

Shannon's Interview with Melissa Mello

August 30, 2021

“The only person you are destined to become, is the person you decide to be.”



SL: Please describe your childhood?

MM: My childhood was relatively happy. My mom and dad were your typical old school mostly Irish Catholic (and some Italian) couple. My father, a former United States Marine, served in the Vietnam War. My dad worked hard and my mom stayed home with us. I'm the oldest of three, with two younger brothers. But I was awkward and uncomfortable in my skin probably because I felt different from my peers. At age 6 until age 11 a family friend molested me and it changed my once happy personality. I became an angry, rageful, depressed, suicidal teenager at home, who was in and out of treatment facilities starting at age 12 and had my first (of many) suicide attempt at age 13. I was a chameleon even then. I remember hating myself so early in life that I would spin around and around in circles in my room to music, listening to Juice Newton, Laura Branigan, Pat Benatar, the Go Go's, and Madonna. Anyone

who wasn't me. I think this was probably my first way of getting high. Or at least outside myself.

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

MM: I started drinking in high school and I described it as, “finally shedding out of my skin,” meaning as soon as I could feel the alcohol running through my veins, I felt myself leaving and the “new me” being born. In college, I went on a date with a guy from school who lived out of state and I agreed to go home with him. Once I did, my nightmare began. He took me to a house by a beach, and once there I was blindfolded, gagged and tied up. Several men raped me, beat me. They all took turns sexually assaulting me themselves and with objects for days. I was left blindfolded in the dark on a beach when I was finally released. I had never seen any of my captors except for the person I originally went on the date with, who told me that he would come to my hometown and kill my family if I told anyone. (He had taken my purse and wallet.) After this happened, it also triggered what happened to me when I was little. My drinking and drug use took off. I did cocaine, heroin, ecstasy. Once fentanyl hit the streets around 2013/2014 I had no tolerance for it. Narcan saved my life more times than I'd like to admit, but even Narcan stopped working, and I started needing adrenaline in order to save my life. I was once dead for a little over 120 seconds waiting for the EMTs. My friend

had used all three Narcans she had. That was the last time I used opiates, November 2018. And then the drug that brought me to my knees, crack cocaine. I found my master; I was a slave. I still loved alcohol but no longer for fun or taste. I drank whiskey and it made me mean. I never knew when the change would happen, sometimes after 3 drinks or sometimes 13. What I could always guarantee was the change *would* happen.

SL: How did your addiction progress from there?

MM: I tried my first attempt at getting clean in 1999. In AA I met my daughter's father. At about 4 months clean, I informed him I was pregnant and he left me on the spot. I stayed clean throughout my pregnancy, but relapsed when she was a year and a half old. That lasted for the next 10 years. I had a great career, with a six-figure salary. I purchased a condo near my parents' house. My little family wanted for nothing, but I was getting high every day. Drinking every night. A DUI in 2002. In 2011, my 11-year-old daughter somehow woke up and found me overdosed on my master bathroom floor. She called 911 and saved my life. She moved in with my parents when I was in treatment. She never lived with me again. The next years saw a rapid decline of my life. I was then homeless, I got married to a man who almost killed me with a baseball bat, I tried to end my own life and was almost successful. I took over 300 Seroquel and waited, not telling my husband anything. I was put into an induced coma, a vent, given last rites by a Catholic priest. I've been homeless on the streets of Fall River, Brockton, and finally landed on Mass Ave. I have a record that is shameful with assaults, leaving the scene, another DUI, trespassing, intimidating a witness, shoplifting. Then came the felonies: larceny over \$2500, uttering a false check, conspiracy to commit fraud, forgery by

check. I've sold my body for drugs, stolen from my parents and children. I lost custody of my son Vincenzo (I was 4 months clean at the time) and I completely spiraled after that. Drugs, mainly crack, and ways and means of getting more were all that mattered. I was on a vicious run for a year and a half on Mass Ave. By this point, I was hopeless. Not one family member was on speaking terms with me. I'd burnt every bridge, except for my godmother and aunt Helen.

SL: Can you describe your path towards recovery?

MM: It was July, I had just done two straight weeks with no money on Mass Ave, and I still had about 18 days until my SSDI came in on August 3rd. So I decided it was time for the merry-go-round to go to detox, DDU, and the timing would be perfect: I would be back out in time for my payday. I went to Mass General thanks to my aunt and had an issue that caused me to be asked to leave another detox after 2 hours there. Then I went to Arbour Fuller in Attleboro. I left AMA when I was paid and went on my last run in Brockton. After 4 nights in the hotel I was broke so I sold myself twice and ran into a dude from the Ave who tried to rape me in the hotel room. I fought him off and figured that it was a good idea to lay low. I called AdCare the next day and drank three sleeves of Fireball waiting for them to come. I had no intention on "really" getting clean there. My intake there was with Mr. Bowen who told me I was a terrible person and a horrible mother. He said my kids were better off without me. He said I was destroying them and they'd get over me if I signed them over now. He could initiate the paperwork. I was so selfish if I didn't. He looked disgusted with me. Normally I would have told him to go F off and left. He was starting to leave the room when I heard myself say, "what do I need to do?" It came out like a

whisper. He didn't even look at me, but his voice was strong and confident. He replied with one word, and I'll never forget it: SURRENDER. I did, that day. And I haven't used a substance since. That was 8/15/19.

SL: What has helped you maintain your recovery?

MM: From my surrender, I was desperate. I could look in the mirror, but I never really *looked at myself*. I was so disgusted with the person looking back. So I went into sober living, found a sponsor, and got working on the 12 Steps in the Big Book. I had a warrant in one court from missing a court date by being in treatment. When I went to clear that up, I found out I had two dockets of felonies in another court. The judge let me go on a PR. I went to court the next day and I was put on bail. And I left it in God's hands. This was a test of my faith in step 3. Now I have so much faith in God and I trust His path I don't even question it for a second. I've been reunited with both my children. I don't have custody back yet, but I trust in God's time I will. My mom passed away unexpectedly in November 2020 and I'm feeling the feelings, ALL OF THEM! For so many years, I numbed out. Today I go through them all. I didn't have to drink or get high to cope. I'm stronger than I realized and if I can do that, anyone CAN! Through God's Grace and the 12 steps, I was able to make a formal amends with my parents and hear my mother tell me that she forgave me, that she loved me, and that she was proud of me before she passed away. Recovery has given me that PRICELESS GIFT!! I'm forever grateful! Mindfulness and meditation is huge, harmony and peace is so important! Being still. Enjoying life and the beautiful, little, simple things. Art, writing, painting rocks, breath work, meetings, prayer, my two children (ages 21 and 5), my family, who wasn't even speaking to me two years ago

and we talk almost every day now. My aunt who always believed in me until I could believe in myself.

I was recently diagnosed with Parkinson's and Tardive Dyskinesia. I don't let that hold me back at all! I'm rewriting my steps and "just about ready" to take sponsees through the steps with assistance from my amazing sponsor. I stay humble and grateful each day and I never forget where I came from. I recently moved into an SRO (single room) shared kitchen and bathroom. Fancy way of saying rooming house lol. And got a "big girl bed ". No more plastic green jail mattress or being the 100th person to sleep on a twin sober house mattress. I have a full-size mattress and I'm the only goddess who slept or sleeps on it! Praise God! I have a gratitude journal, because I remember sleeping on a piece of cardboard on the pavement, or huddled under filthy, smelly blankets in the wet grass, shivering to get warm. Grateful hearts won't use. I practice forgiveness. Forgiving myself was the most difficult and most important thing I ever had to do. It took time, but once I finally realized that my mistakes don't define who I am at my core, what my soul is, then I became more liberated and that freedom allowed me to be able to regulate my emotions enough to forgive those who did me wrong, who weren't even aware or remorseful. I was able to be free of them and the emotions tied to the trauma or hurt they left with me, and really let it (and them) go by forgiveness. Now most of the time when I feel that familiar sting I can stop it before it consumes me. I say to myself, "I know what you are, you're my trauma," and I flick it away like an annoying gnat. I'm no longer a victim. That was one of my major defects and manipulation ploys when I was active. That and self-pity. A habitual liar (learned young), I blamed (anyone, anything, and anywhere), and selfishness, of course. How humbling it was when my denial started to crack and break and my authentic self was

revealed. I'm STILL a work in progress. I'm not my mistakes, they do not define me, but when I make one today, I apologize and correct it, and learn from it.

SL: What advice would you give to someone just beginning their steps towards recovery?

MM: I would make suggestions to someone new and only suggest to them on what has worked for me.

I would suggest to not to be so hard on themselves. ONE MINUTE clean is a miracle. One minor change towards the next right direction is a miracle. Someone smarter than me once said, you don't walk into the forest for years and expect to walk out with one big huge step, no it takes time. Every single piece of advice I give, or quote I say, I've been given or heard from someone who came before me. I'm blessed and grateful for those who gave so freely. I hope I can help even one of your readers by keeping it real.

You will get triggered, cravings, urges, and that's all ok. You'll feel like crawling out of your skin and isolating, and saying "I'm fine" when you're breaking inside. You'll want people in the program to "read your mind goddammit" and "why don't they know I'm freaking pissed off?" And you'll get resentments over big and small issues and your addiction will tell you in your own voice that ALL THOSE THINGS are a wonderful reason to relapse and you can only do it once, and the famous "no one will know." I fell for that one 100 times. Let ME have relapsed for anyone who hasn't. Trust me... God USED TO MAKE my relapses shorter and shorter with much higher consequences, meaning I used to completely ruin my life in 24-36 hours.

Do what you need to do for YOU! Each and every recovery is unique, like a fingerprint. What works for Tom, might not work for Harry,

yet they both are staying clean and it's NO ONE'S BUSINESS how they do it – whether it's God, NA, AA, MATs, psychiatric treatment, praying to Santa Claus, step work, astrology, whatever – if they are truly clean it's no one's worry, and if someone is worried about you and how you are doing your program, I would have to check them and say, if their program was so wonderful, why are they looking at yours? No one can judge except God.

I would suggest to keep it in the day. When my mom was unconscious and I was saying my goodbye, I made her a promise and I wanted to be able to keep it so I said it just like this, "Mom, I promise you I will take over from here. I promise you that I'm going to stay clean, every day, for 24 hours at a time."

Thank you for allowing me to share my story. We are all miracles. We do recover.

Be still and know that I am God – Psalm 46:10

