

NEWS

Heroin a 'disease' to fight every day

Kristen Reynaud For the Poughkeepsie Journal

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Editor's note: Kristen Reynaud is a 29-year-old Ulster Park resident who has been struggling with a heroin addiction for several years. She shares her story on how she got started using the drug, in the hopes it might help others facing similar situations.

I remember seeing a few of my friends get hooked on heroin. I saw how much it changed them, how they turned into someone I barely recognized. I remember thinking to myself at the time, "Why would anyone even try heroin?" Little did I know, just a few short years later, I would become full-blown addicted myself.

To this day, answering that question for myself, I can look back and see that it was a gradual descent that led me to try it. I was already on a self-destructive path when heroin first came into my life. I had been drinking heavily, and mixing alcohol with pills and cocaine. Most of my nights were spent hanging out in bars. It was at one of these bars that I met a guy. He seemed really nice, but I had heard that he was involved with drugs. He assured me he was no longer messing with that stuff. I believed him at the time, but looking back, I know better.

For the first few months we were dating, we were mostly drinking buddies. At some point, I found out he was secretly still doing heroin. At first I begged and pleaded with him to stop, to no avail. I would cry as he would sit there and nod out right in front of me, and lie to my face about it. I could see that heroin was quickly destroying our relationship, separating us from each other and causing a huge rift between us.

I remember the day I decided to try it. I was curious, "What is this drug that is coming between us? What is this drug that is so powerful that he can't stop doing it?"

I shot up heroin the first day I ever tried it, and I knew it was love at first hit. My severe depression and anxiety drifted away. All my worries were gone, and all that was left was this warm feeling of comfort and euphoric bliss. All the self-doubt and self-esteem issues I had on the inside since I was young were lifted away. I promised myself that I wouldn't get addicted.

Unlike all the other people who took it and got hooked, I was going to successfully use heroin recreationally.

Of course, now I know looking back, I was never in control. From that very first day I tried it, heroin was in complete control.

What followed was several years chasing that high. It worked for a while. And then my life slowly fell apart. I lost my job due to drug use. My family and friends couldn't trust me and had to distance themselves from me. I was in and out of detox facilities and inpatient rehab centers.

During some of the times I used, I found myself living on the streets or in dirty crack houses — dealing with very shady, unpredictable people and putting myself in dangerous situations. I completely compromised my moral values and principles that I had always prided myself in having. I was often suicidal and many times I hoped that the next fix would be my last. I overdosed several times, which scared me enough to stop for a day or two. That's the thing about heroin. It takes away all the bad stuff in your life. And then slowly, it steals your love. It steals your passion in life, all your hobbies or interests. What heroin leaves you with is a hollow shell of a soul, whose only purpose in life is to find and take the drug.

Arrest a second chance at life

Eventually, I ended up being arrested for committing a crime directly related to my drug use. And it was one of the best things that ever happened in my life.

I served two months in jail and by the time I got out, I felt good physically and mentally. I remembered what it was like to wake up and not be sick. I had my freedom again, from jail and from the chains of addiction. I got back to living life and it was beautiful. I had several years in recovery. I got working again, got into a healthy relationship. I made a lot of progress and it felt good. Every day I was sober was a good day. I got into a program and was working on my issues.

And then I got complacent.

Over time I stopped making my sobriety a top priority. My recent relapse would almost prove to be fatal. My EMT friend who heard the call on his radio told me I “cheated death.” I am lucky to have survived and have no permanent brain damage. This may sound crazy, but I believe everything happens for a reason, even this. It pushed me again to get clean, to seek treatment. This time I am addressing my mental health issues and got on new medication, and I believe this is something I needed to do to give me the best chance possible at staying

sober. I've realized for me it wasn't just about getting high, it was about feeling anything other than the torment I felt on the inside. I was using drugs to self-medicate. I didn't know how to deal with those feelings on my own, and now I'm not afraid to ask for help.

There is no one specific way to cure the disease of addiction. I will be an addict the rest of my life. But I have the choice now to be a recovering addict. To take care of myself mentally and physically, surround myself with good people, keep working on myself, and give myself the best chance possible to fight this disease.

I fight one day at a time, and just for today, I'm winning.

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Heroin forum

What: "Heroin: The scourge, the stories, the answers," a free public forum hosted by Poughkeepsie Journal Media.

When: Sept. 14, 7 to 9 p.m.

Where: Family Partnership Center, 29 N. Hamilton St., Poughkeepsie

Info: The event is free. Registration is requested to ensure that there will be is enough seating. Visit <http://pojonews.co/heroinforum> or call 845-451-4508.