

Hi, my name is Jeff and I'm a recovering drug addict. Out of my stupidity I have paid the cost of suffering through my experiences in hopes of making an impacting impression on your young minds so you do not have to endure the same. It is people who are cracked like me that best shed inner light. May my sharing today act as a light at the end of the tunnel for those of you now that dealing with drug addiction, be it yourself or someone you love. I don't want to tell you what to do but I do want to offer personal perspective.

I started to experiment with drugs my junior year. Not feeling love or belonging at home or from my failed romance with my former girlfriend. I looked for the approval of my friends. In high school everyone wants to be accepted and peer pressure was always rearing its ugly head. Out of curiosity and recognition, I started to experiment with marijuana, alcohol, and eventually hard drugs. Curiosity never killed this cat but it opened up a Pandora's box that I spent 12 years trying to close. At first partying and my drug escapades were thrilling but trust me, it gets old fast. I felt like I needed to be intoxicated to socialize. It gave me a false sense of confidence. Now looking back, I realize these parties are just full of a bunch of misguided, self destructing teens seeking each other's acceptance and headed towards being your ideal burnout. The more I abused drugs, the more diminished their effects became. This is just the principal of chemical tolerance and it applies to even to something like coffee. Drugs are not just physically addicting as in without them I suffered withdrawals but they're also mentally addicting because I used them to run away from my problems and evade reality. Addiction interfered with my ability to work, study, or interact normally with friends or family. There is a negative stigma associated with drug addiction in society and this eventually led me to being isolated in my guilt and shame rather than seeking help. I should have opened up to those who love and support me like family or friends to find a solution. Drug addiction is a wide spread problem and I think bringing real awareness rather than spreading fear propaganda will better combat this terrible epidemic. I think real change begins with the youth. I didn't have to face the problem alone for so many years and nor do you or your loved ones who are suffering from addiction.

So one time I was driving on the 101 freeway on a cocktail of lethal narcotics. I was inebriated out of my mind. I was driving erratically, blacking out at the wheel. I felt like a hamster in a ball rolling down the side of Mt. Everest. I would drive 80 mph pass out and then wake up to myself driving 15 mph. This process would rinse and repeat. I finally snapped out of it and realized it was too dangerous to be on the road. I could have killed myself or someone else. I decided to exit the freeway and quickly found an empty parking lot. I parked the car and passed out in the bed of my truck. I was awakened out of my chemical slumber to someone furiously shaking me. It was several officers hovering over me asking me questions and interrogating me like some dramatic scene out of CSI. They told me that they had received reports of someone driving recklessly that fit my description. One of them had a familiar face. To my surprise, it was my old friend David who I use to play World of Warcraft with many years ago in high school. When he realized it was me, he told the other officers that he knew me personally and dismissed the other cops. I can tell by the look in his eyes, he knew something was wrong. With a face of sheer worry, he told me that he was letting me go and to be careful. Big sigh of relief. I felt once again I dodged another bullet. I thought about what happened when I got home. I added him to my Facebook. To my astonishment, he had just gotten married to this gorgeous woman and bought a lovely house. I look at his life in contrast to mine and wish I had made better decisions. My dream always was to become a

nurse. Although I made it into the nursing program, I dropped halfway through it because of my addiction. While I'm in rehab at age 31, he's built a wonderful life. All those wannabe "cool" kids in high school who were attention starved rebels using drugs and trying to be edgy little unique snowflakes, probably can't even pay their own phone bill right now. David was a real nerd back then and wasn't popular. He didn't even talk to girls. But David always did what was right, stayed ambitious and fixated on a goal, and remained true to himself never caving into peer pressure.

You don't have to cure cancer or change the world. You don't have to attend an Ivy League school or land a high paying job but one thing we can all agree on is that staying true to yourself and living a joyful life doing what you love is a must. Time is the most precious commodity which cannot be bought or replaced, everything else can. Don't crumble to peer pressure and get tossed around in a sea of regret. Ride the waves of time and seize every moment and every opportunity. If life was a bull, grab it by the horns and ride it to the finish line with persistency and style.