

Melissa writes:

When I heard the knock on the door, I had no idea my life was about to change.

"You're the worst of all of them. You're the mother, you should know better."

That's what the detective who came to my house that day said to me. I can still see him standing in front of me, judging me. As I sat on my couch, the other detectives searched through my house and found pipes, dope and forged documents. I was in utter shock and denial. My little girl was clueless as to what was going on, but she felt something was up. My oldest was at school and to this day I am grateful for that.

I lost my home, my kids, my job, my friends, and basically my life to that drug. It had reached inside and taken over, and I had allowed that to happen. I mean, I've used some substance or another since I was about 15, unless you count the things my mom gave to me when I was younger. I suppose you could say that the only way I knew how to cope with anything was by taking one mind altering substance or another.

Needless to say, I found myself at a place that I'd never been before. The only way I knew how to cope was to use the skills that had gotten me in that predicament in the first place. It was obvious by the previous fifteen years of drug use that I had no clue on how to cope with my environment in a manner that did not include some form of mind altering substance or maladaptive behavior. I'm telling you this because I want you to have a good idea as to where I was when I first found SMART.

I found the SOL community by doing an Internet search, and I decided to try it out because it made sense to me. There was this huge emphasis on self-empowerment, and for myself, the thought of not having control over my behaviors seemed hopeless. I figured that if I had gotten myself into this mess, then I best learn how to get myself out.

I began to attend meetings and post on the message board, and the replies that I received were encouraging and heartfelt. I made myself a home on the boards those first few months, and let out every thought that crossed my mind. I have no doubt that had it not been for the amount of time I spent posting and in the chatroom, I would have slipped far more times than I did those first few months. With each slip came a new recognition, and with each of my recognitions came a newfound strength. For each step back I took two steps forward. I learned the tools and how to apply them, and with some trial and error I began to really get it.

In the meantime, I was doing everything that was asked of me to get my kids back. There was a few times when I became upset with the situation I was in, as though I had not caused it or it should not be happening to me. Again I found the tools to be my foundation for changing those beliefs. My family could see the difference, as I did not react to them as they were accustomed to. The girls began to show an improvement, not only in their behavior, but also in their appearance as I learned how to balance the things required of me and the things I felt were important.

The courts wouldn't recognize SMART as a valid recovery program for me, since the only way I could participate was online, so I managed to get myself into an intensive outpatient treatment program for mothers with children. I found myself resentful of the fact that I had to take my kids with me, while my husband only had to worry about himself. Also, I had to go to group four days a week compared to his one. I began to feel like the words that detective said to me were true, I was the worst out of all of

them. I didn't understand why I was in the most intensive program out of all the people there that day. It didn't seem fair to me.

This belief was enforced around August when I learned that charges had been filed against me for the forged documents they found in my apartment. They charged me with four felony forgeries and one misdemeanor theft by deception. I felt devastated, and again thought it completely unfair. I saw myself awfulizing, over generalizing, and "shoulding" all over myself once again. But that was the key point, I SAW myself. I had somehow managed to come to a point in which I slowed down my thoughts enough to recognize what was going on. Instead of seeing it as something I had to deal with, I changed my perception to that of choosing to deal with it. I was choosing to accept the consequences for my past behavior, and not copping out by blaming others.

Had it not been for the SMART community, I would have found myself panicked and lost among my thoughts and triggers. I received such a showing of support from the members here, that I was truly touched. Even after all the things I had done, I was truly accepted for being myself. At the time I didn't realize it, but when I look back today, I can see that acceptance was all around me. I received letters of recommendation to take to court with me, pats on the back for successes, and an honest approach to helping me apply the tools.

When the day came for me to stand in front of the judge and be sentenced, I was much calmer than I ever expected to be. I knew that I had done absolutely everything that I could do, and that I could not control anything except myself. I was actually in awe of the judge that day in court, as I watched him deal with those before me, and when my turn came to stand in front of him, I believed that he would hand down the best sentence for the situation.

Shortly after the sentencing, I was awarded full custody of my girls, and the case against me with the Department of Child and Family Services was closed. I had gone from losing everything to a brand new start in a matter of 9 months. If someone had told me that I would come so far in such a short period of time, I would not have believed him or her. Yet, somehow, I had done just that. I have recently started college full-time, and remain an active volunteer within the SMART community.

Not too long ago I had what might be referred to as an AHA moment. When I look back, however, I see it as a moment in which I accepted. From the first time that I set a new boundary, to the CBA I used to decide what to do with my marriage, SMART has shown me how to empower myself to make the changes that were in my better interest. If I had not taken the tools and applied them, I have no idea where I would be today. My children are happier, my marriage is stronger, and I now have the knowledge and tools to be able to maintain my sobriety today.

There have been many times when I wanted to give up, or just let go of the fight, and those are the times when SMART was the most useful to me. I would show up in the chatroom late at night, and there would be a listening ear available. No judgments were ever made regarding what I was saying, and there was not a single moment in which I did not feel as though I were a member of this community.

SMART is not the only recovery process I have in my life, but I can say that it is the one that has given me the tools to make the most life changes.