

# A Fork in the Road

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I was raised in Newport Beach, California. Even though my parents divorced when I was ten years old, I had a relatively normal childhood. When I was eleven, my mother remarried; and after that, I always felt unsure of where I belonged.

I was twelve when I first got high, smoking a marijuana joint with friends. My addiction really escalated while I was in college after I was introduced to Oxycontin and Xanax. Eventually, I became so out of control that my parents sent me to Israel for a rapid detox procedure that would mitigate my withdrawal symptoms.

My mental health was rapidly deteriorating. Despite two suicide attempts, I returned to college. I maintained a whopping eleven days of sobriety before relapsing. The year 2012 was the first time I checked into rehab, but it was not the last. Over the next two years, I was in and out of treatment five times.

A truth I had yet to discover was holding me back from recovery.

When I began receiving treatment for my addiction, the doctor told me I would not be able to drink alcohol. I wasn't expecting that. I didn't have an issue with alcohol; I wasn't an "alcoholic." Why would I need to quit alcohol? Just get me off of these pills and I'll be fine. Naturally, I rebelled against the doctor's orders.

I would go into treatment and detox from the opiates, and maintain sobriety for the remainder of my stay. Once out of treatment, I would celebrate my sobriety by getting wasted on alcohol. Within a week of consuming alcohol, I would be sticking a needle in my arm.

It was a vicious cycle: detox from heroin, go into rehab, check out of rehab, drink, use heroin and go back to rehab. I couldn't understand why treatment wasn't working for me. Why was this happening to me again and again?

My need for heroin was growing ever stronger. My parents finally cut me off

because they couldn't bear to watch me kill myself. I started living on the streets. I owed money to dangerous drug dealers who were beginning to follow me, so I stole money to pay them back. I did whatever it took to feed my addiction; nothing else mattered, not even my own life.

**True recovery takes daily hard work — work that will never be finished. Stick with a program that works for you and develop a long-term support system.**

My fight or flight reaction kicked in when I realized I was out of options. To survive, I was forced to decide between selling my own body or dying. It was at this fork in the road that I truly hit rock bottom and knew I needed help.

I was estranged from my family, but managed to find a friend who referred me to a treatment center. I was near death by the time I entered rehab. I spent two days in the hospital.

This time, my mindset had completely changed. I knew in my heart that this was my last chance, and I threw myself into the program. Instead of fighting the staff members and anyone who was willing to help me, I began to take direction from them. I've been in recovery ever since.

In the past, my addiction had run the show. I refused to admit I was an addict and to accept that in order to stay away from my "drug of choice," I had to quit everything, including alcohol. Time and time again, my need for heroin paved the way to alcohol consumption, my fix to ease the pain. The alcohol then paved the road back to heroin. I was finally ready to accept that sad truth.

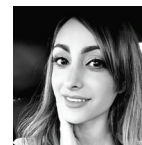


Through my recovery, I reconnected with my family, especially my mom. Because my mom and I saw the suffering of people from the disease of addiction and the importance of treatment centers in the initial stages of recovery, we decided to provide others with the same kind of help I had received.

We started a treatment center, and together we work in recovery every day. We witness the beauty of people breaking free of addiction's grip. We are part of saving the lives of sons, daughters, fathers, mothers, husbands and wives. It has been a gift that has helped me hold steady to my own recovery, and that has brought my mother and me closer than ever before.

If you're looking for help, do yourself a favor and get out of your own way. Let the people in your program guide you and be willing to accept that guidance. Your mind may play tricks on you in order to access what it thinks it "needs." Stick with a program that works for you and develop a long-term support system that will shed a light on your mind's own dangerous tricks.

True recovery takes daily hard work — work that will never be finished. In time, this work becomes gratifying and delivers a high unobtainable through drugs or alcohol. Find something you believe in, and devote yourself to it each and every day. I did and was rewarded with a life full of hope and joy.



Lisa Cohen is the Director of Admissions at Path to Serenity. She attended the University of Arizona, where she majored in media arts. Cohen is currently working on a bachelor's degree. She is also enrolled in CCAPP CAAR Institute to be certified as a drug and alcohol counselor. <https://www.facebook.com/path2serenity>