

Shannon's Interview with Shawn Cannizaro

February 28, 2021

I Surrendered. I Decided to Stop.



SL: Please describe your childhood?

SC: I grew up in a very chaotic household with my mom and four sisters. My father was never in the picture due to drug addiction. I know I was loved by my family, although I never felt like I belonged because I was the only male. The only males that were in my home periodically were my sister's dads who were violent and also active addicts. The only male role model I looked up to was my uncle, but I looked up to him for the wrong reasons. This led me into a lifestyle of violence and chaos, which by the age of 13 I was already used to because that was the environment, I lived in.

SL: How and when did addiction begin manifesting, at what age?

SC: At the age of 14, I started smoking cigarettes, drinking heavily, experimenting with drugs, committing crimes, and being incarcerated. At the same time, I was introduced to A.A. and knew there was a better way to live. Though at first, I fell victim to peer pressure, then I figured out it took away the feelings of loneliness, anger, and fear. By this time, I was already shoplifting food to feed my mom and sisters and also merchandise to sell so I could

buy alcohol. Shoplifting became a major part of my addiction.

SL: How did your addiction progress from there?

SC: My addiction progressed very rapidly. At a young age I started drinking heavily, 15 through 17, I started using heavy drugs, and by age 19 I was sniffing heroin in prison. From the ages of 13 through 43, these 30 years were spent in and out of juvenile facilities, jails, prisons, detoxes, holdings, half-way houses, sober houses, and therapeutic communities.

SL: Can you describe your path towards recovery?

SC: As I mentioned earlier, I went to my first meeting at the age of 14 with my aunt, who was the most influential person in my recovery journey. Around 2004, as my friend who I had just revived from an overdose, was being wheeled out on a stretcher I couldn't even wait until he was out the door to use again. After that, I went downstairs and got on my knees and prayed for God to help us. My prayer was answered the next day when I went to Cambridge District Court and was accepted into drug court.

I was in several treatment programs through drug court and after many relapses, being discharged, and also arrests, I knew I had to make a change. I thought suboxone, vivitrol, marijuana maintenance, relationships, material things, jobs, and geographical cures were my solution. In trying to find a place to live and work, I ended up moving to Florida. The first day I was there, I used. My using continued until I was found face down in a pool from a fentanyl overdose.

A couple of days after the overdose I remembered this woman that worked at the last

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treatment center I was in who had previously replanted the seed of N.A. and mentioned a friend in recovery had just opened a recovery home. I decided to make the long trip from Florida to New Hampshire to give recovery another shot. I had already tried everything besides going inward and looking at myself. In every program I have ever been in, I have taken something positive with me. Most importantly the act of complete surrender. Finally, I did just that. I basically threatened God to help me, that conversation with God turned into me begging for Him to help. On my Mom's birthday January 31, 2019, I surrendered. I decided to stop fighting the war I've been fighting and losing for 30 years.

SL: What has helped you maintain your recovery?

SC: The most important thing I do to maintain my recovery is having a relationship with God and making Him the first priority in my life. Secondly, by taking action and participating in my recovery. I take action by surrendering daily to God and the program of N.A. I chase my recovery like I chased my drugs. I help people when I can, go to therapy, stay away from negative people and situations, attend weekly bible studies, work at a recovery friendly workplace, meditate, listen to motivational speakers, connect with new positive people, and I am a part of my recovery community. I completely changed everything about my old life.

SL: What advice would you give to someone in early recovery?

SC: The best advice I have would be not to use no matter what, find a higher power, a program of recovery that you follow, surround yourself with people that are working a program of recovery, and be your authentic self.