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Season 06. Episode 08

Podcast Title: Tony and Bruno. Talk It Over - Part 1

This is episode 8 (Part 1 of 2) of season 6.

This interview of Tony by Bruno J. reveals what Tony's young life was like as he was heading toward his bottom, and the courageous struggle to get right with himself and his family. Now, at the age of 30 with four years of sobriety under his belt, he shares his recollections so that those who love a still-suffering addict or alcoholic can see that there is always hope for a turnaround to a sane direction.

Bruno J.: "Tony, let's start with your family, your mom and dad. You are an only child, so there must have been a lot of attention paid to you".

Tony: " The people closest to you know you really well, so even if there is something the tiniest bit off, they know it right away. Even when I first started drinking at about 18, mom knew instantly that

there was something not quite right. I was living in Oxford off campus, working at a bistro, paying off loans, drinking sometimes. Home on weekends. I was still highly functional.

Then as my drinking escalated into my early twenties, I started to be defiant and drank openly. Mom wanted to help but did not know how.

My dad held his feelings back, but I know now that he felt guilt and shame over what I had become. I had become delusional, suffered from obsessive compulsive thinking, as in where can I get my next drink, and tried to stuff my feelings of inadequacy with more alcohol.

Bruno J.: "But you knew you had a problem with drinking, so what did you do about it"?

Tony: " I tried detoxing at home, based on a government support program. No dice. I went into a 28-day government-sponsored residential program full of ex-cons, got out, then went over to a friend's house and got good and drunk - on the way home. So much for that. I guess it hadn't gotten bad enough. So, I had a two-week drinking vacation, and then my mom started looking for a private facility. I was OK with that.

But it was an expensive proposition. My dad had to sell his cars except for the one he used to drive to work. My parents made many sacrifices to try to help me.

I had gotten crazy and violent. At first, I wanted to go in, but then I rebelled and was taken to the facility in a police car. After the 30 days there, I went back out there, then asked to go back in.

I just knew that I could not do this on my own anymore.

Bruno J.:" You didn't yet know that the turning point was just around the corner".

Tony: " There was this moment when a counsellor put his arm on my shoulder and said he had a friend in Thailand who knew of really good treatment there, away from all the usual triggers, a sanctuary, as it were. He said: 'What do you have to lose?'

So, I decided then and there I would go. I wanted to go, to get the heck away and give it a real shot this time. I was truly fed up with the frustration, the despair, the anger and the hurt to my family.

I entered into a new world and I felt immediate relief and hope that this time it would work. I committed to recovery. It was time to surrender all my old ways of thinking. It was time to go all in.

I learned the art of living and staying sober one day at a time. It became a clear and simple way of containing my mindset, having no regrets and not living in the future. Having the anxiety dissipate helped massively".

Bruno J.: "But now the work starts".

Tony: " It came down to getting honest with my own self-centeredness, facing reality and not ducking accountability. Getting a sponsor, ultimately surrendering to the teachings of the 12-step program, learning that kindness, courage and honesty are woven into an unshakeable program, a design for living that really works. Working with others to help them get and stay sober is essential. After a year or so of sobriety, I could see that I had a chance to live a joyful and inspired life, that my creativity could be unleashed to do good and sometimes amazing things".

Bruno J.: " Looking back, what is the main lesson for the family"?

Tony: " It's almost unheard of for an addict or alcoholic to get it right the first time. Most take several attempts. The point is do not give up and get him or her back on the horse as soon as possible. The odds of success go down the greater the delay between the last try and the

next attempt. It's a harsh but necessary truth to learn. But there is always hope. If I could do it, I believe anyone can".

What we learned about Tony's downward spiral and about his path to recovery is that:

1. Parents are always at a loss of what to do, as they are not educated on the nature of the disease that has taken over their child.
2. Tony's mom, burdened by anxiety and fear, was nonetheless ready to sacrifice everything to help her son get sober.
3. At some point, even Tony knew he had a problem but couldn't figure out how to resolve it with or without help. His was what we call the "revolving door or relapse".
4. Only when he was truly sick and tired of living in guilt and shame did the "teacher" appear. That's when he made the decision to find a sanctuary and surrender his old ways of thinking.