

WILLIE'S STORY

First of all, let me thank God that I have this chance to share my experience, strength and hope with all of you.

I was raised in St. Louis, MO. I am a twin to my sister and we are right in the middle of thirteen siblings.

St. Louis is where I shaped my concepts of life. We were a poor family, but my mother did the best she knew how. She was the strongest woman I've ever known. She was able to instill a lot of love in us for one another. As I look back, we were a dysfunctional family, we had a hard time showing love or expressing feelings. I can remember feeling different very early in life. I always wanted to be somebody else, other than who I was. I always thought to myself no one felt like I felt, and no one thought like I thought. I was never comfortable in my own skin. I felt like an outsider in my own family and I eventually began doing things to get attention-such as get in fights in school, break things in the home. I wanted my mother to pay more attention to me, more than she did to the other children, the other twelve!!! Ain't that twisted??

I was a very angry boy. I didn't like me so I definitely didn't like anyone else. My father returned from Vietnam with major problems- his way out was alcohol. Talk about being a product from which you come. I faulted him very early on because he never hugged me, didn't play ball, advise me as a boy like other fathers. In my mind, he was useless as a father and a husband because my mother separated from him and I never understood why she would make us visit him on a daily basis. I hated it. I would go to church with some of my friends and their parents, lots of times wishing they were my family. The older boys in my family were always into drugs and crime and to me I thought that was fun! I couldn't wait to smoke my first cigarette, as a matter of fact at 16 that's what I got for a Christmas present! Keep the toys; I went for the carton of menthols. That is what one of my older sisters gave me. I forgot to mention the only reason she gave them to me was so I might stop stealing hers.

I started off being a somewhat smart kid in school, but then the teachers started calling on me too much, that made me feel awkward so I stopped studying as much so I wouldn't know the answers or the questions to ask. That left more time to act out, that seemed to get more attention by some of the kids, the "cool" ones, you know the ones with the cigarettes rolled up in their sleeves, the girls who only combed half of their hair. Those were the smart ones; they knew how to get out of classes. Anyway I started trying all sorts of drugs, you name it, I most likely tried it. Uppers, downers, shrooms, weed, all of this at age 15. I had to have those drugs to cope with every day life, good times, bad times, I got high. It seemed like if something bad happened in the world it happened to my family. All those times I was going to church with my friends? I can't remember ever thinking God was real, when I saw Jesus portrayed as a white on church pamphlets and other things, I just knew he wasn't a friend to any black man. Couple that with some scandals by some ministers, one in particular comes to mind right away, he preached on Sundays and pimped on Mondays. So I was sold on the fact that the God deal was all made up no matter what little reason might try to shine through.

My belief was strengthened about this God that didn't exist or don't care when a man walked up in the front yard, where me and my brother sat on the porch, and shot at point blank range and killed him - right in front of me. He died instantly. With all of the commotion, it's as if I heard it all in a fog as I walked away, pulling a joint from my pocket and went directly to a friend's house.

I stuffed what I was feeling down so far that it was like it never happened. That made for more using and after the funeral my family hardly ever talked about it - as if it never happened. After that, I remember thinking that God let my brother die, so I had no compassion for anyone else. To add to my insane thinking, my father died two months after my brother. After his death, my grandmother came from Omaha and told my mother that we were leaving St. Louis. So I'm uprooted from friends and family to move somewhere I had not a clue about! How was I going to ever adapt to anything new? Needless to say, I survived it but still God was punishing my and my family.

One day soon after, my sister and I were told by a school counselor that my grandmother had died. That was the last straw. Again my mother gathered us up and told us that we will graduate from high school and I did, by the skin of my teeth. Life went on with me just surviving. A judge told me that if I ever came in front of any judge again I would get some real time. My using continued. I stopped long enough to enlist in the U S Army. I had arrived, I could drink legally and smoke pot illegally, and it was great. Plus, no one to tell me what to do. I got married at 21 and she didn't see me the rest of the time. I would come home from work only to eat, change clothes and go party, that's what life had become for me, a big party. I experienced black outs very early in my life, but I always wrote it off as being too tired or too bored - but I was drunk. Military business started getting shady, I no longer was trying to be the best I could be because it got in the way of my using, so was my marriage, it took a lot of energy trying to love her when I didn't love myself. I remember being overseas, my using was becoming worse, my wife moved to Houston where we bought a home. Reality really escaped me and before I knew it I had proposed to another woman I had known for only 2 months - I mean we bought rings and everything and I was about to meet her parents. Before I could make the trip down the altar, I hurried up and got out of Dodge. Well, almost the truth. My wife, you know, the one I've been married to seven years, called my commander and told him that she had not heard from me in six months. I was told to take care of the situation. I responded with something like "But Sir, I send her money every month." Boy, how insane that sounds to me now, but that was the way I twisted. All about me, I ended up trying to pull a swift one on the military and it backfired on me and I ended up back in Houston, Texas where I was greeted at the airport by my wife only to divorce me the next day. I got a letter from her lawyer the next day explaining to me that my wife was asking for the home, citing mental cruelty. This is where my first experience with crack cocaine comes in my life. My world had just come apart. The first friend I met in Houston offered me a hit off of a pipe at a party he was having across the street from my house. It was harmless, I was liking his sister more than I was liking whatever that white hard stuff was that they were putting in that glass pipe. I thought only weed and hash went in that

bong. Anyway I remember when I was asked if I felt anything, I think it was his sister that asked me that. I said, "Hell, no, quit playing, put some more on there." I was more into the alcohol thing at this point. My next experience with the pipe is one I should have learned from. This friend I had met took me to his girlfriend's house where had his 5 year old son staying. This used to haunt me for a while, he pulled out that bong and passed it to me. For the first time I could feel what I was smoking and I liked it. He then passed it to his girlfriend but she refused. I could also remember thinking their kid was in the room we were and how wrong that was, but I didn't say a word for lack of courage. I also remember when he pulled his son in between his legs and grabbed his little head and blew a big gulp of smoke in his mouth. I was stunned; I didn't know what to say. His mother didn't make a big deal out of it, the little boy started coughing and his eyes got really big. I just went on using, but I do recall that high was heaven, I had forgotten that my wife had left me, the career I loved was over and I had to return home after seven and a half years, a broken man. Returning home, I didn't say much at all about my marriage and just went on pretending as though nothing happened. My using got worse, but I didn't see anything wrong with it. Soon after I got into a relationship where I fathered two children. I tried to save some of my military career by getting into the Army Reserves; I also tried going back to school, in college. I was working full time, going to school at night and using every chance I got.

In 1991, I got called up for the Persian Gulf War. I was rescued from myself, temporarily. I served six months overseas where I learned that my fiancé was cheating on me, my world was crushed. I moved out of the house from her. I knew that I had it in my heart to forgive her. So I left and soon after got into another relationship. My using continued, I was changing jobs like other people changed clothes. Before I knew it, I was in the penitentiary for bank robbery. I recall that the judge looked at my record and said "Son, what happened? You seemed to be on the right track?" I mumbled something like "I have a drug problem." He was very lenient with me, I was facing 0 -50 years and got 18 months - 5 years in prison. I was paroled in 1994 and I thought I'd found God but that lasted right up to the time they let me out those gates. My using started up again; it was as though I'd never stopped. I

was just as bad as when I'd been forced to quit when I entered prison. I felt I was going to die using. I was of no use to anyone. I tried moving out of town, but I found people just like me. I finally found the courage to go to treatment and what prompted that was I was supposed to open up the job and do a special event for my boss where I could have gotten a lot of money and recognition, but I took a hit and it never happened. I was so embarrassed and what was I going to tell my girlfriend who had just had a baby by me. So I had to do something drastic, going to jail was out of the question, treatment was wise - to sum up about treatment, I only wanted to treat the outside and put my eyes back in my head. But I graduated; I was so smart I recall the counselor telling me that if anyone would make it, I would. I succeeded at everything I did, everything they asked of me. I was high two days later for another year and a half. As the disease would have it, I would lose everything worthwhile, another relationship not to mention my daughter. There I was again, hopeless. I thought about just getting it over with. That thought went through my mind a couple times. My last time picking up was on October 6, 1996. That morning I had just come from a hotel after using all night. My fiancé had no idea where I was, just like before, leaving my newborn daughter in her care. I recall thinking what a weakling I was for not even putting up a fight against my disease, it had won again. I got in my car and started down I-80 thinking I should run the car off the interstate then that thought was followed by it might hurt. I didn't have the courage to do myself in. I had about ten dollars left out of my paycheck, which had been a little shy of \$600. I even had the nerve to stop and get a hamburger, not even thinking about if my daughter had food. I remember asking whatever God there was, if he would take away my desire for drugs and alcohol I would do anything he would have me to do. At that moment I got the thought to try treatment again. This time I had a different mindset, I knew I didn't want to use any more so I set out for Lincoln, forty-five miles away, because I couldn't face my old counselor and staff who had a lot of hope in me. When I checked in, there was something different about my heart; I was committed to see this through. My first official day sober was October 7, 1996. My action in treatment was totally different this time. I didn't want to play cards, I didn't have time to play dominos, all I could think about is that drugs have destroyed my whole life and alcohol and I was going to see recovery through

or prove that recovery didn't work. There was no more trying to find that easier, softer way out. I was convinced that I would die on cocaine. I knew I had been a slave to cocaine and it would not allow me to have a family, a job, and real friends. There is a lot I didn't share with you on how the disease would make me lie, cheat, and steal, most of this being directed at my own family members. They were opportunity for my disease, that's all. I really did love them but they couldn't and wouldn't believe it by my actions.

There was a lot more insanity that had gone along with my using but for the first time, I started taking responsibility for my actions. I knew my family wasn't coming back so I didn't bother them for the first week or so. She has heard it all a thousand times, "I am sorry", "It won't happen again," so I skipped that part and just kept my head in the solution these people were talking about. I graduated there but I had experience knowing that wasn't enough! So this time when they suggested to me to go into a halfway house, I didn't hesitate. I can't describe to you, for the first time in life, I felt I knew there was a God working on my behalf, but I really didn't know Him so I took suggestions from the men in the Rooms. I went to one hundred in one hundred, I just kept going to meetings listening to people who thought and acted like I did. I felt, at last, I was not alone. What an awesome feeling!!!!

After six months clean and serene I felt there had to be more. I thank God for AA, which is where my recovery started. There was no Cocaine Anonymous in Lincoln, Nebraska. I also thank the first sponsor I had. He was all about solution. He gave me the guidance I needed as a newcomer. I knew left to my own devices, I would have "graduated" again and we all know what happened the last time I took charge! I moved back to Omaha a little shy of nine months and here is where I found my home, Cocaine Anonymous. These people talked my language; at last I found what I had always been searching for - a place where I was understood. When I approached my first meeting I was listening for the solution. I knew I had to get involved quickly because if I gave my disease a chance, it would come back and destroy me again. So I got a sponsor who I saw living the program. I could clearly hear the people who where I had been in my first attempt at recovery. For some reason that behavior didn't appeal to me at that time, I was seeking recovery

with all the desperation of a drowning man, just as my literature suggested to me. My sponsors' first suggestion was to get busy into service, which was enough to keep me busy and focused on my recovery. I found myself wanting to work my program because I wanted to. I started to love chairing meetings, sharing an accurate message and that message came from my literature. I was to have a certain attitude toward my recovery and that was a profound gratitude toward my recovery. A profound sense of gratitude to the ONE who gave me the willingness to fight against my own belief of what I thought recovery was. Things were still not as I would like them to be in my life, but I was sold on the hope that you all share each day in the meetings in The Promises. Everything in me wanted to rebel against the clear-cut direction that the program was giving me. I just remembered my best thinking got me right here, a seat in these rooms. I still had some fear about changing, I was afraid I wouldn't recognize myself. I had to find another sponsor with the same passion for recovery that I had become so blessed to have, early in my recovery. This man that God put in front of me was just what the doctor ordered, he had everything I would care to have in my life. He demonstrates the principles, which are embodied in the steps. Honesty, Hope, and Faith, which enables him to apply the rest of the principles in his life. This man gave me my nine-month chip, that means a lot to me. I've had the privilege of passing that chip on to a man God gave me the privilege to sponsor. But this sponsor's belief in what the program asks us to do to recover is the steps S - T - E - P - S: "*Solution too every problem sober.*" We began to work the steps W-O-R-K "*What our recovery knows*". He made me understand that in order for me to keep my recovery I had to give it away, through work and self-sacrifice for others. By the time I was a year sober, I had a real good picture of what it took to keep my disease arrested, but he shared with me that there was much more. I always settle for less, and again I didn't want to be miserable in recovery so I worked and applied the steps in my life one day at a time and to my amazement, I was happy, without my family back, at that point, without that job I lost because of my disease and without the trust I thought people should have in me for the damage I caused in their lives.

For once, I started to feel comfortable in my own skin. I can't begin to

express to you how important it is to get a sponsor who has working knowledge of the steps meaning he or she demonstrates them in their lives. My sponsor assured me as Bill talks about in Chapter 8 that when an addict is ready to recover he or she would demonstrate the willingness that is necessary for his or her recovery. Sponsors become the luck of the draw. There have been some low spots in my recovery I didn't mention like my mother dying one year into my recovery, if it wasn't for the God that I have discovered through working the steps I wouldn't have made it. I also thank the men and women who have been in that situation before them and they came through it without getting high. If you are looking for the spiritual part and you missed it, you are among it right now, the whole program is spiritual. I also lost an unborn child that my fiancé was carrying for seven months. Again my God did for me what I couldn't do for myself. There has been lots of ups and downs in my recovery. Promotion, getting custody of my children, material success, again my God was there to make sure I don't get it twisted. I feel that my God was pleased with my willingness to be the best example and hope for the newcomer, that he allowed me to sponsor, and I am very humble to that fact. All I owe a newcomer is what you guys gave me when I got here: patience, tolerance, and love, and accurate information about recovery and most of all honesty, even if they don't want it. I love sponsorship. I have found the power to live life on life's terms, I am not baffled on what it takes to recover, but I had to want it more than anything in "life." I have the power to love, unconditionally, working the steps made me look at my past and see my reaction to it and discover the truth about who I was, and with that understanding I am able to live my future, and I must share with you, it's a great future, my faith gets stronger as I continue to recover, but that requires some tests I must go through in life. To prove to my God that he is the one who I look to for the good times and the bad. I thank my creator for revealing his presence through first people in the room, sponsors, and other men and women. Then you feel you have done everything you could do in quitting that terrible cycle that most of us go through when using. And you feel you would like some help with it "H-E-L-P", "*his ever loving presence.*" We know we have an answer for you! I no longer walk around saying I don't know why I am sober, I heard it like this. I get a blessing so that I can be a blessing. So I have a program "P-R-O-G-R-A-M"- "*people*

retrying on God relying,” a message.

I have a sponsor “S-P-O-N-S-O-R” = “*sober people offering newcomer suggestion on recovery.*” And he told me to work the steps, solution to every problem sober. And if I didn’t I would go nuts “N-U-T-S” = “*not using the steps.*” These are the tools of recovery that if applied to one’s life, can get you the happy joy and free. Recovery is a journey and a process and because I was willing to go to any length, I am celebrating eight years of recovery without a slip, not that I am not prone to relapse, you all told me it wasn’t an option.

The life that I live today is because of people like you who are sitting there with one day of recovery, which is where it started for me. On behalf of my loving and supporting wife and our children, we thank Cocaine Anonymous for making me a caring husband and a responsible dad, a faithful friend and employee, things I couldn’t do or be before (BC) Cocaine Anonymous. Oh, by the way, I forgot to share with you that my life has come full circle, my military career has been restored and God has seen fit to have the government to seal my felony conviction. Now I can finish out my career. I now sit here with an M-16 beside me as I write my story in Iraq. I don’t need any more convincing that my God can do anything but fail.

From an addict named Willie.