Continued: ***From Rebel to 'Rise'***

Within 3 years, he was arrested on his father's birthday. He was charged with two felonies and a misdemeanor.

"I saw my Dad cry that day. Up to that point, I'd never seen him cry," he recalled.

His father worked hard to avoid the poverty and dysfunction he experienced growing up in a house with dirt floors. Family members struggled with mental health and substance use disorders, and one brother tragically passed away of a drug overdose.

On his mother's side, a family member abused alcohol.

Houser, who was diagnosed with ADHD as a kid, said, no matter how many times the family moved – sometimes for his father's military career and other times in hopes to give Chris a fresh start -- he always gravitated toward trouble and, inevitably, found it. No amount of family intervention or outside help changed a thing.

"My mom has asked me more than once what else she could have done and I tell her, 'Nothing.'"

Starting at age 19, he tried at times to kick his drug habit, and he says he could quit for periods of time, but back then he didn't fully understand that he had a disease or believe he was living with addiction.

The most motivation he had to straighten out came at age 26 after the birth of his oldest son. Despite all his want in the world, he said he knew he had a problem but didn't know how to stop.

In all he can recount 3 occasions when he was revived with Narcan. Over his lifetime, he would use pills, meth, and heroin.

One of his lowest points was when he was separated from his family – at least physically. His parents had filed restraining orders and no trespass orders against him. He'd lied to them and stolen from them on more than one occasion.

"I understand why they did that," he said. "They put boundaries in place, but they never gave up on me."

Houser would move and relocate hoping to turn himself around. No place, no matter how picturesque, worked -- not Texas, California, Colorado, Hawaii, even Alaska for a short time. None.

Here is another number of significance – 13. That's how many times he tried a detox, treatment center, halfway house, sober living, and county jail. *Continued…*

Ultimately, it was yet another call from his mother that led to start of his sobriety.

“My mom had a friend who helped guys like me. She asked me if I wanted help. I was dirty, disgusting and living in the shelter and under the boardwalk. When he came to get me, he smiled at me, hugged me. He did things differently,” he said.

By differently, he said the man didn’t try to “sell” him on anything. That day, Houser stashed drugs outside the treatment facility just in case it didn’t work out. But, it did, and at age 31, he said he finally started “taking suggestions.”

With 12-step and a new outlook, he would later go on to run sober living houses along with a woman he’d later marry.

He eventually took classes to enable him to work with others who live with substance use disorder. Currently, he is an Operation RISE Recovery Advocate Social Worker with the Drug Monitoring & Analysis Unit, NJ State Police. Through that position he has had opportunities to greet and interact with law enforcement who had once arrested him.

Today he is a father of two children and a stepfather to two more.

“They know who their parents are and what can happen,” he said. “Our kids have been to meetings with us. They’ve been to overdose awareness events.”



*Memorable family events with his parents and expanding family are possible for Chris who has been in recovery since April 12, 2016.*

On this particular day as he gives an interview by phone, he’s home – *home* – with his youngest son who is age 3.

The idea of home is changed now, and so is he.

Often, he says, it’s in the stillness of the morning before anyone else in the house wakes up that he sits in the same chair with his coffee and his dog, looks around, and thinks to himself.

“This is really my life. I have my family, my friends, my two dogs and my cats. I work a job that helps dudes get their family back. How super cool to be part of changing that narrative.” *Continued…*

*Chris Houser says he still chases adrenaline, but in healthy ways. He surfs, goes to the gym, and enjoys concerts. In addition to his 12-step program, he says his mother is a central figure in his recovery. They have, on occasion, told their stories together in high school settings.*

---

Operation RISE is an initiative that focuses on using data and peer recovery specialists to conduct outreach and connect individuals with Substance Use Disorder to care and saturate the state with naloxone. To date, the team has distributed more than 400,000 doses of Narcan. More than 1,000 individuals have been successfully linked to treatment and/or support services since the program was established by NJ State Police in January 2023. The program was established by the NJ State Police in January 2023.