

JACKSON COUNTY METH TASK FORCE

5 YEAR EVALUATION

METH STORIES

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OFF TO COLLEGE – KELLY’S STORY

Boredom. If you ask Kelly what led her to drugs she’ll tell you it was boredom. A mother of three, a wife and a homemaker, plus holding down a job outside the home, Kelly says that she was looking for excitement. It all started 19 years ago.



“I went with a friend to the house of one of her friends and I used with him. I fell in love with meth instantly,” recalls Kelly. “It changed my perception of everything. I was just going to have a boring life and then meth transformed everything into exciting.”

With meth, Kelly could physically do more. It improved her self-esteem and gave her energy. It even helped her to lose weight.

“Meth made me happy. I could accomplish anything I wanted,” she says. “And the feeling was enough. I even performed better at my job. For awhile, anyway.”

While boredom might have been the itch, Kelly’s story goes back farther than boredom. She was born in California to alcoholic parents who didn’t have much. Everyone in the family had a problem with alcohol and at the hands of drinking parents she suffered emotional and physical abuse. Her stepfather also abused her mother, leaving Kelly feeling helpless.

“I felt lost and I felt I couldn’t help my mom. She stayed and it was very hard,” she says. “I started drinking on a regular basis by age 16. It made me not feel, and it made me feel better about me.”

Then she got married, had three children, and by age 27 began experimenting with illegal drugs. Marijuana didn’t do anything for her but she knew a lot of people on meth. Her sister was a heavy user and she knew other people who enjoyed it.

“I had consciously said before that I would not do meth. My sister’s life was so chaotic and completely out of control. She lived in squalor in a trailer,” says Kelly. “She looked like hell and had been such a beautiful woman.”

Alcohol had always been Kelly’s drug of choice. But when she began having marital problems, all bets were off. She liked what she found in meth and used on and off until her first arrest. Then came a two month run with heroin that stopped when her husband checked her into Serenity Lane for 14 days. It was the start of a very bad period.

“I found out that one of my daughters had been molested. I believed that if I had not been using heroin, I would have been able to see what was happening to this 9 year old,” says Kelly. “I found the man who had done this to her and I assaulted him.”

That landed her in prison. Through it all, Kelly said her husband, who never used illegal drugs, was wonderful. He always stood beside her and offered support. But by the time she left prison her marriage was over.

“Meth destroyed everything. Our house got raided in Grants Pass in 2001 and we lost the home we’d lived in for 12 years,” says Kelly. “We lost our possessions and even our pet. I lived a double life to a great degree for at least 10 years. And my husband didn’t know anything. He never used and I was good at hiding my addiction.”

Devastated and unable to cope, Kelly absconded from probation and headed to Virginia with a man she’d known since high school. Trouble followed her east and after another scrape with the law she entered an 18-month rehabilitation program. Treatment helped her back on her feet and, for a time, life was looking better. She stayed clean for 3 ½ years, then slipped back with her old nemesis alcohol. Missing home and her family, she returned to Oregon in 2007, only to continue drinking and enter another abusive relationship.

Finally, in November 2008, her children, by then all in their 20s, decided to take over. After she was hospitalized they picked her up and admitted her into Addictions Recovery Center (ARC).

“My children found this program for me. They wanted me clean. I wanted to be clean but I was homeless and had left an extremely abusive relationship,” says Kelly. “I was beaten down and lost. I owe them my life today.”

The work has been hard but Kelly is facing her demons. The emotions, the abuse of her childhood, the shame and guilt that has accumulated over the years, have been part of her work in treatment.

“The first weeks were really, really hard. I knew this might be my last chance. I felt isolated. But the ARC and the Meth Project have changed my life,” she says. “They made me realize I’m not morally broken, that I have a disease. I have a disease and I have to treat it or it will kill me. “

A two-day relapse with alcohol made this crystal clear for Kelly. Her early success in the program made her complacent and uncomfortable. She had a job she liked and was meeting her goals. It was going so well, in fact, that she thought she might be able to drink socially again. “One drink and I knew that was never going to happen. I’m now clean and 100 percent dedicated to doing everything I can to stay sober. I know it will never be okay to drink again.”

Instead of living her life looking back, Kelly is firmly focused on the present and her hopes for the future. “I’m looking forward to starting college in January and to having a place of my own, a home where I can have my children and grandchildren for a visit. I am so grateful. The road has been rough but I have a blessed life today. I don’t ever want to go back, ever again.”

SENSE OF SELF -- KRISTIE

“I was a great kid growing up. After high school, I was just walking down the street and ran into someone who wanted to have a drink,” says Kristie, 26. “He then asked if I wanted to do a line of meth. I told him he was crazy, but after a few drinks I then said okay. Instantly it felt like everything was going to be all right.”



In that moment, Kristie’s life took off on a wild ride. For seven years, this self-described ‘good girl’ soared to new highs and then fell so low that she barely recognized herself.

“It gave me a lot of energy; it made me feel life was good. I could do anything, say anything,” says Kristie.

“Then there was the shame aspect of it. I lied to my family about where I was and what I was doing. And I was doing it around my daughter.”

By the time Kristie was fully into her addiction she had an 18-month-old daughter. With no job and barely a tie to her once close family, she was spiraling downward.

“I would be up all night for 4 to 6 days at a time, and then things wouldn’t make sense to me anymore,” she recalls. “I was hallucinating and confused. Then when I came down I felt awful.”

Extreme sadness took over where the drug left off. Her body ached, she couldn’t sleep, and was angry because she didn’t have more drugs. It was a vicious cycle.

At her worst, Kristie was popping meth two to three times a day. She lied, stole, and neglected her baby. “I didn’t know what was happening with her. People would tell me she didn’t have toys and when she would stay with her dad she’d have nightmares.”

Her path to recovery took much longer than her tumble into addiction. Addiction seemed to come out of the blue, sucking her in the first time. Treatment, on the other hand, took several attempts and extraordinary effort.

“I could see my life deteriorating and eventually I sought help. I was in and out of treatment and on my first binge I got pregnant again. I tried to clean up, then ran away, and then a domestic violence incident got the Department of Human Services involved.”

That's when she admitted to law enforcement that she had a drug problem. Her older daughter went to live with her father and the baby went with her to OnTrack's Mom's Program.

For over five months she learned about addiction and how to care for herself and her children. When she left the program, however, it didn't take long for her to begin drinking again and seeing her youngest child's father. "That was a no no." She relinquished her rights to her second child and continued to spiral downward.

"My whole mentality was 'screw it.'" She started using cocaine, meth, and whatever was available. After a stint at Genesis, she went home and dove back into her addiction.

For another two years Kristie, again, lived life on drugs. The spiral continued. The more she did, the less effective the drugs became, spurring other physically destructive behavior. She was abusive to friends, began cutting herself, and tried to overdose. Then came three hospitalizations, jail time for driving while under the influence, and yet another pregnancy.

"I found out I was pregnant again when I went to jail. That was January 2008. I spent most of the time at the work center and it gave me time to clear my head. I knew I was going to die if I didn't do something. I was in like a vortex of misery. You don't think it can get worse and then it does."

Then someone visited her in jail and told her about inpatient treatment at the ARC (Addictions Recovery Center) and their transition house. It was exactly what she wanted.

Kristie went from jail to outpatient treatment at the ARC, followed by inpatient care. Ready for the guidance and support, she applied herself, stuck with the program, and was invited to join the Meth Project's yearlong program. Finally, the downward spiral had ended.

The Meth Project provided accountability and time. Time to consistently stay clean and to work with a team of people dedicated to helping Kristie reinvent her life.

"As I worked thru that program I discovered myself. I found out what I wanted to be, and that was clean and sober," she says. "I wanted to be a productive member of society, to be a mom, to have a relationship with my grandma, to have a job. I wanted my life back. I wanted to be okay in my skin."

Today, Kristie still celebrates being clean since January 2008. And her dreams are coming true. She is raising her youngest child and calls each day a blessing with her. She says her relationship with her grandmother is amazing and she is running her own business, a thrift store in a small southern Oregon town.

“I feel good today. I’m confident. Now the substitute for the drug is the real bond and connection I have with friends and family, and a sense of self,” she says. “And the future is taking life one day at a time. I plan to save money, set up a college account for my kids, and buy a house with a white picket fence. And a dog and chicken coop.”

CAN DO – MARISA

“I think I was saved by some miracle.” These are the words of a 26-year-old mother of three. These are the words of a woman who works a fulltime job. These are the words of a recovering meth user who came within a hair’s breath of losing it all.

“Some people never get it, but the system got my attention when I was told my children were going to be put up for adoption,” says Marisa. She was stunned.

It was a long time in coming. Marisa used drugs during her first two pregnancies and admits she was not a good mother in any sense of the word. But her story really begins in her own childhood. She didn’t get an easy start.

“I didn’t see my biological mother very often but I think I was 12 years old when she gave me my first line of meth,” says Marisa. “I remember liking the feeling. I loved it. It’s so hard to explain, but I felt like I didn’t have problems any longer.”

For someone only 12 years old, she had problems that would burden any adult. Her dad was in prison. She floated between living with different cousins and being a ward of the State. At 15 she graduated from what she calls ‘an experiment,’ her first experience with meth,’ to heavy usage.

She doesn’t remember much from age 16 to 19. She ran away, first up to Washington State to be with her biological mom, and then she doesn’t recall where she went. What she does remember is getting pregnant at 18.

“I used during the whole pregnancy. I had a stroke. My teeth were halfway out of my mouth, cracked and damaged,” she recalls. “My family said they didn’t know me.”

Over the next two years, Marisa rollercoasted. She would get clean, then suffer a setback and start using again. Her defining moment came when she was pregnant with her second child and arrested for absconding from drug court. They found her hiding in a closet. The date: April 15, 2005.

“Drug court in Salem sent me to Medford to be in OnTrack’s Mom’s Program. The counselor was so strict and I knew she was the counselor for me,” says Marisa. “The program made me dig deep.”

So deep that Marisa describes one assignment as nearly killing her. “I had to write a letter of apology to my child and read it out loud in therapy. I was just sobbing. I couldn’t even get through it I was crying so hard.”

Marisa carries that memory with her every day of her life. She has returned to Salem and is raising her children with all the humility and strength of a survivor who nearly lost everything.

“I don’t even have to think about maintaining recovery. It gets easier. My biggest milestone was my one year mark. That was huge. Then two years came, then three years and now I’m here and on October 15th, it was 4 ½ years,” says Marisa. “This accomplishment is huge. I can’t even put it into words.

The proof is in her daily life. Her third baby was her first child born clean and sober. And today the house of this family of five is abuzz with the normal sounds of life. They read books together, Marisa helps with homework, and Friday is family movie night.

Marisa also credits the Meth Project’s one year program and Family Court with helping her to stay on her path and supporting her through the difficult times.

“In the Meth program we talked about everything that went on during the week. That was really helpful. We processed what went on, the choices that we made and how they affected us.”

She still talks to her caseworkers at Drug Court and even visited them while on vacation.

“I am definitely happy today. I have all my children, I’m in a good relationship, and I have a successful job. Did I think I could do this? Honestly, no. That changed after my first year. I started thinking, I can do this. I can really do this. And I have.”

CALM – NANCY



“The first experience I had with speed was when I was 16 and a friend’s mother wanted us to wallpaper a kitchen late one day,” recalls Nancy. “She gave us a little prescription diet pill and it was like magic. We were up all night.”

Nancy found success on many fronts in high school. A cheerleader with a great personality, her popularity soared and life was good. But

her world changed at 18 when she became pregnant in her senior year. She felt judged and then made some bad choices as she tried to navigate this difficult time.

As a young mom, Nancy was resourceful. She got a job, figured out how to take care of a baby, and drew on what she knew. Her parents were older. She was the youngest child, born late in life to goodhearted people who liked to have fun. That included alcohol. As Nancy tried to balance her responsibilities, which soon included two young children and a husband, she remembered how that little diet pill made anything possible. It turned out to be easy to get a prescription from her doctor and with it she suddenly had plenty of energy to care for her family, work fulltime, and clean the house at the end of a long day.

“Soon I was taking diet pills during the day and sleeping pills at night,” says Nancy. “I loved it. I felt like I could conquer the world and take care of everything. You had better get out of my way because I was on a mission.”

That was in the ‘60s and ‘70s. A prescription for Desoxyn was a strong dose of methamphetamine hydrochloride, the same drug that addicts today call meth. Nancy was hooked and life was again good. That’s what Nancy remembers. She was productive and full of energy. Her children, however, remember a different reality. She was oblivious to the fact that they were suffering through her ups and downs.

“It made me a busy person. My daughter remembers me as angry and mean. I was pretty impatient due to the chemicals in body,” recalls Nancy. “I was on diet pills for 15 years and I used them every day. Then I took sleeping pills at night so that I could sleep. I was always chasing the drugs. And that made me a different person.”

The doctors made it easy. She went to different physicians and none of them tracked her use. Then came the mid ‘80s. Diet pills became harder to get and the dose was weaker.

To satisfy her habit she had to try something new. Next she turned to cocaine. She couldn't tolerate it every day but on weekends it was her drug of choice. After a string of dysfunctional relationships and seven years of cocaine, Nancy graduated to pure meth.

"I knew it was a same drug as the diet pills and I loved it. I always used to say it was the best thing about life. It was my new best friend. It made me feel complete. I never wanted to be without it."

But as the years went by, Nancy became isolated. She rarely saw her children and grandchildren and spent Thanksgiving alone. That's when it hit her. Her son and daughter-in-law, both in recovery, couldn't visit because she was still using.

"On the phone they said how much they missed me and wished that I would get into recovery," she says. "Two weeks later I was ready. I didn't know anything about treatment programs and had no idea what to expect. It was frightening."

At 57 she also didn't know if treatment could work at her age. Sad to give up drugs, feeling shut down and overwhelmed, she pushed herself forward and entered Addictions Recovery Center (ARC). It was a leap of faith and hope.

"At first every hour was a struggle. The worst part was the first ten days because I was literally losing my oldest and best friend. I had to accept that it was over and begin letting go of the past," says Nancy. "What I realized was that I didn't have to live like that anymore."

As she learned about the disease of addiction and brain chemistry she began to understand how the drug physically, mentally and emotionally affected her. She learned the memory in her brain was all about using meth and to be successful in her recovery she had to put new things in place of using.

"All I needed were some tools to change everything. And slowly but surely I see that this is working," she says. "I stayed here at the ARC and I saved my life."

Each day that she met the challenge added another day of clarity. She made it through 30 days at the ARC and was afraid to leave the supportive environment. When she learned about the one year Meth Project, she knew this was exactly what she needed.

"The meth project gave me back my life. It gave me peace and freedom and has changed my motives. I actually care about myself and my family and the people in my program. It's changed everything," says Nancy. "It's given me a mentor and she works at United Way. Because of that I have learned about being of service and giving back. It's an awesome experience and an inspiration to me. Allowing me to be a part of that has opened my eyes."

Nancy says the key to staying clean is education and a good support system. Twice she has thought about returning to meth. The first time was when she learned she had

hepatitis C. “I thought what’s the point. Then through reading I realized that it would kill me if I went back out and used again. The second time was when my roommate relapsed. If she could do it, I could too. But she did the right things and I knew I didn’t want to go back to that again.”

Today, Nancy is receiving treatment for hepatitis C and is taking recovery one day at a time. Her daughter and son are very supportive and she’s enjoying new relationships with them and her grandchild.

“I’m now calmer and hopeful. I have peace in my life today. I can sit with myself and just be in the moment,” she says. “There is more joy in my life and I’m able to feel joy. Before I was always chasing something. I didn’t know what joyful was. I can honestly say the future looks bright.”

REAL PARENT -- JOHN

“The police knocked on my door and said my wife was afraid to come home,” says John, a recovering addict. “My wife and I were both coming off of meth. Day three always brought out the worst behavior. We got into an argument and she took off.”



When law enforcement officers saw the condition of John’s house they called the Department of Human Services (DHS). They arrested John on a warrant from another county and put their two young children in foster care with relatives. It was the moment John had been waiting for.

“I had been praying for a long time for a higher power to help me get off drugs. I had done it before but after a divorce I went back to using,” he says. “My wife and I kept saying we’re not going use again, but we’re addicts. This time, however, we had both hit bottom.”

The confrontation was a long time in coming. John grew up in California. One of nine children of two alcoholic parents, he discovered at age ten that marijuana dulled the pain of his dysfunctional family. Marijuana led to abusing prescription medication and by his early 20’s he had tried nearly every illegal drug on the market.

“The nightmare of drugs for me was that it robbed me of everything I now hold dear. My morals, my ability to love, to see things clearly, to live life on life’s terms,” says John. “I did things I would never do when I’m clean. It denied me of the ability to think clearly and distinguish between right and wrong.”

But this was a real turning point. With four grown children and two young ones, John was ready to step up to the plate. DHS required his wife to enter a treatment program but he was left to his own decisions. After a urine analysis test, he voluntarily entered outpatient treatment.

“The police came to my house on December 27, 2005. That same week my wife and I both went to a twelve-step meeting and I knew I was home,” recalls John. “I was getting evicted from my house, my kids were in foster care, and I was as low as I could possibly get. I beat myself up for two days and then I got into action.”

He worked with the courts to develop a plan to get custody of his children, he started a new job, attended outpatient treatment, took domestic violence classes, and attended twelve-step meetings every day.

The rules were strict. Supervised weekly visits with his children lasted just one hour for six months. As John worked through the programs and followed the court's orders, he rapidly proved his commitment to recovery and his family.

“This never would have happened without Community Family Court and the Meth Project,” he says. “The Court helped me to find the services I needed and the Meth Project helped me to stay on course. None of this would have happened without these programs holding me afterwards and helping me to learn how to change.”

He and his wife were invited to join the Meth Project by their counselor at OnTrack. The yearlong commitment gave him the accountability he needed to continue on his path. “The support was a real positive influence for us. We worked through packets, talked to others about staying clean, and we shared how we got through the tough times.”

John makes no excuses for his addiction, but says his mother was an active alcoholic and took her frustrations out on him. Like his mom, John says he was a different person on drugs than off. “I wasn't a nice person. I didn't like people and people didn't like me. I was an isolator. Now that I'm clean, I reach out to the newcomers in the program.”

Each day starts the same way for John, with the same affirmation in the mirror and a morning meditation. And he spends his time working with others in recovery. He sponsors people who are in DHS and going through Family Court. Once a person who liked to be alone, today he says he gets more out of helping people than he can put into words.

“I try my hardest every day. Seeing someone stay clean for another day is a miracle. We do it one day at a time,” he says. “I feel real strong, but I also know that if I don't continue to act like a newcomer, the addiction will take over again. My main message to the young kids I work with is we've never seen a person who 'lives' the program ever relapse.”

Today his children are very loving and do well in school. He says they, too, know the horrors of addiction and the joys of recovery.

“Life today is better than I could have imagined it when I was loaded. My worst day clean is better than best day loaded. I hate to say that the police coming to my house and getting arrested was a blessing, but it totally changed our lives. Now my children have real parents on a daily basis.”