

Hello, my name is Ryan Downs and I am a certified Peer Recovery Coach (CAPRC1), but my story did not start there. Addiction has been a part of my family and I's life for as long as I can remember. I am what you may call a culturally-immersed addict; to speak to me of another life outside of addiction was like speaking to me of a world that did not exist. My whole family was engulfed by addiction. I grew up surrounded by addiction. My dad was an alcoholic. He was abusive to my mother. They both used methamphetamine. Meth was always a big part of my family's life. I would get high with my family daily. Most families would sit down at the kitchen table to eat, but my family would sit down to get high. Chaos was always a part of my childhood. My mom and dad split up when I was around five. My mom got with a man that was half her age; he was eighteen years old. This went on till I was about 11; then, my mother got with another man that was in active addiction.

Right round this time, I began using. It started with alcohol by 14 years old, and I was drinking around a fifth of alcohol a day. I was a raging alcoholic, hooked on opiates, and I had already ran in with the law several times. Everyone was contributing into my addiction. I knew I had always smoked weed, and I would sell weed to support my habit. It was around this time that I found out that I could trade Sudafed for meth, so I would go steal it at stores. This went on until I was about 16 years old.

At this time, my mother found out she had breast cancer. Discovering the news of my mother's cancer is when my family changed forever. With the cancer, came the OxyContin prescription. We all had fallen so far into addiction. My mom beat cancer, but we never stopped using drugs; they had become a normal part of our lives. My mother had lost one breast and seven lymph nodes during her first battle with cancer, but none of us stopped getting high during this time. At this point, I was so dependent on alcohol that I literally could not function without it. I would be so sick if I did not have any alcohol that I had to have pills to survive each day. This was how I lived my life. I will never forget the day my mom came home, and said the cancer has returned, but this time she would not be beating it. I was 17 years old at this time. From that moment, I never looked back and I tried drowning myself in a bottle. I had become a main line needle user. I was doing anything I could to escape reality. I was constantly in and out of jail, and I had 32 minor consumptions tied to my name at seventeen years old.

A couple of months after my 18th birthday, I was arrested for a dealing case. This time my bond was one hundred grand cash, and I was not getting out. My mom ended up passing away once I was locked up, and this was one of the darkest times of my life. I eventually got out, but my addiction only worsened. I was at the point that I needed alcohol so badly that I would drinking rubbing alcohol if I had too. I remember wanting to stop so badly, that I would think about taking my own life. I hated myself, alcohol, and the needle ruined my life. I had completely lost control. In 2013 while I was locked up, something hit me differently. I learned about the RARE program, and this was the first time in my life that someone had talked to me about recovery. RARE was a faith-based program that helped open my eyes to learn that there was a different way of life that I could be living. The RARE program helped me go to NA meetings, helped create a treatment plan to work on my underlining issues, and I learned that my childhood trauma played a huge part in my addiction. Up until this point, I did not believe there

was any way out of the cycle for myself. I thought that this was simply who I was, and first the first time, I had hope for my own life. I spent so many years mad at God, blaming him for my life; but, come to find out, he was there the entire time. He was saving me from myself. I accepted him as my Lord and Savior.

I knew from this moment what God's plan was for my life. I knew I wanted to work in the recovery field, and I do not think recovery happens overnight, because it does not. I had my share of reoccurrences. I kept picking myself up and moving forward. I continued to trust God, and he has blessed my life. My kids have the dad that they deserve now. I have been able to restore my relationships with my family as well. Helping those in addiction and recovery is my passion. I am here today to be able to tell you that recovery IS possible, and that there IS a way out; whether you believe it or not. I am thankful that God has lead me to an opportunity where I can use my real-life experience to help others. God has helped turned my mess into a message.