

Kyle's Story

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By Kyle

My name is Kyle. I grew up in a middle class family, in a middle class neighborhood and I went to a middle class school. I had two parents in the home yet conspicuously absent from my life. Their absence however, was my choice, not theirs. I wouldn't allow them to get to know their son. My Mom, was pregnant at nineteen, married at twenty, and divorced at twenty one. She moved us to California and met this guy, when I was two and they were married when I turned five. This man adopted me as his legal son and gave me his name. This man fathered two more children with my mom, one boy and one girl, my half brother and half sister. I grew up being selfish and manipulative, believing that my two siblings were loved more than I, and it showed in my attitude towards them and my parents.

I was suspended from school on numerous occasions and almost expelled once. I spent time in juvenile hall and a Boy's ranch called Verdemont, located in the hills of Glen Helen, nestled in the mountains of San Bernardino County. I also spent time in a place called Boy's Republic. Another wayward home for juvenile delinquents, located in Chino, CA. My parents had said I was incorrigible, that they didn't want me anymore and that I could no longer live at the house with them and my half brother and sister. It was to be almost one full year before I would be allowed to return home.

When I finally was allowed to return, I wouldn't be staying very long. One night, I did something or should I say, I got caught doing something by my dad that was simply, the last straw for him. He beat my ass so bad, I had trouble walking. But walk I did, from home town to a friend's house. Needless to say I wasn't allowed back home after that so I left to live on my own. I had no idea where I would go or what I would do, but that didn't matter. All that did matter was that I was now free to be as selfish and as carefree as I wanted to be, with not a care in the world for anything or, anyone.

Of course this ding of attitude can only take the person with it to certain places, like jails, institutions or death. I started drinking and using drugs and of course

everything that goes with it. Stealing, lying, cheating, self-abuse, abuse of others, manipulation, (on a grander scale). I would promise those that loved me that I would stop doing hurtful things to myself and to them, but it was a lie, of course. I conned people into trusting me and then I hurt them in the most despicable and shameful ways. I stole from my parents, I stole from churches, I would steal from anyone and then help them look for the missing items. I did things, other things that I won't mention here, but rest assured these things were things that completely depleted my self-worth and my self-esteem. I did things that the most imaginative of imaginations could never think up, things that one actually had to witness to believe. Then of course, I started going to jail and from there, prison.

My family completely disowned me and soon after, they stopped accepting my calls altogether. It got to the point where I didn't even bother calling anymore. The next twenty-two years would be spent in isolation, away from anything or anyone that could possibly be deemed acceptable or conducive to an exuberant life. I would get high, then steal to keep getting high, then go to jail for stealing. I would get clean in jail, promise those that I loved that I was finished with the drugs and the criminal lifestyle and they would believe me. Again, they would trust me. Again, it was a lie. This would go on until I would have over thirty-six felony convictions attached to the good name my Father was kind enough to give me. It would continue through thirteen separate trips, in and out of San Quentin State Prison, nine of those being new commitments, the other four, parole violations. I would walk those tiers and those yards, telling the same lies, not just to the same people, but to myself as well. I would think about normal people and what they did at Christmas. I would think about normal relationships and how nice it must be to have someone to cuddle with that would love me for me, no matter what! I would dream of what life would ever be like if, I were responsible enough, to ever own a brand new car? Or what kind of life would I have if, ever I were trustworthy enough to have a credit card with my name on it? I would sit up in my cell and dream of a life like normal people lived, a life where my parents were actually proud of me, what kind of life would I have if, I ever actually got to know my parents? I would walk those prison yards, fantasizing, about life filled with the love and trust of others, the respect and love of family, the friendship of good and caring people, a wife, perhaps even, someday, children of my own? I would dream of all these things and then, the yard would recall or, my cell door would slam shut and I would be snatched back to reality and forced to deal with, what I believed at the time, to be the irrefutable truth; that I was a dope fiend, a liar, a thief, a con-artist, a manipulator, a cheat, a convict, a homeless vagabond with no family that could possibly ever love him. I was the epitome of nothing. I was a waste of flesh

and blood. Looking back now, I can see, that is what it means to become, “institutionalized.” When the surroundings become the absolute truth, when I began to convince myself that prison was the only place I would ever truly call, home. I gave up hope in ever attaining anything normal. I would lye up on my bunk, in my cell, and know, with absolute certainty, that the dreams that would occupy my waking hours would always be just that, dreams. I would always be an orphan, ostracized by society, forced my own destructive behavior, to live out my days locked away in isolation, always moving from one institution to another. I would forever be unloved and unwanted, I would never change, I could not!

To make a long story, short, I went through a drug program. A magical place that I am convinced, is the only place I could have possibly gone to, to get the help that I required. A place called Diablo Valley Ranch. Diablo Valley Ranch is a quiet, serene, place that sits majestically at the bottom of (ironically enough) Devil’s Mountain or, Mt. Diablo, as it is named. It was at Diablo Valley Ranch, that something magical happened for me. I had long since given up on even the slightest hint that there might could possibly be, a truly living, awe inspiring, life altering, God. A true and spiritual force, greater than myself. That if given the opportunity, would take the wreckage I had created, and transform it into what my life has become. I was convinced that my past was to be my truth, my reality, and that if God truly did exist, He did not have any love for the like of me. Events soon began to transpire that would restore my faith in spirituality. With each and every suggestion made to me, that I followed, I would take one more step towards sanity and recovery. I came to believe in a power, greater than myself, as I understood Him, and OH MY GOD, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE I ACTUALLY CAME TO UNDERSTAND HIM!!! This was just the beginning of my spiritual awakening however, because it wasn’t just what I was learning from these people, it was the other people I was meeting through these people. W was introduced to a group that calls themselves B.A.S.N. A bunch of ex-cons, doing the right thing, that have like me, had a spiritual awakening as a result of following the suggestions that were being suggested to me. Ex-cons off parole, with families, with boats, with credit cards, that got to stay home for Christmas with their families and loved ones. Ex-cons that did not have to answer to anyone except, THEIR higher power. Ex-cons that had broken the cycle of recidivism and addiction. I got to see convict, just like me who use to lye up in their bunks, just like me, dreaming the same dreams I use to dram, actually living those dreams. I heard stories of how their life had changed and how their families had been restored. I saw, with my own eyes, that these convicts, some of whom I had known and walked the yards of numerous prisons with, truly were ex-convicts. I

saw miracles in the life of every single person I met and I began to believe, perhaps maybe, I could change. Perhaps maybe, I could be normal.

I began to follow the suggestions more fervently than ever. I got involved and I stayed involved. I went to meetings and I listened when I should and shared when I could. I dealt with life on life's terms and no matter what happened in my day in, day out routine, I DID NOT PICK UP!!! I continued to do the steps people suggested I do and I continued to show up, suit up, and shut up and my life CHANGED!!

Today, I have over ten credit cards with my own name on each and every one of them. I have rebuilt my credit score by paying off debts that were owed by me and now, I can buy anything I want with a signature. My Parents are back in my life in fact, I go to see them as an invited guest at Christmas and my Mom does not have to hide her purse. I have bought and paid for not one but three, brand new cars and I have a checking account that never has insufficient funds. I am currently enrolled in college where I will start my fifth quarter with a G.P.A, of 4.0. I have been asked to be a mentor at this college to help incoming students with whatever it is they require. I speak at juvenile hall to those incarcerated there about my past and how they can change their future. I speak in classrooms, occupied by student who are headed to juvenile hall if they don't change their ways. I am engaged to be married to the most beautiful, intelligent and precious woman, I have ever met and she has given me a son to love and call my own. I have plans to go on to law school and become an attorney using where I've been and what I've done, to better help me in serving the interests of those that should ever need my services. I am on a spiritual path to recovery that has changed my truth from desolation and annihilation to rejuvenation and salvation. I am building relationships with my brother and sister, my parents, and today I have true friends that love me for me because truth be told, I am not a bad guy. I know what it is to love myself and live with principles. I know what it is to be a contributing member of a community and to feel love and respect from that community. I know what it is to live life and experience the joy that comes with it. Diablo Valley Ranch, the lessons learned and the people met, there, along with the friends and support of those at B.A.S.N., in conjunction with the saving grace and the unconditional love of my personal Savior, Jesus Christ, as I understand him, have succeeded in doing what even my mother agrees was not doable; Changing the black sheep, into the lost sheep who has been found by his Shepard and given a new chance at life. God Bless all those who find themselves in need of His blessings.