After the Drinks and Drugs, I Found a New Path

June 23rd, 2014, when I found my strength in my weakness. After the drinks and the drugs, I found a new path in sobriety.

August 15, 2018 By JMV

I'm writing this on a recent Tuesday morning in Provincetown, Massachusetts. P-town, as it's nicknamed, is a small, summer vacation spot on the very tip of Cape Cod where the gays get away. There's magic in the air and the smell of salt water in the light breeze as I sit at a table for breakfast listening to "Here Comes the Sun" by the Beatles. As I wait for my steak and eggs to arrive, I begin to think about my life and where it was and where it is now.

The bartender is mixing morning cocktails for the parents at the table in front of me as the kids drink their orange juice. The smell of coffee and bacon fills the air. I see a server walk by with a Bloody Mary and I'm reminded of a time when he would have set that in front of me. Then I'd have another and move onto something much stronger, but all that stopped on June 23rd, 2014, when I found my strength in my weakness.

Monday, June 23rd, 2014 — My friend, we shall call him Lenny, that I had worked with at Splash was seated on my right side. I was trying to listen to what was being said around the room. I was holding my breath and sweating uncontrollably through my blue, Rökk Vodka cutoff tee, hoping I'd go unnoticed. Lenny would inhale deeply and exhale as if he were letting me know to breathe. There were two minutes left and he nudged me. My hand shot up and I said, "Hi, my name is Richard..." and I knew I had found my people.

I felt relieved. This was the first time I had been this honest with myself or anyone else for years. I thought I had this big secret. The truth was that everyone knew I had a substance abuse problem and that I drank way too much, but I was the last to figure it out.

Each word brought on more tears as I shared to a room full of people. I told them how I ended up there. Two minutes wasn't enough to express what I was feeling because I wasn't even sure what I was going through. I was all over the place. When I was finished, we stood and held hands, and I felt more connected to another person than I had in years. I felt safe.

We poured out onto the sidewalk into the sunlight and headed to get some iced coffee at a local West Village café. The coffee was strong and it was good, and it was my savior as I felt alive but so tired from the strain I had put myself through. We strolled for a second until Lenny sat me down on

a corner of Equinox Greenwich Ave, a four-story health and fitness club wrapped with glass windows. I felt inspired, and speaking to him made me feel good. How could I be relating with someone so much? He was saying what I was feeling. I wanted more of this connection.

We parted ways, and I felt fantastic. I ran some errands and showed up to work on time and was ready. I was usually running late to my shift and got a smack on the wrist (not literally), but this time they cracked jokes of approval. Before preshift started, my friend Kristen listened as I shared about the event of the weekend, getting bumped from Broadway Bares and wanting to make a change and try this sobriety thing. She gave me much-needed encouragement, and then I smelled the warmth of red wine. Generally, before our shifts, we taste and discuss the evening's featured wine Kristen saw my eyes widen and she pulled my glass closer to her. When it was my turn to share about that night's selection, she distracted everyone by clearing her throat and telling us all more about the this particular bottle. No one noticed I wasn't drinking. Relief fell over me and I exhaled the breath I was holding in.

Later that week, I went to see my doctor for a physical. As he examined me and ran through his list of questions, I didn't feel like I was being interrogated. This was the first time in a long time I hadn't felt defensive. I still smoked cigarettes, which he just shrugged his shoulders to, but he was more than happy to hear I was no longer using drugs or drinking. He suggested that maybe I could show up on time for my appointments now if I made it to begin with. I wanted to make it a point of being a good patient and being accountable. He told me about a new HIV medication that might work well for me if I wanted to switch, and I listened. For the first time, I started to care about my health.

He handed me the new script and I stepped out onto Irving Place and walked west across Nineteenth Street to get it filled. It was humid, and the clouds covered the sky. I could smell the rain. I looked up and it slowly began to bless the path that I was walking, and I opened my umbrella with a smile and reassurance. The beginning of sobriety felt pretty damn good.

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