

Name: John Upton (Jocko)

Hometown: Derry, NH

Clean Date: 11/5/09

Age: 47

OL: Can you start by talking a bit about your childhood?

JU: My father and mother and brother never did a drug in their life. My father may have smoked weed a couple of times. He was a war hero, but he was crazy and had towny-ism and a lot of false pride. He was a Boston fireman, Vietnam vet, and hated every other race. From

0 -15 I was definitely on that road to drug addiction and alcohol abuse. Even though I left Charlestown, [to move to Derry New Hampshire as a kid] Charlestown never left me. Everyone on our road knew the Uptons because of my father. He would scream, beat, and make a spectacle of me. When I got clean and sober and took a deep look I realized he didn't know what he didn't know. The war changed him; he was never right again. He came back a totally different person but he never got help himself and his mental health wasn't the same.

OL: How and when did your active addiction begin?

JU: I never missed one weekend of drinking for seven years straight. In 1987 I was only 17 and I lost my driver's license because of Driving When Intoxicated (DWI). I was told then that I had alcoholic tendencies but I still went on and kept that pattern.

I smoked pot at 15 and also tried coke and did steroids. I think at 16 I had tried acid. Up in New Hampshire there was a saying that if you do acid more than four times you're insane. I think I did it 3 times so I wouldn't think I was insane.

I had a bad injury sniffing coke when I was 19 so I quit cold turkey. But I was still drinking continuously. I'd always influence others to party; so much so that they would call me "John Corruptin'." I had a lot of fun in the earlier days but I also used to get depressed. It felt like I was the one person up in NH who went to work rather than college. Watching all my friends go to school took a toll on me.

After they left, I was working at Digital Equipment Corporation and went out to lunch with a friend I worked with. He said I want you to try something. I was 21 and he drops this little brown package of powder and I was like "what's that?" and he said I can't tell you. He then sniffs half of it. At this moment in time I didn't think it was heroin because I only thought you could shoot it. So I sniffed it and it took five to ten minutes to kick in. From the time I got out of the car to the front door I puked the whole way, it just came out like a fire hydrant. Still, I enjoyed it. I had never taken a Percocet or any of those pills so I had never known that feeling.

The next day I went to work and asked my friend what he gave me. He told me "You'll never believe it, you did heroin." After that first time I did heroin for 30 days straight. I was probably up to two to three bags a day. I was 21 years old and my parents were going through a separation and stuff was starting to really come apart. So that was an excuse for me at the time, which I didn't really realize until I got older. Around the 30th day I said I haven't been to the gym since I started using, what is wrong with me? So I quit cold turkey. My friend told me I was going to be sick but I didn't know anything about being dope sick.

For three days I couldn't sleep but was in denial. My friend knocked on my door three days later and asked me, "how are you feeling?" I'll be honest, I was happy to see him. He then said he had something to fix me, and he gave me a half of a bag of heroin. It was then that I had the realization that I was addicted.

OL: How did your addiction progress from there?

JU: From 21 to 24 I was doing heroin occasionally. I was in Derry and then in 1993 moved to Salem (New Hampshire) to be with my mother. I went back to clubbing and drinking and was a once a month heroin user. I ended up trickling back into the heroin when I was 24 and there weren't a lot of people around on the weekends. I was working nights, and that was my excuse for my use. At this time I also quit my job at Digital.

I didn't know I was an addict because it was hard to admit. My uncle has 35 years sober and he approached me about my habit and scared me. At that point I knew I had to go to detox. I remember crying because it was at that point that I realized I was a drug addict. Before that I thought I was just partying. But as times going on I had friends buying houses, getting married, getting degree and getting jobs, and I was still living with my mother.

I'll never forget my first round of detox. I went to three in 10 days. The first I got kicked out of for smoking crack. At my second detox I went out, got a bunch of dope and when I returned the staff asked me to give a urine. The next day they had this swat team of psychiatrists. I sat down all casual and continued the lie. That's all I knew. They threw me out and then I went to my third detox. There I was about 10 days in and feeling pretty good. This kid from South Boston and me laughed the whole 10 days, it was like the best laughing I had had in years. There was this one kid we tortured together. He was just young and had serious identity issue so we were just ranting on him. We decided to frame him so we smoked weed in his room. He got thrown out but the staff ended up taking urine from everybody. They caught up with me two days later and I got bounced.

From the age of 24 to 40 I've done 80 detoxes. I had three months clean at 28 years old and then I relapsed. At that point I was dual diagnosed and they told me I should go see a psychiatrist.

In 2000 I broke my hip playing football when high. I had just turned 30 and I was high as a kite. The first hit nailed me so hard but the heroin was so potent I walked off the field and didn't feel it. I went to the nearby hospital in New Hampshire and they gave me a script of Vicodin and sent me home.

After 4 days of pain I went to BMC and they said your hip is very badly broken in three places. I got a job driving a limo when my hip was healing. I was driving limos for his guy that I manipulated for the job, from New Hampshire to Logan two times a day in the snowy weather. I was high the whole time.

OL: Can you describe your path towards recovery?

JU: My hip started healing and I hit another bottom and went to a halfway house and got sober. I started leaning on God and going to [Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)] meetings. I ended up putting 4 years and 2 months of sobriety together and moved down to Charlestown in late 2000 to open up my own business. Things were going so good, I had so much money from working all over this town, was going to AA, and still believing in God. Through this transition, though, I had slight culture shock and I was hanging with people that weren't in AA and eventually if you're going to hang at the barber shop you're going to get a haircut. I ended up relapsing and I went out for a night and came back 6 years later.

I went to the Pine Street Inn and I lived there for nine months and it was the craziest place I've ever lived and the most insane part of my life other. I got pistol whipped, was dealing drugs, and running around Boston as the lookout for a guy robbing women's pocketbooks.

For the 20 years that I sniffed heroin I never shot it. I also never smoked a cigarette. I don't like to say I did heroin for 20 years straight. I had a lot of clean and detox time. At 39, however, I did shoot it. Within that period of 9 months of shooting up I overdose and caught Hepatitis C and didn't even care. I said I was going to quit when I was 40.

I did get clean and sober when I was 40, a bit after my birthday. The lesson I learned was no matter what comes down the pipe, I'm not going to pick up. And just for today I'm sitting on seven years, seven months, and eight days sober and I'm still active in AA. You have to stay plugged into AA and plugged into recovery. I'd say 98% of people who don't stay plugged in, relapse. I don't want to ever learn my lesson the hard way again.

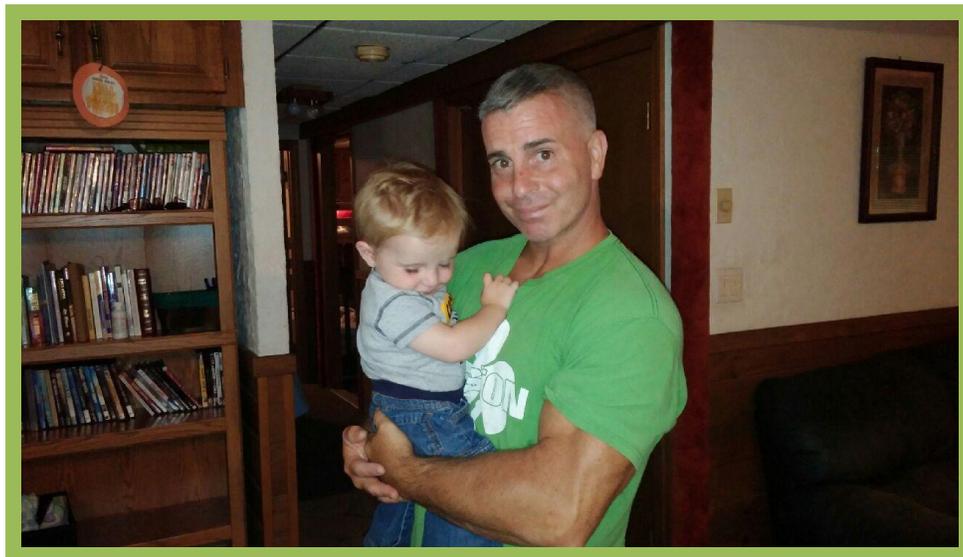
OL: How have you helped maintain your sobriety for over seven years?

JU: I remind myself that I did enough partying to last me a lifetime. I have an AA group, sponsor, and go on commitments. I knew I had to get a foundation in the city, which have been the AA meetings. It was my focus and it's given me a life. I have a four year old son and two step sons. I went to Recovery Coach Academy. I work for myself in construction.

The only way for me to stay clean and sober is to say I have to take every hit. I've already been through a few deaths. I have a beautiful girlfriend and I think she's so smart. She's a stay at home mother and unbelievable and keeps me grounded. She has 14 years sober. I have a brand new car and pay rent faithfully. There is so much more to live for. I'm not jealous of everyone, I do everything I can to just stay consistent. I run an AWOL every Thursday night at the local halfway house which I get more and more continuous psychic change from.

I'm comfortable in my skin and have a lot of peace of mind. You cannot buy peace of mind, it comes from up above and I don't want to lose it. I live in the day because tomorrow I could lose it. I just try to do the next right thing all day, and try to live right. AA has taught me so much. The BHHC, Dr. Morrill, and Dr. Neely have been a tremendous help in aiding my recovery and curing my Hepatitis C.

Addiction is a three-fold disease, mental physical and spiritual. I try to focus on all three parts.



Jocko and his son