

A Northern Ontario drug addict's true story

(During the last several columns, we have been talking with a recovered drug addict whom we are calling 'Bob'. We have been looking at Bob's tortuous journey out of drug dependency.)

Today, we continue the interview as Bob describes some of the difficult realities of finally getting straight. By Ken Moffatt, ARF, Thunder Bay, and Dennis Bernardi, ARF, Timmins.

ARF: Bob, let's start by reviewing the mixed feelings you had when you realized that you could no longer control your drug use.

Bob: Well, you're always hoping that you don't have to completely quit. You keep hoping that you can keep using it and controlling it.

What I found out since I've been straight is that you can't do that. If you try to quit and you keep hanging around the old places and hanging around dope all the time, you'll lose the control on it - you'll get right back where you were.

I've tried to quit before and that's what happened. The first time around, you know you have to have your mind made up, you've got to be serious about it. You have to say, okay, I'm quitting. You got to change your whole lifestyle.

ARF: So your perspective changed from the time you decided you wanted to get straight and the time that you were actually able to keep yourself straight for a fairly long period of time.

In other words, it sounds as if you're saying that when you got yourself straight enough you were able to keep yourself straight for a fairly long period of time. In other words, it sounds as if you're saying that when you got yourself straight enough you were able to recognize that you had to quit completely if you were going to stay straight.

Bob: Yeah, that's exactly it. If you can get to a point where, like you said, you are straightened out enough to get your head together, that's one thing.

But when you're in dope like I was, it was pretty hard - you're not thinking right, you're not rational.

So if you can get to a point where you clean out the cobwebs a bit and realize that if you try and go back and control it or try to hang around where you used to or do what you used to do you won't be able to make it. Well then you've got a good chance to beat it.

ARF: It sounds as if you went through a process where at one time you were conning yourself 100 per cent, but you got to the point where you were conning yourself maybe 50 per cent. And it let you get to the point where you got clean enough that you could stop conning yourself completely.

Bob: That's right. You get to the point where you face reality and you see where you've been. The last 14 years I realized I was nowhere - I lost my time.

I hurt a lot of people because I was dealing. I got a lot of people involved in dope, so I had to face that and realize that it didn't get me anywhere. It's hard to get to that point but once you get there you have a good chance of beating it.

ARF: So you carried a very heavy load in trying to get straightened out.

Bob: Yes. You can be straight for a year, you can be straight for five years, but it doesn't mean that you'll never fall.

You might go off the wagon. But if you do get off the wagon, what you have to do is pick yourself up and give it another go.

ARF: That brings up an interesting question. I'll put it in this form. You're saying that if you try to get straight and you fall down, the ball game is over yet, that in fact you can still make it?

Bob: Oh yes, for sure. But when a lot of people fall off the wagon, they have a really heavy guilt trip. They feel very guilty and they feel like they've let themselves down - like they let everyone else down.

So they just say the heck with it, they don't bother trying again. What they have to do is say, okay, I did this or that wrong, that's why I got into it again. So the next time around I can avoid that, I've learned from it.



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ARF: From what you're saying, the stakes are pretty high when you try to quit. You have bad feelings when you lose control of the drugs, you have bad feelings when you decided to quit and even have bad feelings when you get straight awhile. This is serious business.

Bob: You got to be really serious. If you're saying I'm going to quit like I did before, but you don't really put everything you got into it, you're not going to do it.

So when you say you're going to

quit, that means you gotta try. At least give it a good try.

ARF: The implication of what you're saying is that the decision to quit using drugs affects not only your habit of using drugs, but your entire lifestyle as well.

Bob: Yes, sir, you've got to change everything, you got to start over.

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