

Name: Brian O'Neil
Neighborhood: Charlestown
Sobriety Date: May 15th, 2016

OL: At what age did you start drinking?

BO: About 11 years old. My father was an alcoholic so he used to leave a lot of booze around. When I was a little kid and my father would leave his beer on the table we would pick it up and drink it and he'd think it was funny. I already had the gene for the disease, which I do think is a disease. By 14 I was out of control.



OL: How was drinking perceived in your community?

BO: Everyone older than me was drinking or using, that's how we grew up. At a young age I'd hang out and go away on vacation with cousins and drinking was just normal, a way of fitting in.

I played hockey and I was pretty good. I was drinking all through school, but I didn't even have to show up for classes because I played hockey. Pretty much my school years were all spent drinking and drugging and in and out of jail. Teachers allowed it to happen.

OL: When did you recognize that your drinking was out of control?

BO: At about age 15 I'd been getting arrested for stealing cars. Every time I'd drink I'd get in trouble and every time I got out, I'd get in more trouble. At age 15 they sent me down to the courthouse for AA meetings. I was going there but I wasn't listening, I didn't take it seriously.

OL: Describe a turning point in your life

BO: I was in and out of jail and rehabs and halfway houses until I was about 28. I was in South Bay and went into the drug program and had a cousin that worked there. He said to me, "What are you going to do? What are your plans for the future?" and I didn't really have a plan. I was just going to do what I needed to do illegally to live my life. This time something stuck with me. I already had two boys and I knew I had to do something, get sober and stay sober.

OL: Describe your initial path to sobriety

Brian started out in South Bay's drug block, graduated to the Brooke House and then to Gavin House.

BO: When I arrived [at Gavin House] I was nervous but there were a lot of guys I gelled with. This was the start of a sober network. We started to go to meetings and do everything together. I was there for 6 months and it flew by because I was focused and doing the right thing and had the right tools.

OL: What happened after you got out of Gavin House?

BO: When I got out I was sober and working and living my life the way I thought it should go. I was sober for 5 years. Then I started to get too confident and cocky and slowed at my meetings. I was going out to clubs to meet women and what started with a soda water, turned into soda water with lime and then soda water with Tanqueray. I would drink by myself and it would start to be the habit again. Start to be a necessity.

OL: How has alcoholism affected your relationships?

BO: I ended up meeting a girl and we got married and she was a great person but she didn't understand the disease. I didn't tell her I was an alcoholic. We had to move a ton of times because of my drinking. I gave her more reasons than not to leave and she stood by. She tried her hardest to be there for me. She was there emotionally but I was at the point where I just wanted to drink.

Finally she said she had enough and put me in jail and while I was in there she found someone else. We ended up splitting up and she got full custody of my daughter. I understand; I wasn't at all in the state to take care of anybody, let alone myself.

[Years later] I was sitting and just going through my motions being depressed and sad and woe is me. I put my head down and two feet come in front of me and that was my daughter. I hadn't seen her in so many years and she was like "Do you know who I am?" My emotions got out of hand.

About 3 years ago I started seeing my daughter again; I started to get emotionally attached. I saw myself as drinking to survive, in order to function.

OL: How did you get from drinking to survive to today, over 4 months sober?

BO: Shannon and someone else found me behind the Whole Foods by the dumpsters. I was slouched over, discolored and had 6 pints of vodka around and it wasn't good vodka either, it was the cheap stuff. They got me up and [Shannon] said she wanted to get me to the hospital. I didn't want to because I had a warrant and was in trouble with the law. She said they wouldn't get me in trouble.



After spending time in the hospital, Brian went to AdCare in Worcester and then to the Hope Center Rehab in Springfield.

It wasn't even that great of a place, kind of a half ass rehab center, but I started to realize that I had to start depending on myself. If I wanted to get this and get sober, I needed to not worry about what people think and the mistakes I've made.

OL: Describe a turning point in your recent treatment

BO: I had an open case and they told me I had to go clear up a warrant. They let me take the bus from Springfield to Boston. The thoughts through my head were "You should drink, they won't know." I had the freedom to make the wrong decision but I made the right one, which showed me that I can make decisions that are better for my health.

After 37 days in treatment, Brian was forced to leave for insurance reasons. With no money, he was homeless in Springfield for a week before he could afford to call his sister Francine who sent him a bus ticket back to Boston.

I had a lawyer from the Brighton case and he was big up in the Hope House. He said if you can get back here today and take a clean urine, you will have a bed at the Hope House. I took the urine I've been in the Hope House for 2 and a half months.

OL: How are you feeling right now?

BO: I feel great. I still worry a little, but try not to look too far to the future. I'm trying to fix a few things but I don't want them to get in the way of my sobriety, because it has before. Right now I'm just looking for work, because I've broken ties in the past. People are waiting to see if I'm serious about this or just bullshitting again. I've made a deal with myself. I've got to stop lying or I won't get any further. A lot of people never gave up on me, Shannon, my sister Francine, Efran, my sober network, Dennis, Paulie, there are so many people who have helped me through.