

## A LIFE CHANGING EVENT

I can remember the feelings of loneliness, despair and desperation. No matter how hard I tried, I could no longer justify what I was doing. I wanted out of the prison, freedom from my own mind.

They say that the illness of addiction, is the only illness that tells you, you haven't got it. In most cases, I now know this to be true. For me, after several years of misery, admitting my illness was the easy part – Accepting it was, altogether, a different matter. It now seemed impossible to hide the emptiness inside from the reality of life, besides, what other people thought was no longer as important as what I knew, but somehow, the two still became mixed up from time to time.

My mother, who, despite having moved away because of my out control behaviour, had always stood by me in the hope, that one day, she may again see the little boy she once knew. Not the hollow existence I had become. This was among the things I clung onto in the early stages of my recovery. The distant memory of a person I remember being all those years before, a vague image, in my mind, of a time when I laughed freely amongst friends.

On January 13<sup>th</sup> 2003, I remember waking up from a shallow sleep at around 7am. Despite being awake until just after 4 am the night before, it had been the longest sleep I had had in a while. I felt ill. Alone, shaking, sweating, weak and afraid. Apart from the depression, fear and loneliness were the only other feelings I now recognised. I had packed my bags the previous night, whilst under the influence of Heroin and Valium, because I knew that, in the morning, when the drugs wore off, I would be too weak.

After lying in bed, for what seemed like hours, contemplating the choices ahead of me that day, I decided to get up from under my damp and rather uncomfortable quilt. I was cold and felt too ill to have a bath, so I put on the clothes that looked cleanest from a pile on the floor. I made a promise to myself, that morning, before leaving the flat, one, which I have not broken to this day, a day at a time.

The thing that stands out for me, about my first day in treatment was the kindness of the staff. A simple hug and the offer of a coffee, as a greeting, seemed foreign to me, after years in and out of prison and institutions, but the initial cosy picture, which I had already created, in my own head, of re-hab being an easy ride soon evaporated when reality set in, on the first day, after my first group meeting.

It was then that the voyage of self-discovery began.

Years of drug and alcohol abuse had destroyed my mind, body and soul. Mentally, physically and spiritually I was a mess. I just wanted to feel like other people looked. In one group session, a counsellor told me I was angry. I dismissed this, but resented her remark. She knew I angry, even, when I didn't. That's how it worked. People who had been there, seen it, done it and who had the whole wardrobe, telling me how it is. Nothing was a secret anymore. Their Honesty seemed harsh and painful, but their teachings were true. The more honest they had been, the more honest, open minded and willing I became.

I learned many lessons about myself and other people during my time in treatment. More than I had ever learned through my own life experiences. The most painful

times were, having to admit, face and deal with things from our pasts. It was only by doing this that we stood any chance of moving on. I saw more tears shed, in 19 weeks, than I had done in the previous 15 years, some of joy, but most stemmed from guilt or shame.

For nearly half a year I listened to other addicts and alcoholics share their experiences comforted by the knowledge that I was no longer alone. With each day, there came a new challenge, and with new every challenge, a new scenario to deal with.

When the obsession from the drugs lifted slightly, the real work began. Life on life's terms. When you're away from real society for so long it is very hard to re-adjust. I needed a goal, some kind of ambition to aim for, a source of focus.

From an early age I developed a passion for the sea and the life it supports. Whenever things became too much or too hard to deal with in treatment, and I felt like running away, I hung onto the thought that, one day, my dream of studying Marine Biology would, perhaps, become reality. On my last day in re-hab a wise friend left me with this thought. She whispered to me. "You can only fly as hi as the dreams you dare to live". That is the reason why you are reading this now. It was all, once, part of a dream, and part of that dream now lies in your hands.