

You Are Worth It

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My name is TC. I am a native of California, born in Oakland and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area. My problems that arose as a result of my father's bipolar disorder and substance use issues led to my parents' divorce when I was two years old.

A few years later, my mom remarried a man who was abusive, violent, and an alcoholic. There was no peace when he was drunk and angry, and he eventually raped one of my sisters. I was terrified of him. It wasn't until he finally left our home and our lives that I felt I was able to breathe.

Looking back, these experiences instilled in me a belief that I had no value. I had accepted and believed that I was not as good as others—after all, my father was completely unknown to me and the stepfather I did know was a mean and scary guy, and he was long-gone anyway.

To compensate for my lack of self-acceptance, and assuming that I was unacceptable to others, I became a bit of a loner. Being alone was safe and isolation became a friend and a comfort. When I was in school, I would get in fights with other kids and I soon became a discipline problem for my mother.

When I was around 11 years old, I began to smoke pot, sniff gas, drink, and skip school. My mom was a single working mother with four young children, so she sought help through Big Brothers of America. I was so excited when I first met my Big Brother. Here was a real man taking an interest in me; I was in heaven.

It didn't take long before he started giving me marijuana and LSD. We would get stoned and watch porn together. I began spending weekends at his house and that's when he started molesting me. There were parties in his home where men and women came to use drugs and we would all have sex.

When I was in junior high, he persuaded my mom to allow me to move in with him. But I continued to get into trouble at my new school. On top of my other issues, I now had guilt and shame from the continued sexual abuse. I finally left my Big Brother's home and moved back in with my mom. I quit school and started hanging out with a group of street kids with whom I finally felt accepted.

We would steal things—cars mostly. And we burglarized vehicles, homes, and businesses. The proceeds funded our drug and alcohol habit. I also stole things from my mother. I sold her tiny black and white TV set for a \$25 bag of heroin. I pawned the family silver for a bag of meth.

By the time I was 14, I was using needles to inject myself with heroin, coke, and meth. Somewhere during that time, I contracted Hep C. By the age of 17, I had made 23 trips to the juvenile detention facility. I escaped from lockup three times and again from a treatment center in San Francisco.

The last time I ran, I called my dad, whom I had not seen since I was two. He bought me a

plane ticket to Texas. There, I met my dad, my stepmom, and half-brother and sister. I had a fresh start, and I began my working career. I still used drugs and drank, but I always held down a job.

One night, I got really stoned on LSD and alcohol and almost lost it—my mind that is. I was in bad shape for several days. It was then that my brother, George, walked me downtown to Memorial Baptist Church there in Baytown and Pastor Edward Theile introduced me to my Higher Power, Jesus Christ, and helped start me on the path to recovery. I can still remember that day, and the prayer we prayed. That day I found hope. That day everything changed.

Fast forward to 1994. I married my third wife. The first one left me, the second one I lost to a fatal auto accident. When my work brought us to California, I did something I thought I would never do—I began using pain pills to fight my lower back pain.

I just woke up one day to the realization that I had a 15 pill-per-day Norco habit. I had been clean for 14 years; how could this happen? I was sober but I'd never worked on myself; I never discovered the *why* of my addictions. I was clean but not in recovery.

After using the pain pills for 15 months, nearly driving Susan away, and totally screwing up on my job, I was shaken. I was a successful welder at the top of my game, and it was all about to dissolve, all about to melt away like an ice cube on the pavement on a hot summer's day. For me, this was my rock bottom.

I called my pastor and told him that I was addicted to pain pills and my life was quickly spinning out of control. With support from him and a fellow congregation member, I called my doctor and told him I was not coming in for any refills and that I would no longer be seeing him. Those little pills that gave me so much energy and confidence turned on me and brought me to my knees—and that's right where I needed to be. I had my last pain pill on June 30, 2005.

Three years later, in 2008, I began a recovery program called Celebrate Recovery. Through my recovery, I've learned that abandonment was at the root of my issues. False belief systems are often validated by our circumstances and feelings. They are not truth, but when we believe lies, they become our truth. There is only so much real estate in a human heart, and if that real estate is grown over with lies, there is no room to plant and cultivate truth.

I no longer suffer from mistaken identity. I know who I am because I know who my higher power, God my Father, says I am. Today I am free of Hep C. I hold a great job and have been married to and in love with my wife Susan for more than 24 years.

I commend you for the courage you have shown just by coming to our site and reading my story. You are exactly where you need to be. When you're ready, take the next step and reach out for support. Call one of us—we've been there. It's an investment in your life. Whether you believe it or not, you are worth it.