

To the Addicts:

The stories you are about to read are true. They are real, and they are you. They are for you, about you, and by you. The addicts who tell these stories have been in your shoes, and they speak from their hearts with piercing insight, honesty, and warmth. They tell how they got hooked, how they got help, the hell in between, and the hope at the end.

I hope that, as you read this book, you will find strength in the struggles they've been through and triumphed over. I hope you will find someone like you.

To the Parents, Family, and Friends:

It is nearly impossible to describe the deep, penetrating, soul-wrenching darkness that surrounds you when you know your loved one is on drugs. Unless you've been there yourself, you cannot imagine this heartache.

But this is a book, not about that pain, but about the hope, the healing, the recovery of our precious loved ones. It can happen. I pray that it will happen, and that your dark days will be lifted, and you will feel free.

Wild Bill

Call me Wild Bill. Nah, just call me Bill. My wild days are behind me now, and that's a good thing, because they started when I was about six or seven. My mom was just seventeen when she had me, and she and I lived with my uncles (her brothers) near Philly, Pennsylvania. We were a big, close-knit German family who loved to get together every chance we could. Two of my uncles worked for the Schmidt's brewery, and there was always plenty of beer around. We used to get together in the summers for backyard barbecues, and my uncles thought it was funny to give my cousins and me a couple of little beers and watch us get tipsy. I was only about seven, and mostly I did it just because my uncles wanted me to, but I guess I kinda liked it. It made me feel big and strong, like I could do anything. It wasn't long before I was managing to sneak alcohol other times besides the barbecues, and I soon made drinking a part of my life. Of course, alcohol is a drug, and one thing led to another, and by the age of ten I was smoking pot.

"Hey, Billy, you wanna try some of this?" It didn't take too much persuading for me to take my first hit of pot. It felt like I was floating on a wispy cotton cloud on the top of the world. I enjoyed the laughing-giggling-everything-is-hilarious high so much that I was soon doing pot every chance I could get. Me and my band of gutter-looking guys would cut school and sit around smoking weed—hysterically cracking jokes and carrying on all day long. This was the laughable life I lived and loved for quite a while, but I got to craving more.

One of my friends had an older brother who was a crank dealer, so I tried a hit of that one day when I was about thirteen. Wow! As that rush of speed ran through me, I was a supercharged ram, ready to rule the world with one arm tied behind my back. The magic of methamphetamines tangoed its way into my heart, and I was hooked. Still drinking heavily, I was also sniffing the crank, and I soon graduated to putting a needle into my arm to get that high I so needed.

So there I was, a fresh new teenager in middle school, which was as dull as a silent black and white movie to me. I was rebellious and wild as a caged bull, not wanting to listen to the teachers or anyone. No one can tell me what to do! As each day dragged on, I trudged my way through, skipped it whenever I could, and lived for the afterschool hours of drinking, drugs, and wild, reckless abandonment. To an onlooker, I fit the mold of "student with discipline problems still fitting in with school society"; I played a few sports, I showed up most of the time, and I liked music so I formed a band with a few other guys. Sometimes I showed up high on speed already, but mostly I did it after, when I could also consume excessive amounts of alcohol. I was able to drink a lot of alcohol because I was so wired on speed. Actually, I did it every chance I could get. I'd ask my dad, "Dad, you have any nuts and bolts to pack?" Or I'd cut some lawns or save up my lunch money—whatever I could do to make a buck. There was always a way to have money for my speed and booze. If not, I took to stealing money from Mom's purse or Dad's pocket—wherever I could get the money to continue the party. It was definitely all about the party—the high that went on endlessly. "When are we gonna do it? Who's gettin' the keg?" That was my life at the tender age of fourteen.

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I care, but the bottom line is I gotta look out for me. My kid's already lost one parent, so I need to stick around. And I'll do whatever it takes, say whatever I gotta say, in order to keep it together.

I make about four meetings a week, and I go because I need to go, because I know it works. Sometimes after a tough day at work, or if I'd rather be hanging with Billy, or whatever, I have to force myself to go. Life shows up—I could be riding my motorcycle, or going down the shore, or being with my kid—but the only reason I have all that in the first place is because of going to the meetings. The meetings are keeping me clean. It says right in the literature, and I'm not a big literature quoter, but it says, "Rarely have we seen a person fail who attends our meetings on a regular basis." So I go because I want to go, because that's what saved my life and gave me another shot. I need the fellowship.

My best thinking is what got me in so much trouble in the first place; why would I not go someplace that gives me what I need to stay out of trouble? It's like a disease—like if you have diabetes and you take insulin, you feel better. If you then stop taking it because you feel better, what's going to happen? You'll get sick again. Well, meetings are the medicine for the disease of addiction. If you stop going because you feel better, you'll get sick again. Maybe not overnight, but over time, eventually you'll crack. This is what I tell myself, and I speak The Truth.

There's no way I want to go back to the life I came from. I've done time, I've been homeless, I've been stabbed, I've been held up at gunpoint, I've even been at the other end of the gun. I was a nasty, strung-out brawling junkie who wouldn't think twice about knocking over a ninety-year-old woman to get what I needed.

Today, I'm a happy guy. I've got a good job right around the corner from where I live in a small, two-bedroom house that I'm renting. Next year I think I'll be ready to actually buy a house of my own. My kid is happy. He's tough, but he's got manners. He knows everything about my disease and knows I have to go to meetings to keep staying clean. We love spending time together on my motorcycle or watching him play football or going fishing or boxing together. Every morning I wake up, go get coffee, and ask God to help me get through the day without using alcohol or drugs. To protect me and watch over me as I drive and as I work and "thank you for letting me have another day and another chance at life." And at night, "thank you for another day clean."

Today I'm living; I'm not just existing. Today I can smile. I feel good. Today I have freedom. I have hope. I have respect. Today I am truly grateful I'm not using. I thank my mother and God that I'm alive today. If I had only known sooner what this was all about, I'd be sitting at my shore house right now! But it takes what it takes. I did what I did. I can't change the past, but I can change the future. I'm okay where I'm at right now and I try to continue to move forward and better myself.

If I could take this feeling that I have inside me now, and rip it out and give it to a newcomer, they wouldn't use anymore. They would not use. This feeling I have is unspeakable—they can't imagine how good they'll feel themselves and how good their life will become if they give this a shot, if they just give this a try. Today I am truly grateful to have this second shot at life, and I am living it to the fullest.

Our Readers Say:

This book is excellent. It is moving, because it doesn't matter if it's alcohol, heroin, prescription drugs—addiction is addiction. But get “the gift” of recovery, and it's one that once you have it, you never want to give it back. It's like getting a chance to live two different lives. *Beyond the Darkness* shows, beyond a doubt, that recovery is possible, even in the worst situations. Very, very touching.

-Jeannie M, recovering addict

As a recovering addict who has struggled for many years myself, I have found this book to be extremely realistic and profoundly moving. Whether you're affected by or afflicted with the disease of addiction, the stories depicted will touch your heart and serve as a very useful therapeutic tool for healing. I would like to use it for discussion during some of my patient detox sessions.

-Scott S, Admissions Director of The Right Place Residential Detox Center

This book is truly inspiring. *Beyond the Darkness* gives hope and encouragement to anyone that has a loved one who is an addict. I was left feeling like I wasn't so alone.

-RET, parent of an addict

Wow. This book really tells it like it is. I can definitely relate to the characters, especially Melissa. They're all so sincere and they don't hold anything back. They make me feel like I'm right there with them and I'm glad they are in recovery now. I hope to be there myself someday.

-Julie P, struggling addict