



downstairs. This went on for years. They are very happy that I am here. It made for a really sick environment when people are wondering when you are going to show up, and in what shape, or whether you are even alive.

Even after I was six months clean my dad asked me one night if I was high. That's just an example of how much trust they lost in me. When he said that I freaked and said, "What the fuck do you think you're saying?" But then I realized a second later how horrible I was to my family and that I couldn't really blame him for saying that. I made everybody in my family really sick.

Excal: How did your parents respond when they attended one of your NA meetings?

Tony: They were blown away. At first my father was really skeptical. He originally thought that his son was hanging out with a whole bunch of drug addicts and that I would probably end up in worse shape than I was. The first meeting they attended was the hardest for me. I had to stand up in front of them and say to everybody, "Hi, I'm Tony, and I'm an addict." That was so hard.

But after meeting a whole bunch of people my father was really impressed and said to me right after a meeting, "Keep coming. This is the best place for you." Now, if he notices that I haven't been to a meeting for a few days, he asks me what's wrong and suggests that I go that night to a meeting. If I forget that I am an addict, denial could set it, and the disease could just start coming back in full force. So every day I remind myself that I am an addict because if I don't I could just end up back where I was a few months ago.

Excal: Did you find that your problem was similar to the other NA members?

Tony: Some people don't have to go all the way. A lot of times we say that you're on a garbage truck and it's whether you want to take the drive all the way to the dump or get off somewhere before. Some people realized that they had a problem, or an addictive personality, before they ended up losing everything. Some people make it here sooner. They're lucky.

Everybody considers it [narcotics addiction] a disease — Narcotics Anonymous, the American Medical Association, Candian Medical Association . . . When I went for my rehabilitation OHIP covered it. I have a disease, and at one point I was very sick. There was a period of two or three months where I wanted to stop using but I couldn't. I got up every morning not wanting to get high ever again, but by supper time this disease would tell me that I had to score.

Jim: The disease can always be arrested. I've stopped my disease because I've stopped using. But if I were to go back to drug use again, it wouldn't be like the early stages when I enjoyed it — just getting high, putting the drug down, and walking away from it. If I started using again it would be like just where I left off.

Tony: You might get high a little easier because you stopped for a while and your tolerance levels are down. But if you start using drugs again, you'll find yourself worse than you were, in a

really short period of time. We hear this constantly from people who go out and relapse and come back. They just end up 10 times worse than where they were. If you go to meetings you'll just arrest the disease. That's when recovery will start to happen.

Excal: Can you fully recover?

Tony: No, I don't think you can. At least, I don't think I'll ever fully recover. I mean, what's fully recovered? A drug addict will always think about using even though he or she has been clean for a period of time.

It's a constant battle. At first it was taking on the disease 24 hours a day. It's not like that now because I've been straight for a while, but I still get the urges once a month or every two months and something comes into my head and I start thinking and it starts going. The longer you're clean the less often the urges. But it's still something you have to stay on top of.

Excal: How long do you think you'll attend the meetings?

Tony: Indefinitely. I'm going to the meetings until I die or I decide to go back out — using again.

Jim: The meetings are a big benefit. If you run into problems in day-to-day life, you can sit down and discuss it with other people who have recovery under their belt. You get good feedback, suggestions, and help. I consider it an invaluable resource.

Tony: If I stopped going to the meetings I know it would only be a short amount of time before I started thinking that I have the disease under control. You're in trouble when you start thinking that way.



NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

Excal: Generally, what are the drugs typical NA members use?

Jim: In NA we try not to speak about different types of drugs. When people talk about their recovery at a meeting they try not to sit there and say, "I used to do this much, I used to do that much, I know these people . . ." We are not interested in what or how much you used but rather what you are willing to do about your problem. Someone who has a problem with marijuana has no less a problem than someone with an alcohol or cocaine problem. If you have the desire to stop using any drug, you can come to the meetings.

Excal: NA members are all ages and come from a variety of backgrounds. What specific characteristics, though, do they have in common?

Tony: You hear the same story over and over again. If I go to a meeting I hear my story from someone else's mouth. That's usually the way it goes. We say, however, "Relate to somebody, don't compare," because no two stories are exactly the same. Nobody went through the exact same things. But they are the same feelings — isolation, self-consciousness, loneliness, anger, frustration, guilt.

Excal: What is your advice to the addict who has yet to come forward?

Jim: Many people are still in the good time phase. I had a lot of good times on drugs and I won't deny that. But somewhere I crossed over a line where I stopped using drugs and drugs started using me. And it wasn't fun anymore.

Hear our message, and when your life becomes unmanageable and you want to do something about your problem, come see us. We are recovering addicts who meet regularly to try and solve our problems.

Narcotics
Anonymous
Toronto Area
Helpline
691-9519

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