

Shannon's Interview with Ryan Evans

August 31, 2020

Learn to get vulnerable.

SL: Please describe your childhood?

RE: For most of my life I grew up in a nice middle-class suburb called Agawam much known for Six flags. I remember hanging out with the neighborhood kids. It was the 90s. I loved skateboarding, I played sports, I had 2 older brothers I was close with and I wouldn't have changed it for anything. I felt like I fit in. I still have childhood friends that I remember having dreams and high hopes for life. My mother will tell you I was her "hardest" which is the nicest way possible a mother can tell you my kid's a pain. As a child, I do remember gravitating more to the kids who got in trouble. For my family, Sunday was an important day in my house because we went to church with mom and then I couldn't wait to get home to watch football with my old man. He loved to gamble. He would ask me who I liked on the game? I was always watching ESPN. At age 7 he was like super dad in a great mood handing me 500 dollars telling me I'm the best for my picks when he won, but when he lost he went from 0 to 100 and would say get away from me I can't even look at you right now you little \$#%\$. It really would dictate the atmosphere of my house. It's funny now that me and my family can laugh about it, especially at the fact he was asking a 2nd grader for gambling advice. Though, at the time it wasn't so funny and I remember being full of fear at a young age I just didn't show it. I love my family and know they love me. I'm very close with them.

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

RE: For me it started very young. I had my first drink at 11. We had a lot of parties at my house when my parents weren't home. It was a blast really. It escalated very quickly for me and by the time I was 16 I was already on heroin. I had no clue what I was getting myself into. One of my teachers told me I had to stay after

School one day. I had no idea why and when I went down to the principal's office after school almost all my teachers and my mother were there trying to have an intervention with me. In my head at the time I thought all these people were crazy and being dramatic. I still didn't understand the concept of addiction and where my life was heading. I thought I had everything under control and that addiction wasn't going to happen to me. I believed I'd stop before it got out of control. I wanted everyone to just CHILL. My attitude was like this is a joke, not a big deal.

SL: How did your addiction progress from there?

RE: At first the consequences were small, but they only grew and grew. I would leave school to drink or drug. I played lacrosse in high school. If I didn't do heroin before a practice or a game, I had no desire to be there. I graduated high school and needed to stop on the way to get heroin just so I could walk across the stage and grab my diploma. After high school a lot of my friends went to college. I immediately went to detox followed by jail. That's what my life had become for a long-time, jails and institutions as they say. I don't remember being depressed; however, I do remember having anxiety which is just a fancy word for fear. I remember my first detox I was 17 at the intake and they asked me if I wanted to kill myself? I remember being offended they would even ask me that question. I still didn't understand where addiction could lead someone, but by the time I turned 27 when asked that question, I would think yes, I now hope I die at this point. I felt so hopeless by this point. That's where years of drinking and drugs had taken me. My brother Chris passed away from an overdose and I miss him every day.

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SL: Can you describe your path towards recovery?

RE: I was a chronic relapser. I struggled for a long time in and out of wanting to get sober, but just not being able to. This last time in detox in Quincy has helped me put together the 21+ months I have right now and I wouldn't have believed it could happen, but it did. It's surreal. It's surreal to me now how I lived like that for so long. I drive down Mass. Ave. on my way to work and think wow that was me. Not only was that me, but all it takes for me to be back there is one slip-up. I keep that thought in my head first and foremost.

SL: What has helped you maintain your recovery?

RE: I lived in a halfway house when I first got sober and it was vital for me, I needed that structure. I got involved with a 12-step program. I have a good sponsor that I went through the steps with. There's so much truth in the saying, "show me who your friends are and I'll show you who you are," so I surround myself with sober people. The people who have been there for me and helped me has assisted my recovery too. I believe God works through people. Not only that, but the way I see the world is like night and day. The best thing I can do now is pay it forward.

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

RE: Ask for help. Learn to get vulnerable. I had to learn how to do that. I remember cracking a joke at a meeting from the podium, but the best thing I did in the midst of speaking was to ask for help. I said I don't know what I am doing I just need help, which I was told to do for so long and when I finally did, I got the help I needed and a lot of people came up to me

at break. I remember someone saying I don't know what all those jokes were about, but if you don't learn to get vulnerable, you're not going to stay sober. I believe for me that was true. The first-time I spoke, years ago, I remember roasting people at my halfway graduation speech. That's all I did, crack jokes and it was a show I'll tell you, but I think deep down I knew that the 6 months I had just spent in treatment was for nothing and I was going to get high as soon as I left.

This last time graduating treatment was different. After I did my last graduation speech, I remember one of the Directors coming up to me saying that they were so proud of me and that they've never seen someone get so vulnerable in front of that many people. I don't think that's a coincidence that I went from one extreme to another and I am still sober. It's good to laugh and I still do, but I also had to learn when to get real and be vulnerable.

