

Name: Tommy Fasano

Age: 27

Neighborhood: Charlestown, currently living in California

Sober Date: March 22nd, 2016

OL: Tell me a bit about your childhood

TF: I was raised by an awesome mother and an awesome father. We were raised really well. My father [first] owned Charlestown Townies Pizza Shop and a sausage cart shortly after. My mother had custody of us and we lived with her. She was a very good mother who brought us up with beautiful morals. They used to bring us to Florida and through all kinds of different places. I even played sports at a young age. I got MVP in Lacrosse and played football and baseball. I was skateboarding and eventually got into paintball as well.



OL: How did you start using?

TF: It was at a young age, around 13 is when I first started drinking. I eventually started around the same time smoking marijuana. Shortly down the line at 14 or 15 I started doing cocaine on the low. I travelled to Denver and Huntington Beach and Tampa Bay for National Professional Paintball Tournaments but I could only stick with that for a little while and shortly down the line, I started to sell drugs.

OL: Where did you go from there?

TF: At 15 I lost my first friend right in front of my face. I dropped out of school at 16, thinking that I would get my GED and I stayed around with that drinking and drugging for a short time. I got involved with selling drugs (OC 80s) and I started smoking Angel Dust and there was just nonstop partying with friends and selling drugs. When I was 19 everything kind of went down the drain. I got involved with crack and was still doing OC 80s.

I did my first detox at 18 years old and after that I ended up doing heroin and that sort of took everything from me. I ended up going downhill and was in and out of programs left and right. I was nothing but in and out of institutions and jails and that was how my life stayed from 19 to 26.

OL: Tell us about some of your most challenging experiences as a person struggling with substance use

TF: I've overdosed 6 times. At 21 years old, I ended up getting shot in the face and was placed in the hospital for a month in a coma. When they woke me up they put me in Spaulding and were offering for me to go to Tewksbury Hospital [for specialized further treatment] but I didn't follow through with that. I left the hospital and went back to my father's house and I was getting high with no skull on the left side of my head.

At this point, Tommy was at higher risk for overdose than the average addict, because the bullet was still in his head. His surgeon said he must be clean for 6 months before operating to remove the bullet. It took a few attempts to stay clean for the full 6 months.

I eventually stayed [at treatment in Tewksbury] for four months and then they brought me to MGH and placed the titanium skull in his head. Shortly after is when I was placed into my first halfway house [Grenada House, Brighton] because my father told them he wasn't going to accept me back because he didn't feel safe.

All of the trauma and traumatic that I've been through isn't why I use. My drinking and drugging started before my trauma and traumatic that I've been through—I would overdose and go back and use again.

OL: How did you end up in California?

TF: I got help from Shannon and Sarah; they got me into a program out here in California. When I came out here I didn't try to make any changes in my behaviors. I got into this program and all I was hearing was that it was a big insurance fraud so I couldn't go with it. I knew that there was something behind this program and I didn't have fun with the groups or the way that the program was ran.

OL: What changed between then and now?

TF: I then tried something different out here [in California]. I got involved with a sponsor. I got kicked out of the program and as soon as I did, my sponsor came and picked me up and brought me to a sober house and I've been here ever since. I've been following directions from my sponsor. I do Step Work. I go to meetings daily and every Sunday I go to a Big Book Step Study Group through Alcoholic Anonymous (AA).

OL: Describe your experiences with AA and Step Work

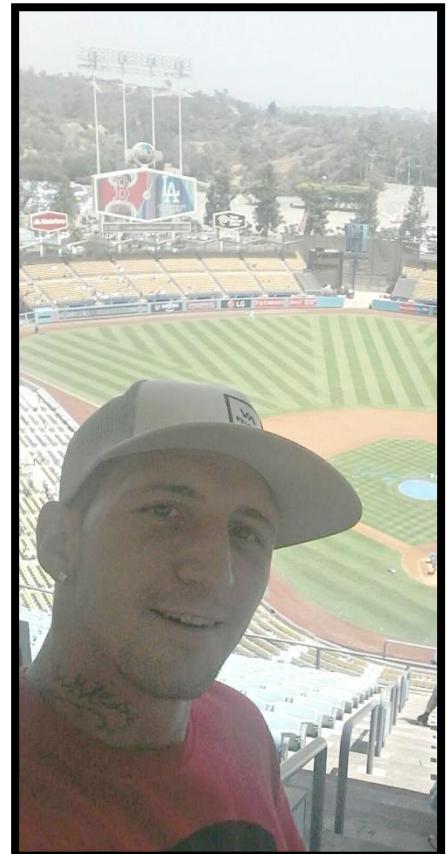
TF: This is where I get to learn about myself. I've had to sit down at the table with my sponsor and just go through where I've been selfish and self-seeking.

I've had a tough time with my belief in a higher power—with a God. Even going through Catholic school, I've had a tough time with a higher power. This time around, that's what's been making changes, because I've been praying nightly. When I first got placed in this sober house, I was just starting with my Step Work and all it was asking me to do was to pray the Third Step Prayer nightly.

Tommy then recited the Prayer from memory.

I wasn't even understanding for awhile but I stayed doing it and I stayed praying while before I would only pray for lost friends or to get out of jail. I've even had tough times after that and I've had to read off a certain page [in the AA Big Book] to remember that I'm surrounded by spiritually sick people [but I may be] able to help them. Shortly down the line things have been changing and this has been working.

On Step 1 I was powerless while using and I couldn't manage life while sober. I had to write down how I was selfish, self-seeking, and had fear as I went through Step 4. Shortly down the line, on Step 7, I had to find out personal defects that I have to work on. Step 9 is where I had to make amends with places that I've stolen from and people that I've harmed. I'm slowly doing that and I'm not on Step 10 & 11.

**OL: Tell me a bit about how working with Shannon and Sarah and the Charlestown Coalition has affected you**

TF: Shannon and Sarah always tried to keep me in the right direction. They were always the ones to check up on me. They used to come visit me when I was in Tewkesbury Hospital. There have been plenty of times when they would get me placed into detoxes and halfway houses. They didn't give up on me and showed me nothing but love and friendship.

OL: Tell about your experiences in California

TF: I've been out in California for 9 months. I'm out here by myself, out in the mountains, and I enjoy the beaches out here. I've been to two conventions since I've been here. I've been to LA and I got into trouble at that house because I had Suboxone sent through the mail and I relapsed on Suboxone and then I got moved to a second house in Malibu. I've been to Joshua Tree and they had one group called Resentment Group that brought you through the Step Work in two weeks so you'd have at least a [basic understanding] of how Step Work is run.

Being in different environment has been helpful. [In Charlestown] I grew up on my background and having a name for myself and I kind of took pride and loyalty in the wrong direction.

OL: Overall, how are you doing now?

TF: I've been working. I've found real friendship in recovery and through AA meetings. I just got everything cleared and I'm now able to get my driver's license.

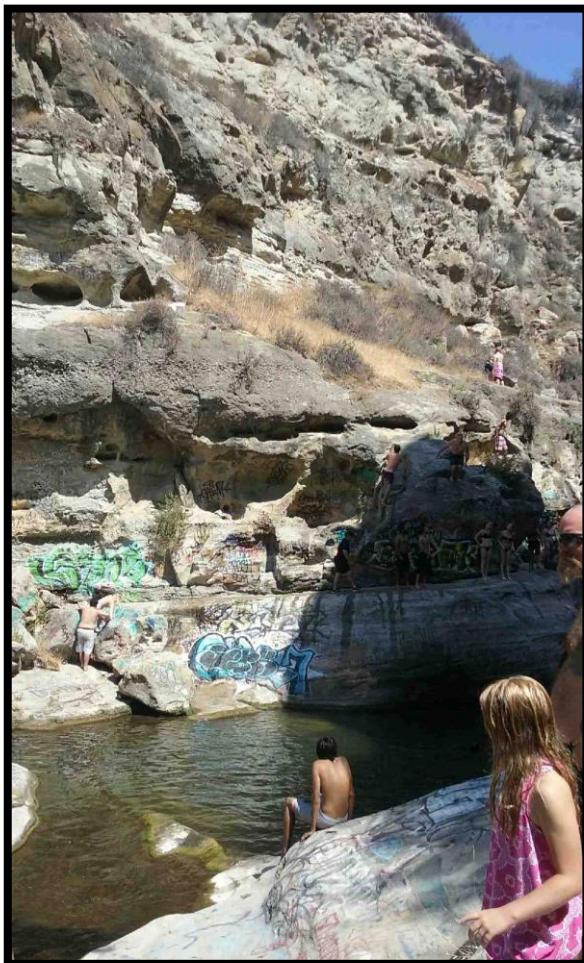
I'm trying to get my education and I have plans for later down the line. I'm still waiting for a tutor to catch me up on my vocabulary. I'm going to try to get into school to get my GED and I want to get involved in painting as a career.

Nowadays, it's the little things that I'm grateful for: That I get to get phone calls from my family telling me that they love me and trust me. That I get to start a new life and I'm happy. I am now on Steps 10 and 11 and am praying daily and nightly and going on *commitments to jails, hospitals and institutions (H&I). I help other addicts in recovery and will start being a sponsor in a couple of months to keep other fellow addicts in the right direction.

It's all done by a higher power; praying, following step work and showing up to meetings. Not one addict can do it by themselves without the help from a sponsor. Everyone has their ups and downs, but my life has improved a lot through this recovery, and I'm just going to become a normal human being, a real man.

I want to be a better brother. Because my little brother [Richie Fasano] was my world and I want him to look up to me and see these changes that I've made, and then I really want to see it happen in him.

*Commitments are when people in recovery carry the message to other alcoholics and addicts.



Exploring a cliff in California



Tommy representing Charlestown on the cliff