

# Shannon's Interview with Alison Goodliss

March 31, 2020

*Give Yourself A Chance*



## **SL: Please describe your childhood?**

**AG:** Overall, I would say I had a happy childhood. I have an older brother so I grew up a tomboy-- constantly surrounded by sports and competition which I love more than anything. I played almost every sport, whether it was on a team or playing with my brother and his friends on the street, it was my happy place. My family definitely had our problems, but regardless we were always taken care of and my brother and I had the privilege of obtaining a good education. However, I always felt different from my family and the people around me. At a young age, I struggled with a lot of things emotionally which I felt separated me from everyone else. On the outside, we looked like a happy family but we struggled with a lot of things nobody really knew about which kept me in a lot of pain most of the time. We also weren't as financially secure as the people around us, so I felt like I never belonged which also brought on a lot of insecurities. As a child going into adolescence, I felt angry and sad at times but never really spoke up about it. I had a hard time making and keeping girl friends in school. I never felt like I

truly belonged in any group and was often excluded or looked at different for how I handled personal situations. So, looking back, it was definitely bittersweet.

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

**AG:** I would say my addiction started manifesting in high school around the age of 15. At first, it started off as just drinking and smoking weed at parties, but it ended up becoming much more than that. Once I realized using drugs and alcohol took me out of myself, my disease really took off. Towards the second half of high school, I wanted to drink and smoke weed as a distraction from everything going on around me to suppress how I felt about family and other people in my life. At the end of high school, I started to become aggressive and violent when drinking to the point that it scared my family. I started skipping school and I specifically remember missing track & field practice to get high—to the point where I got cut from the team. When using started to affect my ability to play sports and distract me from things I am most passionate about, I knew it was becoming a problem but, I still did not care. Every day, morning and night, I was smoking weed. I also started dabbling with cocaine here and there, which really took a turn for the worse.

## **SL: How did your addiction progress from there?**

**AG:** I made an attempt at college by attending the University of Arizona located in Tucson, AZ. I moved out there not knowing anyone and I loved it. Unfortunately, I did not put all of my focus into my education and ended up throwing it all away to where my disease really began to progress. It started off as crazy college parties, but by my third week out there I was evicted from my dorm and was facing criminal charges due to my actions which were a direct result of

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my addiction. That was when I started drifting away from the “college atmosphere” of Tucson and began hanging with the locals of that city as opposed to students. Long story short, I was introduced to oxycontin and did a lot of cocaine—I ended up staying out in Tucson for three years with nothing to show for it academically. I was living a secret life out there that my family was unaware of, which kept me very sick and I quickly hit a bottom out there. Eventually, I made the decision to return to Boston thinking that this would cure me because I never used opiates in the state of Massachusetts. I returned home and just substituted for a while, telling myself and others that I was sober. Inevitably, I got into the same pattern of drugs and chaos which then went from oxys to heroin, then escalated to me becoming an IV drug user. I was not only using, but I was lying and stealing from my family and everyone that I loved. I lost a job that I had for years, I was always in the system, getting arrested left and right. I was always sick, threatening my family, not caring at all about the toll this had been taking on my poor mother. These were definitely bad times.

### **SL: Can you describe your path towards recovery?**

**AG:** My path towards recovery was not of my doing, which is why to this day, I believe in my higher power. After being on probation for years, unable to pass a drug test or report to my PO—it all finally caught up with me. One night I decided to steal my brother's car and he called the police, not knowing that I had a warrant. When they caught me, I was detained at South Bay and stipulated to go to treatment. I was placed at Project Cope in Lynn—an amazing 6-9-month halfway house for women. I got there and knew nothing about staying clean with zero accountability for my actions. At first, I was only there to please the courts and to avoid going back to jail and had every reservation to

return to the life I had been living. Then I got to the point of “fake it till you make it” type of mentality. After months of living in that program amongst women who took their recovery seriously, something began changing within me. I began wanting to set goals for myself, established relationships within my family again, I got a sponsor and began to take AA/NA meetings seriously. I got a job, made real friendships, and saved money- my life became so much better over time. That program not only saved my life, it directed me to incredible women who have helped shape me into the woman I am today. I eventually graduated from that halfway house and my probation had been lifted, and at that point I realized that I wanted to remain clean for myself, not only for the courts. I moved onto Sober Living after that in their three-quarter house, stayed on the road to recovery and I have been clean ever since. I now have seven and a half years clean and owe it all to my higher power for allowing all of this to happen to me.

### **SL: What has helped you maintain your recovery?**

**AG:** When I first got clean, it was my meeting attendance and network that helped maintain my sobriety. Once I completed the halfway house, I dove headfirst into service work to keep me busy and help stay connected. For the first couple of years I didn't fully commit to step work, but eventually I made the time to do so and it led me to a relationship with my higher power which has helped me tremendously over the years. I have found that at the beginning of my process it was easier for me to stay on a routine, but as the years went by, I started to build more of a life for myself—working more, bills to pay, getting engaged, starting a family. While these are all amazing things, it became more difficult to find balance and at the end of the day my recovery needs to come first so that I am able to stay clean and maintain this beautiful

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life that I have made. Having a homegroup has always been a must for me and currently it's the women's meeting and constant contact with my higher power that keeps me intact. My family is a huge motivator for me. Throughout my process, I have worked towards improving the relationships within my family. Having them in my life, especially my mother, motivates me to want to be the best version of myself that I can possibly be. My son and fiancé provide me with a tremendous amount of strength. I have been blessed with a beautiful family and this is huge for me because these are the things I have always truly longed for. Strong and supportive women is another thing that has helped me tremendously along the way. Like I said, I had struggled with maintaining relationships with women throughout my life, which is why having a strong network of women who help push me closer to my goals has been a big deal for me. Being available to help the next addict seeking recovery has played a major role in my process, as well.

There have been times when helping others has been able to pull me out of some of my darkest times which is one reason why I think the program is so amazing. Another thing that has been a constant throughout my process, is keeping that pain upfront. I have never let go of the pain I felt while using—that feeling of being sick, stuck, lonely, and desperate. Remembering that pain is key to remaining grateful. No matter what life throws at me, at the end of the day, I know its gratitude and my higher power that will keep me strong!

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

**AG:** My advice to those who are just beginning their steps towards recovery is to give yourself a chance. I have witnessed both women and men pull themselves out of the trenches to create the most beautiful lives for themselves. My advice

to those in detox or a holding would definitely be to move onto further treatment. If you are about to graduate your halfway house—consider their three-quarter house or consider finding a sober house to help hold you accountable. If you are stipulated to treatment and only doing this to appease the courts, try to be openminded by giving the program a chance because it could change your life forever! Honestly, now having hindsight, it was the beginning stages of my recovery that were my favorite. Embrace the unknown; have fun meeting new people who are on the same path as you; go to new meetings; go out for pizza afterwards; build that network you've always dreamed of; get a service position; find a sponsor; remain openminded; **GIVE YOURSELF A CHANCE.** Attend both NA & AA meetings and attend **WHICH EVER WORKS FOR YOU.** If you struggle with meetings and the fellowship, consider reaching out to find more resources-- there are many avenues you can take to help further your process like therapy or SMART recovery. Find an outlet, whether it's the gym, art, or traveling! It's important to practice selfcare and doing things that make you happy is part of that! Get comfortable reaching out and asking for help! Never give up on yourself and always remember that you are worth it!

