with my dog in my arms, asking her if she wanted to go first, or with me.

I woke up in my flat. My friends who had got my note were shouting up and banging at the door. I'll never forget the look on their faces – they didn't know about the drugs, let alone that I was an intravenous user and they saw the state of my house. Smashed mirrors, computers, TVs and the names of everyone I thought was going to kill me written on the walls.

Hospitals, more suicide attempts and a mental institution followed suit. 28 days in rehab turned into three months. I admitted I was an addict and that I could just not stop using drugs. I found out my addiction wasn't just a few years of heavy use of crystal meth, but a lifetime of using drugs, alcohol, sex, money, people and acting the way I did. A life full of fear.

Once I surrendered and took on the principles of honesty, open-mindedness and willingness, my life started to fill up with hope and that has grown the more I've worked my programme of recovery. I did, and do what was suggested.

Meetings are an important part of my recovery. I'd spend hours planning a use up, so a few hours a day isn't a hardship. Meetings remind me what it was like and what joy comes from recovery. I did 90 in 90 as suggested across a range of recovery fellowships.

CMA is helping me get to know many other gay men in a positive way. My entire life has revolved around either bitching about gay

men, or sleeping with them. Platonic friendships are definitely the way forward.

Service at meetings is important to me. Right from the start I would help where I could. I put away the chairs, and then I took on the greeter role and the tea commitment at another meeting, newcomer rep at a CMA and I've become the secretary of a meeting in another fellowship.

Getting myself a sponsor was essential. I eventually plucked up the courage to ask someone to be my sponsor, putting it off and off, and causing myself unnecessary pain. He said yes immediately. I cried. I never would have thought praying would become such a big part of my life. I went from the "I'm not doing that God thing" to twice daily prayer, sometimes more, to God. I definitely had a Higher Power looking after me throughout my life. Meditation came naturally and calms and keeps me connected to God.

I worked through my Steps in great detail, but quickly. After rehab, where I had been in a bubble, I was vulnerable, and I needed to do the Steps quickly.

Each Step gave me an understanding of me, the way I act, my defects and my strengths. I understood that I needed to let go of those many resentments – from the hate for a teacher at school because I thought he made me look stupid (he was just being a teacher); to the first boyfriend who wanted to watch as men used me (when drunk I'd instigate this but cry "poor me" when I wasn't drunk – selfish when I wanted this sex. Ok yes, this situation is wrong on many levels, but I saw my part in this and that is what counts).

The amends process may be one of the most beautiful experiences anyone can undertake I found. It's not been a "I'm sorry" but a fresh start. I now have amazing relationships with some lifelong friends. Overall, the Steps freed me – from me. On completing each Step I changed and that to me is a spiritual experience.

I maintain my recovery daily – I wake up, I pray and meditate (often too briefly as recovery fits with life). I write a gratitude list as today I have so much to be thankful for. I was never grateful before recovery. I check my thoughts and actions as I go about my day. Sometimes I know I'm being unkind, at times I've not realised I've been

dishonest, but when I review my day every night in my inventory I usually see the error of my ways.

I don't use apps. Sex was a part of my downfall too. I'm avoiding that as I avoid substances. I'm a happy singleton for now, learning to be with me rather than be codependent on anyone I could take "hostage".

None of this is easy, but it's better than wanting to kill myself. There are days I feel like it's the end of the world, but it's not. As long as I do what my programme has taught me I should hopefully be a grateful addict in recovery for the rest of my life.

When it comes down to it, recovery is fairly simple. It's about having a routine and living in the day. Yesterday is gone, tomorrow isn't here yet.

Live for now. Live in recovery. Live in hope.

- Ashley W.



# *APPENDICES*



## What Is CMA?

Crystal Meth Anonymous is a fellowship of people for whom methamphetamine and other drugs have become a serious problem. The members of CMA meet regularly to help each other stay clean and to carry the message of recovery to crystal meth addicts.

Our only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using. The Fellowship advocates complete abstinence from all drugs, including alcohol, marijuana, and any medication not taken as prescribed. Time and again, we have seen how alcohol and other drugs lead us right back to meth.

Staying clean is our top priority. We lay a solid foundation for our daily recovery with these basic elements:

- Meetings and fellowship
- Sponsorship and Step work
- Service and commitments

Meetings are where we gather to hear the experience, strength, and hope of fellow members. We come to CMA because of our common problem; we stay because of the common solution. Our groups strive to maintain an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality. CMA's traditions of unity and anonymity are paramount for they give each member equal standing and an equal opportunity to recover.

The Twelve Steps of Crystal Meth Anonymous are a spiritual, not religious, path of recovery. We define for ourselves the nature of our personal relationship with spirituality. Working these Steps with a sponsor as our guide, we experience a spiritual awakening.

Service is essential for the survival of both the addict and the Fellowship. The gift of recovery was freely shared, and in turn we gratefully offer it to other addicts. That is our primary purpose. Nothing else is as effective as one addict helping another.

If you think you may have a problem with crystal meth, you're in the right place. Welcome home. You always have a seat here.



### **CMA Interim Approved Literature**

*The General Service Committee has approved this literature to be used widely by the Fellowship, and encourages feedback and comment so that it may be considered in the future for approval by the General Service Conference.*

© Crystal Meth Anonymous  
6.28.2017

# Crystal Meth Anonymous™

## THE TWELVE STEPS: A Plan of Action

We have a simple message: Recovery from crystal meth addiction is possible. You never have to use again. To find long-term freedom from the grip of addiction, we work the Twelve Steps of Crystal Meth Anonymous:

1. We admitted that we were powerless over crystal meth and our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a God *of our understanding*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with a God *of our understanding* praying only for the knowledge of God's will for us, and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to crystal meth addicts, and to practice these principles in all of our affairs.

Crystal meth seemed like the answer to our problems. Not anymore. We came to CMA because our drug use was killing us. If you are like us, you know that once we start, we can't stop. To stay clean and sober, we don't pick up—no matter what.

Abandoning our old companion fear, we take a breath and work the Steps. We see results when we're rigorously honest and thorough. Practicing spiritual principles day to day, we live in the solution:

Surrender is an action...it brings freedom.  
Humility is an action...it brings perspective.  
Gratitude is an action...it brings contentment.

This is the gift of recovery: We awaken, our lives improve, and we gradually move from self to service. We act as messengers to others who are suffering—messengers of hope and healing, of connection, serenity, and yes, even joy.

The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous have been reprinted and adapted with the permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. ("A.A.W.S."). Permission to reprint and adapt the Twelve Steps does not mean that Alcoholics Anonymous is affiliated with this program. A.A. is a program of recovery from alcoholism only—use of A.A.'s Steps or an adapted version of its Steps in connection with programs and activities which are patterned after A.A., but which address other problems, or use in any other non-A.A. context, does not imply otherwise.

The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous: "1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable. 2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. 3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him. 4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. 5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. 6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character. 7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings. 8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all. 9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. 10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it. 11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out. 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."



**CMA Interim Approved Literature**

*The General Service Committee has approved this literature to be used widely by the Fellowship, and encourages feedback and comment so that it may be considered in the future for approval by the General Service Conference.*

© *Crystal Meth Anonymous*  
6.28.2017



## **The Twelve Traditions of Crystal Meth Anonymous**

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon CMA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as expressed in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for CMA membership is a desire to stop using.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or CMA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the Addict who still suffers.
6. A CMA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the CMA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every CMA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Crystal Meth Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centres may employ special workers.
9. CMA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Crystal Meth Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the CMA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films and all other media.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous have been reprinted and adapted with the permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc (A.A.W.S.) permission to reprint and adapt the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous does not mean that Alcoholics Anonymous is affiliated with this program. AA is program of recovery from Alcoholism only—use of A.A.'s Steps and Traditions, or an adapted version of its Steps and Traditions in connection with programs or activities which are patterned after A.A., but which address other problems, or in any other non-A.A. context, does not imply otherwise.



# I Can Stay Sober

I can stay sober.  
I don't have to relapse.  
I never need to go back out there;  
I can stay here—there is a solution.  
I can stay here and stop running;  
I can stay here and start saying yes to life.  
I can find a Higher Power to rely on.  
I can find some peace and find out who I really am.  
I can make a decision and make some changes.  
I can make some new friends—  
And make amends to my old ones.  
A lot of addicts will go back to using, but I don't have to.  
Not if I get a sponsor and get to work.  
  
Take a deep breath...  
If I can accept the truth and put away my fantasy,  
If I can ask for a little help,  
If I can take these suggested steps,  
One day at a time, I will be free.

(Groups may change this reading to the “We” version at their discretion)



*CMA Conference Approved Literature*

©2013 Crystal Meth Anonymous

[www.crystalmeth.org](http://www.crystalmeth.org)

CMA Helpline - (855) 638-4373

4.17.2013