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Season 06. Episode 01

Podcast Title: Interview with Frank - Part 1

Frank, a personal friend of this writer, has seen much over the course of his life. At the age of 65, he recalls here the countless times his life has been affected by drug and alcohol abuse, from his childhood until this very day.

He starts with his early years:

"My early life in Ottawa, Ontario, was actually happy. I had a lot of personal freedom to run around the neighbourhood and in those days, no one worried about being safe. You would come home at dusk and mom was there waiting with a nice supper to enjoy with my family. I have one older brother whose story I will share in a moment.

My young life was upended at the age of about ten when my father took up with another woman. It ripped my family apart. I had

assumed, wrongly, that my dad loved my mom and I never thought about what went on behind the scenes.

At this stage, I'm an innocent kid, for God's sake. My worldview was shattered in a heartbeat. And I never got an explanation or an apology from my father for wrecking my sense of security.

I started smoking pot at about that time; maybe I was twelve years old. No older.

School was an afterthought. Then at the age of fifteen, I moved out and never returned. I found a place to stay with some "older" guys - who were in their early twenties and, of course, I started a career dealing drugs. I'm fifteen or sixteen at this point. I bought and sold meth and marijuana, and alcohol to underage boys.

Then, when I was in my twenties, some true addicts joined my circle, or rather they became the centre of the circle. While they got way high on heroin and morphine, I did what's known as "chipping", that is, I would try a little coke here and there, but I was more interested in keeping sort of straight so that I could make lots of money dealing. I was that guy who dealt but didn't snort the profit up my nose.

You will notice that I never did go back to school.

The place I lived in had a house full of people coming and going, maybe twenty or thirty at a time. It became a true drug house, as there was some heavy dealing going on. And very unsafe if you didn't know what the deal was. I knew what the deal was as an old-timer in the house with a bedroom door that locked really good. Even so, I had a gun stuck into my face one morning by a guy who was coming down from meth and got real paranoid as meth addicts do.

Another time, I gave up \$15,000 cash to a cocaine dealer who just stuck his gun through my driver's side window. He just demanded the money because he knew I had it. It was the same money he had just paid me for a load of coke earlier in the day. All he did was

follow my car and wait for the time I parked at a place convenient for him, of course.

No point in calling the cops, right?

I mentioned my brother earlier. After our parents died, he became a real alcoholic. By that I mean that my brother John started going down the slippery slope to hell in his twenties that ended in a sad bottom, even though at this stage he is still alive.

He is an incredibly talented, fiercely smart man. At the height of his career in Canada, he had risen to become a mergers and acquisitions specialist in the rarefied world of high finance where hundreds of millions are put into play, and he would get a cut of the action.

All this time, say in the 80's, he is drinking more and more. His wife divorces him after he hit her, and she leaves with his two children in tow.

Down he goes.

I tried to save him. He had gone down a long way. That great job was in the rear-view mirror, and his health was awful. He was by this time living hand to mouth in a crappy apartment that he shared with alxies and addicts, on some sort of disability deal.

I flew to Toronto from Thailand where I now live and brought him back here. As part of the arrangement in helping him straighten out, I made him promise that he would stop drinking. It all ended badly, with him trashing my house in a drunken stupor, and fleeing in shame back to Canada. I still speak to him, but he has not yet asked for help, and I fear the worst. My only brother.

Let's talk about my friend Ben. He was a jack of all trades. A contractor who did a variety of construction jobs around Ottawa. Chipped cocaine and drank to excess. Ended up in Royal Ottawa Hospital sick as a dog from all the drugs and alcohol he had been consuming for years.

He would claim that he lost it all due to madness, as he put it. What seemed to save him from an almost certain death was a kind and wise woman who gave him the structure that he needed to come around, wake up and start living a sober life. The power of love transformed his life. Perhaps that's what they mean when they talk about a power greater than oneself. That was 25 years ago.

Don't talk to him much anymore but I do believe he is alive and well.

That does it for part one of my story".

These stories go to show you that you do not know where alcoholism will take a person, and one never knows what role fate plays in the story of ruin and redemption.

They also demonstrate that an individual can rise to the heights only to be struck down by addiction regardless of ability, education or social standing. That is why we at SafeHouse Rehab call addiction "an equal opportunity disease".

Part two of Frank's story is coming up in the next episode where he will share how his exposure to addiction shaped his worldview and affected his interactions with the people in his life and society as a whole.