

**Name:** Alex Cancino  
**Age:** 32  
**Hometown:** South Boston  
**Sobriety Date:** Feb. 10<sup>th</sup> 2016

**OL: Can you tell me a bit about your childhood?**

**AC:** I grew up in the South Boston Projects. I moved there when I was 5 years old and lived there with my mom, father, and sister. It was difficult at first being accepted as Hispanic growing up in an Irish neighborhood. I got into a good amount of fights over race. One of the reasons I fell into drugs was because of that; I wanted to be accepted and be the cool kid and [drugs] were kind of my way in.

As far as addiction, I've seen it my whole life because my father was an alcoholic. I saw a good amount of the bad stuff that can come from addiction at a very young age. As a young kid I was very curious about what the attraction was to these so-called "bad things."

**OL: How did your addiction progress?**

**AC:** My addiction didn't get really bad until I started messing with opioids at the age of 17 [specifically Percocet and Vicodin]. I didn't think that I was a drug addict and I actually looked down at those people. It gradually got worse from there and OC-80s [Oxycontin] came into play when I was 20 or 21. I got heavily addicted to those. I started off eating them and then progressed to snorting them, which was a very expensive habit to maintain but one of the reasons that I maintained it for so long was that I was doing illegal activity in the streets so I never really got what I considered to be dope sick so I didn't really consider myself to be an addict. Eventually money ran out and I started experiencing what it feels like to be dope sick. I would steal from my friends and I would lie, just like what the majority of addicts do to get drugs.

OC-80 got too expensive so I went to heroin, which was less expensive and more potent and once I found that I fell in love with it. Everyone that I grew up with in the neighborhood was shooting heroin. Me, I was a late bloomer [at 24]. I was already doing opiates since the age of 16 but I just hadn't stuck a needle in my arm.

**OL: Where has your addiction taken you?**

**AC:** I was real good at hiding things from the people that I needed to hide things from. [My current sobriety] comes with a lot of failures and ups and downs and coming to the realization that at 32 years old it's time to grow up.

I didn't want to live this lifestyle anymore. I've overdosed ten times, including the last time I got high. I've been left for dead in the hallways of projects twice. If it weren't for neighbors I wouldn't be here. It happened so much that it became the norm. Sometimes I would snap out of it on my own without medical help.

I remember one Christmas Eve I was in a project hallway. I then remember collapsing in the middle of the street and I must have been out for at least an hour because it started snowing and my body outline was in the middle of the street. I saw the footprints of people stepping over me, so people acknowledged me but didn't do anything to help. I realize that they [people who didn't help him] were just as sick as I was.

I can only speak from my own experience but I've never left someone who has overdosed, but that's just me. I don't care if cops are coming. I used to carry NARCAN with me all of the time.

**OL: How did you reach your recent accomplishment of one year sober? (Congratulations!)**

**AC:** I was involved in Charlestown Drug Court.

***Alex and his mom moved from South Boston to Charlestown six years ago, making him eligible for the Charlestown Court.***

I was doing good for five months but then I relapsed and got high and overdosed and got kicked out of my halfway house. There was a warrant out for my arrest and my goal was to go into treatment to avoid jail. Nevertheless, I got pulled over and was arrested.

***At this point the Charlestown Drug Court decided to give Alex another chance with their program, which is he currently completing while living in sober housing.***

Three months ago I graduated from the Casa Esperanza halfway house. I'm now working full time at Portland Group, a plumbing and HVAC company. I've been working there for 6 months full time. Someone gave me a great opportunity and I've been here ever since.

I go to my meetings; I work; I don't have that much of a social life right now but I'm okay with it. I'm pretty strong in my recovery right now that walking by an area where I used to get high doesn't bother me. I know where I'm at now and I don't want to go back to where I was.

I'll tell you what; Drug Court saved my life. If it weren't for Drug Court, I would be dead, on the streets, or in jail for life.

You can't force an addict to get clean. That's another thing I've realized—what I'm doing to get and stay clean isn't going to work for the next person. You have to find what works for you in whatever steps you're taking to get clean. It's not an easy thing, but if you want it you have to put work in.

I've lost a lot of friends to this opiate crisis right now. I wish I could save them all but I'm just grateful that I'm alive. I've done a complete 180. I've gotten my life together. I still have a lot to go but if I can do it, of all people, others can as well.

**OL: Are there any individuals who have helped you get to the place you're currently at?**

**AC:** I want to give a shout out to obviously my mother, first and foremost: My mother whom I love with all my heart. She's stuck with me through thick and thin and never turned her back on me. [Thank you to] my friends and family. Without their love, I wouldn't have gotten here.

To all of the families who have dealt with addiction in their family—don't stop loving that person, don't turn your back on them, because the day you do that with tough love may be the last day you see them. The reason I say this is because giving addicts tough love actually makes it worst.

I want to also give a shout out to all of the Drug Court team members at Charlestown District Court; Shannon, Mr. Deluca, and Judge McCormick who is doing a great job with drug court. That's all.