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Season 04. Episode 06

Podcast Title: Interview with Tomas - Waking Up, Now & The Future

This is part 2 of Adventures with Tomas of Germany; the story of what it was like, what happened and what life is like for him now.

B: You spoke in the previous episode about how you bottomed out and decided to seek help. I would like to have you take us on your personal road to recovery. This is especially important to hear from a young, vital 30-something male.

Examples: who were the people who helped you along the way? Did you go into treatment and if so, how did that help you? Did you relapse (and almost everyone does) and why?

T: I bottomed out to the point where I was frozen in fear and didn't really know what was happening to me. I suspected that the alcohol and drugs had something to do with my paralysis. I did not go to treatment, but I did go to some AA and NA meetings and got help from my friends who taught me to surrender. Not fight on my own.

Talk about what you do to keep you not only clean and sober but also emotionally stable, loving, and productive.

I am sober now for 6 years and am still dealing with my emotions. I feel like I have PTSD from all those years of crazy family living. Don't talk, don't tell the truth, don't trust, don't feel. It's still a struggle to feel natural.

Talk about the importance of your personal 12-step AA or NA program and being involved in it beyond just going to meetings. Do you have a daily ritual?

I do mostly the same things every day. I meditate a few minutes, I read from the Daily Reflections and from Courage to Change Al Anon book, and I say a prayer or two.

I also, and this is vital, follow the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous which are identical to those of Al Anon, with one small exception at the end. The first step is the foundation of the whole recovery process, and nothing happens until and unless it is embraced 100%.

It simply says that "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol and that our lives had become unmanageable." That means we are as powerless over someone else's alcoholism as much as we are our own.

So, give up trying to exert any individual power over something you have no power over. This is where surrender ultimately becomes victory.

B: Could you please share your involvement with Al Anon and how it has helped protect your sobriety and helped you stay sane?

T: I was under the illusion that the only way I could be OK with myself was if you were OK with me and/or you were doing what I wanted you to do. So, I was the classic co-dependent, trying to control you and not taking care of myself.

But I did learn in Al Anon the value of boundaries, the idea of detachment with love and minding my own business. I overcame the obsession with the woman and she no longer lives in my head rent-free.

I found great help from the people who identify as Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA), another 12-step group designed for those suffering from the PTSD-like symptoms of alcoholic trauma.

I also learned that:

1. Addiction or alcoholism are not moral failings. Addiction is a disease.
2. The disease is progressive; the addict always gets worse, and never better left untreated.
3. Because addicts are defiant, they have trouble accepting that they can never get better on their own. They need the help of others who have walked the same path.

This is what we learned from Tomas today:

1. Al Anon can not only help families who are not addicts themselves, but it can be a vital tool in helping addicts focus on their own recovery.
2. Having a daily ritual helps keep the recovering person stay on track, reinforcing healthy behaviour and attitude.
3. Sharing feelings with people you trust serves to relieve the pressure of stuffing them and/or turning to a substance to numb them.
4. Tomas readily embraces that his addiction and co-dependency, including his being an Adult Child of an Alcoholic (ACOA) all played a role in the development of his disorder, and he freely seeks help from whatever resources he needs.