

Susanj – 40s, Arkansas

- **Former maladaptive behaviors: alcohol, anorexia, self-harm**
- **Member and Message Board Volunteer, SMART Recovery® Online**
- **Sober: two years and counting**

With ten months of miserable sobriety under my belt and a State board decision hanging over my head, I was desperate to flaunt the system and avoid AA at any cost. I wandered into the cyber-halls of SMART Recovery® and found a place I now refer to as my home site.

Nearly 20 years of alcohol abuse was just the tip of the iceberg for me. I had been battling suicidal depression, self-abuse, and anorexia for 30 years. I was not a happy camper. Still in agony from my last “mental breakdown” 10 months earlier, I set out to achieve one goal. I wanted to be sober for one year and one day.

My entire goal system was set up around getting my license to practice nursing and creating a life that I believed would miraculously change my outlook and therefore my behavior. The right job was going to cure my ills. **Little did I realize when I finally found the guts to post a hello that I was about to set off on the journey of a life time.** I posted daily, read as much as my eyes and brain could take, sat in daily meetings, and generally just did the minimum. But the reading began to lead me into a place where a year and a day didn't seem so difficult.

Using the tools at SMART Recovery®, I started looking at all of the behaviors that had long contributed to my personal misery. I started digging very deeply into my thoughts and beliefs.

For a few months my life was littered with post-its, (my best brainstorming tool) , boxes of tissue, and poster boards with an ongoing CBA. I posted in a group that encouraged me to speak up and out, cheered me when I was struggling, commiserated with me when I was sad, and made me laugh. Every day I could feel tiny changes, I would be happily posting along and something would appear on the screen that seemed as if I were writing to myself. **As I shared my journey with other's I found that I was sharing theirs too. As I was writing to offer ideas to virtual strangers, I was a virtual stranger to myself. I was writing to me, too!**

And I began to learn new ways of thinking.

Well, I got my license and still have to attend mandatory AA meetings, but I learned that is wasn't a forced-to-attend issue. It was a choice I made. I could walk away from any of it anytime I wanted, I would just have to pay a price. The benefits certainly outweighed the costs. **And hanging out at SMART Recovery® made AA not only tolerable, it made it functional in my life. It taught me how to accept the ideals of others and draw knowledge and support from them. SMART Recovery® was an opportunity for me to choose the direction in which I wanted to grow.**

I have been here for a year and a few months. I can say (with professional documentation) that my chronic long term depression is in remission. That self-harm rarely poses itself as an option for coping. For the first time since I was 14 years old my body is in good health. And in about a week I will commemorate 2 years of relapse and

slip-free sobriety. Perhaps, the one thing I learned from SMART Recovery® was that I could make choices. And the choice I made was to learn to be happy, and to continue striving towards that goal in my daily living.

I got my first job in my chosen career (at 44 years old) and told the interviewer that I could not possibly imagine being happier than I was during that interview. I have since had to apologize to her for the oversight. **Every day brings me another option to choose wellness and happiness. And every day gives me another chance to speak out loud about the benefits of finding a recovery system or systems that work for you.** How distant that year and a day seem now, I am wallowing in my present with a slight glance into a future that is within my power to create.

Well, you have my permission to use this for whatever, but if you find a captive audience, throw them a pillow, give them a cup of coffee, get them comfy. My mouth and my fingers aren't tired yet and I still have tons to say.

Hugs and hiccups (Be well and courageous too)

susanj