

ANGEL'S STORY

I was the last person you would ever imagine could fall victim to the tragedy of drug addiction. A straight A student who graduated high school a year early with an OP3, an impeccable athlete who won 'age champion' in every sporting event in every year at high school and was a successful amateur boxer, and a deeply analytical and self-aware person who was constantly told that I could do and be anything I set my mind to. I was even blessed with a beautiful family, whole and untainted by divorce, with a father that ensured I was always clothed and a mother who put food on the table every night.

But drug addiction does not discriminate and nor do the horrors of life. I fell into deep depression around the age of 10 or 11 following my first encounter with sexual assault which worsened throughout my life until its peak around the age of 21/22 at the height of my addiction. Throughout the time in between, I was the victim of multiple additional occurrences of sexual assault and was now onto my fourth unhealthy relationship and the third relationship that had resulted in acts of physical violence.

After suffering what now in hindsight seems like the most insignificant 'heart break' at the age of 20/21, I went from being content living a life of meaninglessness partying and drinking my youth away, to being on a hell-bent mission to completely destroy my life. At this stage I had had six failed suicide attempts and was heading straight towards the seventh, which thankfully was also unsuccessful. I was also deeply entrenched in eating disorders and self-harm, which had been begun in late primary school and never truly stopped. At its core, I had given up on life, the heartbreak had finally pushed me over my breaking point, and my soul had left the building. I was ready to die. And I made it my mission to bring that date forward as quickly as I could.

I met my now ex-partner shortly after the 'heartbreak' that sent me spiralling downward, and he brought with him the access to a drug I had always wanted to try but never really had offered to me – ice. Whilst I admit I never seemed to fully gain all the benefits that others claim to gain from the drug, it offered me the ability to work ridiculously long hours to further my new career in finance and also inhibited my desire to eat – something the disordered eating behaviours in me really treasured at the time. I was instantly hooked and my partner and I – who had been using the drug himself for some 15 years on and off – both fell into a critical state of addiction very quickly.

I spent the next 1-2 years entrenched in addiction while my partner was dealing ice out of our home to 'keep costs down'. Not only was my situation with ice reaching the point of no return, but my partner at the time had become a source of extreme fear for me. Following a personal tragedy, his addiction took a turn for the worse and he became hostile to the point I truly believed that he was capable of and more than willing to kill me. He would flick between empathy and evil, often telling me when he was right of mind that he was also worried he might really hurt me or 'accidentally' end my life. I spent many months fearing for my life and feeling unsafe in my own home, and that coupled with the drug addiction most certainly drove me mad.

It is amazing how an addict can convince themselves that their addiction is minor or does not exist at all. I recall telling my partner I could stop whenever I wanted to, but that it was helping my work and making me beautiful, so I didn't want to. Then came the first day I tried to quit, and I realised my mistake. I was completely hooked and could not even get out of bed on any given day without knowing I had access to the drug for the rest of the day. I would sleep (and eat) one day a week and the other 6 days would be spent working 20hrs at a time, studying or riding my motorbike in a completely unhinged manner.

After finally summing up what little courage I had left to leave my abusive partner, I was but a shell of the person I had used to be. I had completely lost my beauty physically and my soul was fractured and hopeless. I had no choice but to move back in to my parents granny flat to get away from my partner, who continued to stalk me and offer me drugs in an attempt to get me to come back to our house for some time after the breakup.

I remember clearly the day it all changed, the day I decided to fight back. It was night time actually, and I was sitting on the edge of my bed, pipe in hand. I had had eight infections in the previous 3 months and spent most of those months on courses of antibiotics to try and combat the diseases I was plagued with. I could hardly breathe most days, my hair was falling out at a rapid pace and most of all, I felt such an intense fatigue inside of me that I still cannot fully describe to this day. It wasn't just the absence of physical energy. It really felt as though my soul had vacated my body, and whatever was now driving it did not have my best intentions at heart. Holding my pipe in one hand and wiping tears that fell freely and effortlessly from my face with the other, I knew that if I did not change something I was going to die, and soon.

There was a part of me that was content with that outcome. But there was another part of me that hated myself for wasting what had been unlimited potential. I realised in that moment how truly blessed I had been and how I had taken it all for granted. And so began my recovery journey.

I spent the next couple of years going through the ups and downs of recovery, getting a ways and then relapsing and so on and so forth. I went back to boxing, finding comfort in the gym, and used it as a tool to help pull myself up out of the hell-hole I had fallen into. There is nothing quite like a boxing gym for setting the untethered soul back on a path to self-realisation.

Boxing saved my life. What first was a tool to recover soon became my new addiction and I fell back in love with the sport I had grown up using as my only therapy for everything adverse I had ever experienced in life. And so birthed "The Alchemist" which became the code name for the person I became in the gym, the person that was able to take anything horrible, burn it to the ground and create something beautiful out of its ashes.

I am proud to say that I am now well over three years clean and the current Australian Superfeatherweight Champion in professional boxing. After being unable to imagine a day without ice, I now could never imagine touching the drug again and promote a very clean and healthy image on social media, seeking to inspire others to find happiness through health as I believe strongly that a healthy body is the fastest way to achieve a healthy mind.

If there is one thing I have taken away from my experience it is that the mind is more powerful than you could ever imagine and it is entirely your decision if you want to use that power for good or evil. I chose love. I chose life. I chose me. And I cannot thank myself enough for having the courage to take back my life.

The power is yours.

Written by Angel Rushton