

ERIN'S STORY

My name is Erin, and I'm an alcoholic. My path of self-destruction started when I was thirteen years old, and I was fortunate enough to find the recovery community and get sober four months before my sixteenth birthday. As of the date of this essay, I am 26 years old and have been entirely free from drugs and alcohol for eleven years.

The most frequent question I get when speaking with people unfamiliar with Alcoholism is: "Why? Why did you even start drinking?" Unfortunately, I have no reassuring answer to this question. I was raised in a good home by parents who loved me, and before I was introduced to drugs and alcohol, I was a good student with a good group of friends. I believe that Alcoholism is a disease like any other – some of us have it, and some of us don't – and I simply happen to fall into the category of those that do.

I was introduced to alcohol and marijuana in the typical "experimental" fashion. A friend said, "Hey, want to try this?" and I said, "Okay." I almost immediately developed the obsession and craving of addiction, and my disease progressed quickly. In a matter of a few short months I went from an A and B student on the swim team and yearbook committee, to a depressed and angry young woman who rarely went to class. I started spending all of my time with the "wrong" crowd, sneaking out of my parents' house at night, and putting myself in dangerous situations. The need to get drunk and high overshadowed everything else in my life.

Alcoholism is a tricky, desperate, ruthless disease, and living in the midst of addiction is a waking nightmare. As cliché as it might be, it's a lot like the movie "The Matrix" – once you are immersed in the life of drugs and alcohol, it can feel impossible to go back to the life you lived before. Although I had once been a happy teenager, I could no longer see joy or success as options in my life. The only possibility that existed for me was to continue getting high in order to suppress the feelings of fear, self-loathing, and despair that my addiction perpetuated.

I am fortunate enough to have a family that is connected to the recovery community, and parents who were willing to fight my disease with me. In a moment of desperation, I reached out, and it became clear to them that I had a serious problem. They did everything they could to

get me the help I needed, even when I fought hard against it. They sent me to outpatient treatment, put me in therapy, and most importantly, sent me to meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Getting sober is not always an easy feat, and in fact I didn't stop using right away. But I continued to attend AA meetings, and after awhile, the program stuck and I found myself immersed in a loving, supportive, and life-saving community. I do not believe that I could have gotten sober without AA, and it is only through the rigorous action of the program that I am where I am today. I have a wonderful life, and I am no longer the hopeless girl that I once was. In the course of my using, I dropped out of high school. Today, I am an honors student at Eastern Michigan University with a 4.0 GPA. But even more important than the material benefits that I have gotten through my journey of recovery are the intangible ones. I have self-respect, dignity, honest relationships, and a future that defies boundaries. The fear and anger that once ruled my life have been replaced by an outlook of possibility, and I know that as long as I continue working the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, my life will continue to improve.

My suggestions to anyone dealing with addiction themselves, or dealing with the addiction of a loved one are these: Love, Hope, and a 12-step program. Love, because we cannot achieve anything without it; Hope because the possibility of recovery exists for everyone; and Alcoholics Anonymous or Al-Anon, because we cannot recover alone (and because recovery is not only for the alcoholic). Although recovery from addiction may not be an easy road to walk, it is a viable one. If I can do it, I know that you can, too.