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First, I would like to say that recovery looks different for everyone. It took me falling down MANY times before recovery stuck. My clean date is August 27, 2020. This is my story: Growing up I was an energetic and crazy child. I did relatively good in school and had a small friend group.  Around age 11 I put on a bunch of weight pretty fast. Kids at school made fun of me and honestly those hurtful words followed me around for years… Drinking was normal in my household and at family gatherings… People drank and used substances to celebrate but also to cope. So at age 12 or 13 when a traumatic incident happened to me, I turned to substances. I stole beer and weed from my dad and some of my mom’s Vicodin prescription. I just wanted to forget. I threw up everywhere and vowed to “never do it again.” Man was I wrong. I became a frequent pill popper at the age of 15. I felt pressure to be what everyone else wanted me to be, and I had no idea of who I actually wanted to be. Home life kind of sucked at times… Lots of arguing and me stepping in to protect my siblings. I felt like I was drowning, and drugs were my escape. Age 16 I moved into uppers and hallucinogens. That was a wild ride!! At this point I am skipping school all the time, my mom is getting calls from the school and I had a ‘screw the world’ attitude. My grades plummeted and so did my self-worth. Age 17 I tried heroin. A friend said it would be cheaper to buy that instead of pills due to my tolerance… I became an intravenous user shortly after. I whole-heartedly believed that I could quit whenever I wanted and that I just “liked it too much”. My first overdose - I was age 18. It scared me so bad and I still have a scar to this day of where a cigarette burned into my arm. This is the time I found out I was addicted. I stopped for a couple days and had terrible withdrawals so I started it back up. I felt even more guilt and shame which led to more using. My family had no trust in me and I totaled my first car due to being high and nodding out. This was the beginning of my spiral…

I had stints in rehab and sober living, ended up on the West Coast at age 19 in a very posh type of rehab. The house manager relapsed and I ended up on the streets of San Diego. It was rough and I didn’t stay sober very long. I traveled to various states but was still getting high in all of them. I called home from Georgia right after the New Year of 2015. I came home to Pennsylvania and ended up catching theft charges in February of that year. I was kicked out, bouncing from trap house to trap house. I dropped down to 95 pounds!!! I ended up being on the run, homeless, just using drugs to forget basically. I was just existing… I got caught and did 5 months in jail then went to another rehab. I became pregnant with my son at the end of 2016. I had my son in 2017 while on house arrest. I did pretty well for a while until post-partum hit… I relapsed and was ashamed, so I went on the run. This shows just how strong addiction is. I left my family and my now amazing son. In 2018 I overdosed at a Walmart and was then arrested. I was sentenced to state prison this time. I did boot camp and cut my 2 1/2-5 years down to 13 months total incarceration. Once I got out life was hectic and hard. I became overwhelmed and did not lean on my supports. I relapsed again, and in 2019 I went back to state. Thankfully I got pulled over and detained because I had pneumonia plus a blood infection. I had emergency surgery while still custody. I could not call my family while in the hospital. I had Correctional Officers by my bedside 24/7. Went back to SCI-Cambridge to do my 6 months from the hospital. You think that would have been my last time, right? Well, it wasn’t.

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I moved in with a man I barely knew because I had burned all my bridges. He was not a good person at all, and I was isolated in a town where I knew no one. I relapsed for the last time in August on 2020. Made it back to Erie and used for I believe a total of 2 weeks. On August 26, 2020, I got high for the last time. I thought I was using methamphetamines; however, it was laced with fentanyl. I did the drugs in an abandoned house. Three other people were with me when I overdosed. I woke up by myself and with no use of my left arm. There were signs of trauma as well. I cried so hard saying “I deserve better. My son deserves better. My family. These people don’t care about me”. I ended up going to the hospital and calling parole on myself. I had a big clot in my left arm from being passed out on top of it. I was not sent back to prison due to being honest and asking for help. I knew I mean it that time. I just felt different. I had to do color code and supervised visits with my son, while attending Partial Hospitalization Programming, while addressing my mental health and trauma. Eventually the blood thinners worked and I had movement in my arm again! I kept open lines of communication with providers and personal supports. I started journaling and reading self-help books. I obtained employment in 2021. My visits with my son eventually no longer had to be supervised. Things were looking up! I found a recovery pathway that works for me. It involves nature and internal work on myself. I decided I wanted to help others find their way out of the darkness. I took the CRS training in 2022 and started working as one in 2023. I successfully completed parole in February of 2023 and enrolled myself into college. I have joint-custody of my son now and enjoy the work I do. I know not everyone will make it unfortunately… that’s the nature of the disease. I am not perfect by any means but I am better than I once was. I want to get a degree in social work and criminal justice to be able to help those who are incarcerated. We are still people, we just made some bad choices.

Today, I still journal and get in tune with nature/the universe. I utilize my sober supports and am honest when I am struggling. Life shows up even when we don’t want it to. For me today, nothing is worth using over. I hope to continue to grow as a person and be able to help others along the way. Recovery is not cookie cutter nor is it linear. I am proud of all of those trying recovery. Change is scary, but so is staying the same! “The opposite of addiction is not sobriety, it is human connection”. There is so much stigma centered on addiction still… But I am trying to be a part of that change. We don’t have to do this alone! Thanks to those who believed in me.

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-Peace, love and light