

Opinion: Why my friend abused opiates

Posted by [Jacqui Atkielski](#) On 07/13/2016

HOLLYWOOD, MD -- Opiate abuse is a well-recognized issue, but addicts are treated like wayward animals instead of real people who struggle with pain.

Natasha* and I sat down over coffee one morning to discuss her relationship with opiate drugs, how simple curiosity turned into something more cynical. She admitted she has an addictive personality on several occasions, but discussed it further during this meeting.

Innocent curiosity led to her first experience, she said.

"Cigarettes and drinking came first. The first time I tried those, there was a pack laying on the coffee table and beer in the kitchen fridge. I saw my parents would enjoy them both and I wanted to know what it felt like," she said.

Her curiosity expanded after getting her hands on a visual encyclopedia about drugs, which described different kinds of drugs and their highs. She studied the book faithfully, but didn't want to experiment until meeting others like her in high school.

"I had an interest in cannabis because I was always told, you know, don't do drugs. Well, why can't I do them? Some of my friends knew people who smoked regularly, and I joined their group when I was 14," she recounted.

Natasha waffled on the idea that cannabis is a 'gateway drug.'

"When I first started using, the only way it was this gateway drug was just a gateway to the fridge," she said with a chuckle. "Looking back, I see that I was open to experience other drugs other than weed because I was around them with my friends. I didn't try harder narcotics until I started partying with older kids."

The summer before college, she fell at a local waterfall and that's when she was first exposed to opiates. The doctors had prescribed pain medication, and it wasn't enough.

"I first used opiate pain pills illegally when I was 18 because of those injuries. The doctor prescribed 800 mg of ibuprofen which didn't relieve the pain. I still remember the little white 5 milligrams of Hydrocodone," Natasha stated.

After trying Percocet, she decided that she could self-medicate herself more effectively than a doctor could.

"I bought what I thought I needed to relieve the pain. It was such a relief to not feel any pain. But I would drink or smoke a blunt while on the pills and I didn't like how the combo made me feel. Doing all of that at once led to other habits," she admitted.

Natasha started working evenings as certified nursing assistant (CNA) to help patients with their daily needs, while balancing a full load of classes in college. She had difficulty prioritizing school, choosing to party instead of study.

"I realized I had a problem when I woke up one morning a few months later and realized that I couldn't make it to my next paycheck. I didn't even have enough money to buy groceries. Instead of being worried about food and other bills, I was more concerned about not having a 30mg Roxycodone to snort so I could get out of bed," she said.

Hopelessness was one of many emotions that she experienced as she realized she was addicted. She described her experience as an endless cycle of wanting and fulfilling the need to not feel pain.

"I was letting the pills be my higher power. I struggled to really believe that this addiction was taking control of my life. I wanted to deny what I had become, deny that I had hurt anybody when I was using. I was doing anything but facing my problems," she said.

Natasha went on a tangent and recounted a conversation with a friend.

"When I was still using, she told me she wouldn't hang out with me anymore because she said I was like, 'the lights were on but nobody was home,' " Natasha remembered.

She started to turn to stealing from her patients when she realized her life had come undone. She was faced with two stark options: death or jail time.

"I turned into someone else when I used. My life was unmanageable. I did a lot of illegal things to obtain the drugs I was using. Which I will regret until the day I die," she said.

After signing herself up for drug rehabilitation in 2014, Natasha has been clean for two years this month with the help of her local Narcotics Anonymous group.

"Both AA and NA's twelve-step programs gave me the tools to use going forward to cope with my daily life and this disease of addiction," she said. Natasha's advice for addicts was simply stated.

"Seek help as soon as possible because you are not alone in this battle," she said, almost at a whisper now. She said remembered being afraid of telling her loved ones that she was struggling with addiction, saying that it is a family disease.

"I don't think I would have struggled for as long as I did if I had just been honest with them. Addicts need unconditional love and support to an extent. Enabling them doesn't help them overcome their struggles. It not only hurts the addict but everyone around them," she stated.

Natasha believes that opiate use can be a good thing, when used as prescribed by a medical professional.

"With my doctor's help, I've been able to get a prescription for the opiates for my back. I've managed to turn my life and get back into school. The drugs no longer control my life," she said.

****Name changed to protect privacy.***

For more information about local chapters of [Narcotics Anonymous](#), check out these links.

I've had my say, now what's yours? Let's share.

Contact Jacqui Atkielski at j.atkielski@thebaynet.com.

Copyright © 2019 thebaynet.com. All rights reserved.