

The Path Was Rocky (But Worth It)

Steven Michael Sarber

Sobriety is different for everybody, and so it is hard to put into words what it feels like to have reached such an awesome goal after so many set-backs. But I will do my best. My path to sobriety was rocky, and full of detours. I lost my way often and often stayed lost. I am sober now. Not “dry”, or “on the wagon”, but sober. That is one magical word. Sobriety. While in active addiction, it feels like the most unreachable goal one could ever dream of.

While I was drinking, I never - not once, not for a fleeting second - believed I could ever *be* sober. The most I ever hoped to accomplish was the illusion of sobriety. In truth, I would suffer panic attacks if the night was nearing a close and I hadn't found any money for alcohol. I sold everything I could to buy beer: guitars, my wife's CD collection, whatever wasn't nailed down.

Now, looking back, my degradation saddens me. But it shaped me into who I am. Today I like myself. Today my wife and son love me more than I probably deserve, considering the things I did when I drank. I was hateful, self-centered, rotten. I only thought about, cared about, drink.

At twenty-one, I received my first DWI. My blood-alcohol content was .284. I never fully understood what that meant until I was in rehab. A counselor explained to me that my blood was twenty-eight percent alcohol. Twenty-eight percent! And I was out there driving. It was appalling, but I also wore it as a badge. It was the highest blood alcohol level of anyone I knew.

It took four more DWI's, a near-divorce, and more than fourteen months total prison time before my eyes finally opened. I missed my son's second and fourth birthdays. I missed Christmas and Thanksgiving dinners; I missed a whole lot of important things I took for granted anyway. I still wasn't learning. I cared, but not enough to change.

During what I thought might have been a real good attempt to become a sober man, I suffered pulmonary embolisms: three blood-clots in my right lung. I was twenty-eight at the time. The day I got out of the hospital, I bought a bottle of vodka. I didn't need the excuse; I would have drunk anyway. I wasn't ready yet.

I hid my drinking from my wife for about four months, then I drank openly in front of her. It was like a slap in the face to her, and that was when she began to fall out of love with me. I still hid my drinking from the rest of the family and I felt terrible when they would tell me how proud they were of me.

Finally, I went back to prison after violating my probation. When I shipped out to my state home, it was truly a godsend. I hadn't known my wife was falling out of love; she told me over the phone the day after Christmas. I cried. In front of eighty some-odd hard cases, I sat on the phone in tears. What did I expect? That she would let me walk all over her forever? That getting evicted from three apartments, having our power shut off on more than several occasions, having most of our friends not even want us around, that none of that should matter to her?

I had never cried in front of her and she realized a change was coming over me. I was finished. I couldn't live like this anymore. She agreed to keep an open mind, and to see how things would be when I was released from prison.

I immersed myself in recovery. I spent all possible time in A.A. and N.A. groups. The prison I was serving time in happened to have the most groups of any prison in the state of Missouri. It was exactly where I needed to be at the time.

I gave my addictions over to God, and my cries for help were answered because I was ready to help myself.

Now, my ideal day is a sober one. I spend time with my son. I see my wife when she gets home from work. Then I go to work in the evening. It is not exactly a perfect arrangement, but it works for us. I write when I get home from work, and every night when I go to bed, I thank the Lord for another sober day. Then I ask for the next day. I do it this way because it works for me.

The date of my last drink was September 29, 2005. At the time of this writing, I have been sober for twenty-one months.

I do not think I am unique. I do not think I am special (even if my family would now argue that point). I am loved and blessed. I have a wonderful system of support. I am still recovering, and it is great. I love the time with my son, who is now almost six. He does remember I was away for awhile, and he knows it was jail. Thankfully, he was too young to remember me at my worst. Now, because of the path I have chosen, where doors were once closed, new ones are opening. My family respects me again, and that is a feeling I wouldn't trade for the world.

I am thankful for every day for my life, and for my sobriety.

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Born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri, the author has overcome many great obstacles to become a husband, a father and, perhaps most importantly, a sober man. He still resides in Missouri with his wife Crystal and son, Randy.

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