

# Joe's Story

I was raised by loving parents, along with two older brothers. My brothers were close in age, but I am 10 years younger. As a kid I really looked up my brothers, I would go with them to their friends' houses where we would ride bikes and they would go off jumps. I was very influenced by my brothers so I got into BMX biking.

I remember, when I was younger, having D.A.R.E. visit our school, but I didn't really learn from it. By the end of middle school the only things I believed about drugs and alcohol were what I saw on TV. I thought drugs were bad because of the "brain on drugs" commercial, but alcohol I saw as relaxing, just having a good time and being mature; because of the way the commercials portrayed it.

The first time I drank alcohol was at a cousins wedding, it was offered to me by my older brother, it made me feel accepted that they wanted me to drink with them. Alcohol made me feel open and warm, I liked that. As I got older I started smoking cigarettes and weed. The friends I started hanging out with were people that had that in common with me. Drinking and smoking became a daily activity up until after I was out of high school. I barely graduated. As the years went by I began to realize that I had a problem. It wasn't until after getting my second DUI that I decided to stop.

After a year of sobriety I bought a motorcycle, a few months later my leg was broken in a motorcycle accident. I didn't get why this was happening after all of my efforts to get my life in order. I was prescribed prescription pain medication. I fell in love with the way the pills made me feel. My mom had recently passed away from cancer and those pills took away the emotional pain from losing her. After my prescription ran out, the pills got more expensive and harder to find. A friend from high school had gone through the same situation; he introduced me to heroin, just as his friend had introduced him. This progressed onto daily use of heroin, leading to legal problems as well as withdrawal.

I wasn't using heroin just to get high anymore. I was using it so I wouldn't get sick. I was using drugs to cover up my problems.

In 2015 I was pulled over and given another DUI for driving high on heroin. I was depressed because my father was in hospice and heroin was the only way I knew to cope. About a month later I was arrested for another DUI. I was bailed out on the day of my father's funeral but still ended up missing it. I was sentenced to a year in jail as well as going through the short term program at Minnesota Adult and Teen Challenge. After sobering up I realized that I needed to dig deep and address the issues behind my addiction.

After 9 months of being in MnTC I have learned a lot about myself that I never knew before. I have also had the opportunity to give back to the community. Working with Know the Truth has been very fulfilling. I hope that when the students hear my story that they realize addiction can happen to anyone. I also hope that I can be someone for them to relate to, and know that they are not alone.

