

Name: Lorraine Fitzgerald
Neighborhood: Charlestown, Revere
Sobriety Date: April 4, 2014

OL: When did you first start using drugs?

LF: I grew up in Charlestown; I've lived here my whole life. At around 12 or 13 years old, friends were smoking weed and trying things like that. Maybe it was peer pressure, just wanting to fit in, but I started smoking weed. In the beginning it was not every day but then it did progress to every day and I was showing up to school stoned and I didn't really care, I was a class clown. It became a regular thing and I started to drink.

OL: Can you talk a bit about your place in your family growing up?

LF: My parents divorced when I was 3, I lived with my father most of my life but I always wanted to be with my mother so I moved to be with her in Winthrop. There I found a whole new group of people and I was out of my comfort zone. My mother was prescribed pills and I would steal them and use them. From there I went to heroin very quickly. My cousin [who has unfortunately passed away from an overdose] was the first one who introduced me to heroin; I think we were about 16.

OL: Describe your initial experiences with heroin

LF: I liked how I felt when I was high. The first time I tried it, just like everybody, I fell in love with it. Once I felt that, I wanted to feel that every day. I was always shy, because I have a deep voice. [On heroin] I felt like I could talk to anybody, do anything, I didn't care about how I talked, how I looked. That feeling is something that you really can't describe except for at the time you think it's amazing.

OL: When did you realize that you were struggling with addiction?

LF: It didn't take too long for me or my family to recognize it was an issue. Probably by 17 I was in my first detox. I had dropped out of school—getting high was more important. I came back to Charlestown to stay with my father and I hid it from him that whole year. But people talk—everybody knows everybody and my father said that I had to go to detox.

After completing her first detox program, Lorraine tried going for further treatment.

The further treatment on the Cape is called Emerson House. When I went there they were redoing the house and there were women from federal prison and I was very young and scared and I called my father and said please don't make me stay here and he ended up coming to get me.

OL: Describe some of your past challenges while seeking treatment

LF: Since that first time, I've been to detox about 20 times. I was in and out for a long time. Ever since I was younger this would be a pattern for me—I would stay out and get high and when I felt like I needed help, I would get it. When I was 20 I got pregnant and had my first daughter.

After I had my first child, I went to the Cushing House, [where Coalition Community Outreach Coordinator, Shannon Lundin worked at the time] and did up to four months there. I was 2 weeks away from completion when I left. A girl got



kicked out and I went to meet her while out on job search and she just pulled out heroin and did it right in front of me. I ended up doing it and then I went back and Shannon saw me and pulled me into the office and said she was going to give me a urine. I thought that because Shannon was from Charlestown she should have loyalty to me. She had to explain to me that this was her job. I was mad at Shannon for awhile.

After I got kicked out I knew at that point that I really needed help so I went into the court house and told the judge that I was going to go get help and wanted to give guardianship to my father.

At that point I heard that Shannon was working in the field so I started coming to her. Shannon has never once ever denied help. It doesn't matter if I relapse 100 times; she was always there to give encouraging words and tell me that I have to get back on the horse and get sober.

Not long after leaving Cushing House, Lorraine was arrested and placed in jail for 60 days. Shannon secured a spot for her at Meridian House and when Lorraine was released she went directly into treatment.

LF: I was at Meridian House for 6 months when I received terrible news.



At that time, Lorraine wanted to be alone. However, at the Meridian House you were not allowed in the bedrooms before a certain time. Lorraine violated this rule and was forced to leave the facility.

On my way out I was already calling Shannon, asking if there were any sober houses available. I didn't want to get high. This was a big step for me because I never would have thought that I would be responsible. That was the first sign to me that I could be [responsible] if I was sober and wanted to be. I stayed sober 14 months before I relapsed.

OL: Can you talk a bit about your relationship with your daughter?

LF: She lives with my brother but slowly but surely I am building a relationship with her and I will never stop fighting for a relationship with my daughter, because I go through life with a huge part of my heart missing, and it's her.

OL: How was your last experience in treatment different?

LF: When I left Meridian House and went to the halfway house I met my now husband. On June 29, 2013 Gerard [Lorraine's husband] and I got married. My mother was my maid of honor

and two weeks later they found her unresponsive. She had a diabetic coma. She was the best—that was a very hard time. At the time I wasn't in a good state of mind and I used her death as an excuse to get high.

After we relapsed we were dead homeless, sleeping at the airport in the dead of winter and I was like this is crazy. This has to stop, it's insanity, we can't keep doing this. We both went and got help and when we got out a friend of mine took me and my husband in. It was the nicest thing.

Lorraine and Gerard relapsed again and Gerard went to jail. During that time, Lorraine went on Suboxone to get clean and when Gerard was released, he did as well. They've both been sober since then.

OL: What has helped you to maintain your sobriety?

LF: If I could give any couple advice it would be to go against what you think is right—don't go to detox together. You need that time to be away from each other. That's the time when you have to be selfish and focus on yourself.

OL: What keeps you going?

LF: Sometimes I feel guilty because I couldn't get sober for my older daughter but ever since Ella's been here I've been sober. I'm doing everything I can to form a relationship with my daughter and my baby. Both of them are the reason I'm still going and still breathing, because they're my motivation.

OL: What are you up to now?

LF: I went and did an interview a few months back at New Health, which just opened here in Charlestown. They called me and said that they wanted to offer me a position [as a recovery coach] and I almost died.

I've always wanted to be sharing my experience instead of being the one sitting in detox, still not getting it. And Shannon had so much to do with that because she helps everyone who comes in her path. If I can help half of the people that Shannon helps, I would be so happy. I can't even believe this opportunity is here.

I also just got my license this year and we have a car. I never thought I'd be smart enough to pass the permit test. My husband is also working; he's a great provider. We have a beautiful apartment, and Ella has her own playroom. These are things that I never thought, in 100 years; I'd be able to do.