

Journeys

This new section in our magazine called "Journeys" consists solely of the stories of people in recovery. Listening to the stories of those who have recovered has proven to be a highly effective manner in which people contemplating change are thus encouraged. Stories spark hope, ignite belief and demonstrate the truth that living without mind altering substances is not only possible, but positively rich and meaningful. This section can only develop if you send us your stories. Please email all contributions to carolynedwards@genieinthegutter.co.uk

I suppose you could say my upbringing was tough. I am the eldest of four brothers, however I have not met any of them as they were immediately removed from the family due to my Mother's chaotic lifestyle and excessive drink abuse. Drug dealing and violence became the norm until I was eventually taken away at the age of six and placed into the care system. The early years were difficult, being of mixed race and living with a white foster family in a racist area wasn't easy.

School wasn't too bad although the feelings of not fitting in were always present, this showed in my lifestyle outside of school. I soon found myself mixing with people from dysfunctional backgrounds. At the age of 15 I had dreams of going into the Army; my plans went by the wayside as I was introduced to cannabis. Any ambitions were lost with every joint I rolled. I should have realised the destructive effects drugs had on me at the age of 17 when I ruined my step sister's wedding on a cocktail of cannabis and alcohol. My friend and I ended up smashing up two police cars parked outside the wedding reception. They were the groom's friends who had come to wish him all the best. I soon moved out of the foster home and got my own flat. I finally had the green light to party and do whatever I pleased. It was at this point I was introduced to cocaine which I loved from the outset. It gave me the confidence I had been searching for. No longer was I walking around the area in fear of the gang violence I was caught up in; this confidence did not last for long though. I was addicted!

I soon found myself in more trouble and more messed up than ever. I decided to escape from this lifestyle and found a job on a holiday camp in Wales. However I could not escape as the problem was me. I got sacked for my chaotic behaviour; I had managed to put the cocaine down but was drinking to oblivion every night and caused murder on the camp. So that was me back in Liverpool with nowhere to go. I decided to get in touch with my real mother who put me up but I soon found that she had swapped her alcohol addiction and had a raging crack and heroin habit. To cut a long story short I found myself dabbling with crack cocaine when I could not score powder cocaine. I could not handle the comedown and used to drink excessive amounts of alcohol. It was at this stage that I was at my most dangerous. Over the next few years I lost jobs, tenancies and relationships with friends, family, girlfriends and society. At the age of twenty one I was living in hostels due to my poor maintenance of properties and anti social behaviour.

At the age of twenty two I was living in a shared house when on one of my comedowns I was introduced to heroin "it will help you come down" I was told. I decided to try it and yes it did bring me down. It also brought my life crashing down with it. Before I knew it I was addicted and started what you could call a rollercoaster of an existence. I wanted so much to get off heroin but could not cope with the withdrawal, the aches, pains and emotional imbalance was too much. I would try to substitute each drug for another but always found myself back in the grips of addiction. The process of getting help was slow and

tedious. I tried to get into a detox three weeks after realising I was rattling every time I put heroin down. 6 months later I ended up in the Kevin White Unit but by this time I was too far into my substance misuse and picked up heroin and crack as soon as I left.

A new approach was needed. 8 months later I was back in the Kevin White Unit only this time I accessed the Park View Project straight from detox. I started to learn about myself and didn't find it easy as I had masked my feelings and emotions for so long with drugs and drink. Whilst in the Park View Project I developed hope and inspiration that I could live a better lifestyle. No more did I have to exist, I could live.

I was inspired to develop a career for myself within the drug and alcohol field. I accessed many of the structured day support programmes such as Transit and the Independence Initiatives. It was here that I started to educate myself and learned how to integrate back into society. After I had been to these services I accessed a counselling course in college and felt ready for work. By this time I had my own tenancy and applied for a job within the fixers programme. I was successful and trained as a community drug support worker. I have not looked back since and have worked as a Case Manager and now as a Key Worker at the Park View Project.

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My life is totally different and a far cry from my life in active addiction where I was causing pain and hurt to those I encountered in my lifestyle. Through getting clean I am a productive member of society and live a life of peace and contentment; something I had been searching for so long. I have recently begun university doing a degree at master's level! I have also done a documentary for the BBC and who knows what other possibilities lay ahead? Whilst I am clean anything is possible. I would like to say thanks to all those who have helped me along the way, far too many to mention. Thank you all, Lee

Since writing his journey story Lee has had fantastic news - He's going to be a Dad. Congratulations Lee and Natalie from all your friends and colleagues at Genie In The Gutter and the Park View Project.