

Shannon's Interview with Shannon McMahon

January 31, 2021

"The opposite of addiction is connection."



SL: Please describe your childhood?

SM: My childhood was chaotic to say the least. I grew up in a family of good people with big hearts, but all a little misinformed by the misinformed. There was untreated alcoholism/addiction as well as untreated mental illness that plagued my home. I received unspoken messages such as "do not ask for help" and "what happens in the home stays in the home." For as long as I remember I felt both ashamed and responsible for my parents untreated illnesses and an overwhelming sense of powerlessness. I had also experienced childhood trauma that really skewed my view of myself. I felt worthless, like trash. I was filled with debilitating anxiety, fear, and an overall sense of self-hatred. I had never felt comfortable in my own skin.

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

SM: By the time I was around 12, I found alcohol and it became the solution I was looking for my entire life. I could finally breathe. I remember the first time I picked up, I was hanging around kids much older than me, I

blacked out and couldn't remember how I made it home. The insidious part was that I could not wait to do it again. For the first time in my life, my brain stopped flooding me with painful memories and obsessive thoughts and everything didn't matter as much. The weight of the world was lifted from my shoulders. I was numb from my internal torment, even if just for a few moments. I had found my solution. I now found a way that I could cope with life.

SL: How did your addiction progress from there?

SM: My addiction progressed very rapidly. From that very first time I picked up that drink, I immediately obsessed about how and when I would get the next one. It quickly became less about fun and more about survival for me. By the time I was 13, I attempted suicide and wound up in Children's Hospital recovering from a medical malpractice. They had filled my left lung with charcoal, and I had to go through multiple procedures to drain the charcoal from my lungs. It was at this point in my life where I was introduced to doctor's that would prescribe me medication. I quickly learned how to play the victim and manipulate the doctors to prescribe me substances I could use to get out of myself. Since I was underage, it was easier for me to abuse pills than find someone to buy alcohol for me. I found myself on a long journey of inpatient hospitalization, many different diagnosis, and multiple medications. Nothing seemed to offer me any significant or sustained relief. By 16, I was introduced to a man much older than myself and found myself in a long-term relationship filled with violence, power and control. Fast forward to age 21, I found myself pregnant with my son. I had never really tried to stop using but when I was pregnant, I did. For the first time in my life, I realized the power of this disease of addiction was even more powerful than the bond I had with my unborn child. I was terrified. After my son was born, my disease continued to progress. I went from

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prescription drugs, alcohol and cocaine to becoming a full-blown heroin addict. This was an extremely painful existence for me. One day, after a night of partying, I looked myself in the mirror and did not recognize the woman staring back. She was a shell of a person and nothing like anybody I wanted to be like. I attempted suicide that night and woke up in Melrose Wakefield Hospital from a coma, with a doctor saying, "there is no medical explanation why all that medication you took, did not affect your brain. I don't understand why you're not braindead." I lost custody of my son shortly after that suicide attempt and it was the beginning of the end for me.

SL: Can you describe your path towards recovery?

SM: My recovery began at McClean's Hospital where I was introduced to Alcoholics Anonymous for the first time. Seeds began to get planted and I suddenly realized there may be a solution out there for what I suffered from my whole life. Previously, I had never felt like there was a way out. Though, my journey into recovery began. I started to feel a little less alone. I began to experience hope and that was something I hadn't felt in a long time. After I left the hospital, I started going to meetings in my area. My son was in foster care, and DCF was already in the process from changing the goal from reunification to adoption. I was devastated but surrounded by people in recovery that kept telling me to utilize this time to work on myself, and I did. I got a sponsor and started working the twelve steps as they are laid out in our big book of Alcoholics Anonymous. I slowly began to recover from what had a hold on me my entire life. I was able to start showing up for life and began fighting for custody of my son back. I showed up to court dates, sober and people began to notice that something was different in me. I was awarded supervised visits, then unsupervised visitation, and I eventually regained custody of my son. The numbness of

my trauma and my past slowly started to fade away and I started feeling human again. Getting sober was the most difficult thing I ever done in my entire life, but it has been by far the most rewarding. Everything good that I have in my life today is a direct result of my sobriety. Through recovery, I have gained a relationship with God which has become the most vitally important relationship to me today. My sober date is October 13th, 2014.

SL: What has helped you maintain your recovery?

SM: How I have been able to maintain my recovery is by submerging myself in the program of AA. I attend a lot of meetings and that not only helps keep me sober but helps keep me sane. I once heard that the opposite of addiction is connection and that truly resonated with me. My disease kept me isolated and alone. My recovery is contingent on my connections with others. I will be forever grateful for the men and women that came before me and showed me how to live. God works through people and for me to maintain my relationship with God, I need to be around people.

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

SM: My best advice to someone just beginning their road to recovery would be to never give up on yourself. Ask for help and surround yourself with the people you want to become. Remember, no one does recovery alone.