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Busting Addiction and Its Myths Episode 3 Season 3 Part 1 of 2

Robert Speaks About the Power of Addiction - Part 1 of 2

I was privileged to be able to have Robert sit down with me recently and have him reflect on his journey from a hopeless condition of mind and body to one where he brings much hope and light to those who still suffer. Those who still suffer are not only the addicts and alcoholics themselves, but just as critical, the family and love ones of the primary “patient”, or “client”.

Robert is a highly capable and experienced addictions counsellor who is the head of treatment here at SafeHouse Rehab Thailand; we are indeed fortunate that we were able to lure him here from the UK.

I asked him: “Robert, I would like to pursue two lines of inquiry. First, tell us about your journey from where you were to where you are today and then I will ask you what lessons you have learned on your journey as a recovering person and as a counsellor of many years”.

Robert states: “I was given away by my birth mother when I was about 3 years old and was taken in by a reluctant relative who was married to an abusive and alcoholic man. The family was classic dysfunctional – don't talk, don't trust,

don't feel. I was in constant fear of being beaten, and I was beaten for random things.

I am the child of a white mother and a Nigerian father. It was hell being a half black and half white kid in a white neighbourhood.

I tried to run away a hundred times but finally succeeded at about 16 when I grew to be bigger than my step-monster and he could therefore no longer restrain me.

We lived in what is called in the UK a spill over town, a suburb of London, but poor. I ran away to the inner part of London where I put my teenage wits to work making and selling posters, back in the psychedelic days. I was very successful and ended having many employees running around selling my posters.

I got to know the streets very well. So well that I became in time a crack addict when nobody had yet heard of crack, cocaine yes, but not yet crack cocaine.

We cooked it ourselves, then I got to dealing it and made a ton of money doing that, for a while at least.

During the 10 years I was doing that, I ended up having six children, five kids by the first woman whom I did not marry, and one child by a woman whom I married, and we although we are now divorced we are good friends. At this point I was about 26 years old. I had had six children over a 10-year period. I was living an unrestrained life with no boundaries, no values, no laws, no principals.

My crack cocaine use had finally gotten so bad that I lost everything - money, family, sanity. I became psychotic...I was imagining that there were evil forces out there to torture and kill me, and you know what that was all about? Somewhere along the way, I must have developed a conscience, and it was therefore my guilt and shame - over whom I had become - disguised as the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse – Terror, Bewilderment, Confusion and Despair.

So, I ended walking over to an office in London called the British Advisory Service, and upon their recommendation visited with some people at a government-funded NHS drug rehab centre. I went into that residential treatment centre and it was a draconian place, but I stuck it out for 6 months or so. Then I decided, enough of this, I'm going to leave, I got this, and in a few days, I was back to the crack.

That was around Christmas and I went to hell in a short time. I was out using crack at Christmas, was absent for all the family gatherings, got thrown out of

my home, and in early January I was banging on the door of that same rehab desperate to get back in.

You have to understand that this was just the beginning of the end of my old life. I came and went into rehabs several times before it finally dawned on me that maybe, just maybe, I could do this thing and get clean and stay clean. I was so tired of being sick and tired and paranoid and feeling guilty and ashamed for what I had done to my family, that I felt I had to get this right or be committed to the asylum, or commit suicide. I just didn't have the guts to kill myself, and besides, I couldn't put my family through it.

That's when I connected to some guys in NA... Narcotics Anonymous, a twelve-step program modelled after AA, Alcoholics Anonymous, and I got myself a sponsor and started to work the 12 steps. And then I started to heal. I had bottomed out and started on my journey toward sanity...even though at the time I had no idea what that looked like, since I never had any.

I got the gift of desperation. I was lucky that there were some good and competent people at the NHS who could me in steer in the right direction and guide me. I didn't have to like what they asked me to do, but at that point I had tried to get clean and sober on my own and I had nothing to lose.

I ended getting a counsellor's certificate and travelled to Jamaica to practice there, and then returned to the UK to continue my education and practice what has become my life's work.

I know in my heart that I needed to go through what I went through to enable me to be of utmost service to the clients who come to me for help. I believe I can empathize in a way few others can, because I have seen hell, and I want to save addicts and alcoholics from having to experience hell or ever see it again.

And now, what is my message to the those who love an addict or alcoholic?

There is always hope while your loved one is still with us. There are several options: First, get educated on the disease, and understand it as that as opposed to a moral failing. Two books I recommend are: Love First by Jeff and Debra Jay, and Co-dependent No More by Melodie Beattie. Second, speak to a licensed, qualified AODA counsellor or psychiatrist. AODA stands for Alcohol or Drug Addiction. Third, attend an Open Meeting of Narcotics Anonymous, or Alcoholics Anonymous. These are meetings designed to educate family members, or anyone really, about the challenges and promises of recovery. If you search, search for Open Meetings on the likes of aa.org for your area. Closed meetings are for those who wish to preserve their privacy, which is understandable even today".

My next post is all about what Robert has learned in his many years of experience about getting on and staying on the road to recovery for family members, and for the addict or alcoholic looking for a better life.

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