

Chapter 01

David: My name is David. I'm an alcoholic. I've been sober since July 9, 2006, and I got sober when I was 26 years old. My life begins like a lot of people, I would say, in the Midwest. I was born to a very conservative Christian family. My dad was a preacher. My grandpa was an evangelist. I have a long lineage before them of ministry, and I have cousins and aunts and uncles who are in the ministry. So that's kind of the upbringing that I had.

I grew up with morals and values. My parents are still married today. My sister married her high school sweetheart, and they're still married today. That's how I grew up. I grew up at Sunday school and Sunday morning church and Sunday evening church and Wednesday night youth group and church camp and kids camp and discipleship camp, youth camp and preacher's kid camp. That was my upbringing.

I can remember somewhere around the age of 12-ish, 12, 13, something just wasn't clicking for me, and I really wanted it to. It wasn't that I didn't want it to. I would go to the altar calls, and I would get saved over again, and I would be baptized and all of those things. But something just didn't click. There was something missing.

I had questions that nobody seemed to either A.) couldn't answer, or B.) didn't want to answer. I remember thinking in my younger years, "When I'm old enough, I'm out of here, and I'm not going to look back." When I turned 18, that's exactly what I did. I didn't really start

drinking until high school. I was somewhere around 15 or 16 years old – and I hear a lot of people that are able to describe their first drink in great detail, and they can talk about the glistening glass and the chatter of the ice or whatever it was.

For a long time, I didn't remember my first drink, and I wish that I could sit here and say it was this shot of whiskey or a pull of Wild Turkey or whatever, some of these stories that you hear. But once I remembered looking back, I know that I was at a party in high school, and there was this drink, this

alcoholic beverage, kind of like a wine cooler. It was called Zemo. That was popular back then. This would have been in the mid-90s. And that was my first drink. It was nothing exciting, and I don't even think anything really happened that first time I drank – for me.

And in high school, to be totally honest, because of the upbringing I had and because of the house that I lived under, there was always a pretty thick thumb on top, and so there was a lot of rules and regulations, and the opportunities to get away and do the things that I really wanted to do weren't there. But I started smoking pot, and I could hide that, and I could manage that easier. And so really for most of my high school career, what I really was was just a good old-fashioned pothead that was in band and played jazz music and fell in love with jazz. And I started studying these guys like Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk and some of these greats.

And when I really started to deep dive into their lives, the truth of who they were in the background starts to come out, and I idolized these guys. I wanted to be just like them. I played jazz trombone, and I had a lot of opportunities in high school, and got to play around town. And as a senior in high school, I played with, backed up Bobby Watson, who's a jazz saxophonist, and I backed up Buddy Guy. And I got to do some pretty extraordinary things as a talented young trombonist. And I left the summer after I graduated high school, and I went to Michigan. There's an academy there called Interlochen, and it's a world-renowned arts academy. And I went as a scholar student.

My private lessons teacher had been trying to get me to go for years, and I would never go. And I finally said I would go after my senior year. And I got there, and I was immediately with my kind. I felt a part of. I was just there for the summer, but that year, there are – it's an academy. It's a full four-year academy, freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors. And a handful of the kids who had just graduated ended up staying for the summer, because they were just trying to get one more notch on their transcripts.

These are kids that are trying to go to the Cleveland Institute, or to Juilliard, or things like that. They're trying to get in, and they just need one more thing on their transcripts. But all of their friends stayed for the summer who just graduated, and just worked on site. They would work in the cafeteria, or in the welcome center, or whatever. And so they didn't have to stay on campus, and we did. And we immediately – I immediately jumped in with these folks,

because I could sneak off campus, and they could bring in whatever they wanted.

And I spent that summer, for lack of better terms, drinking took on new proportions. It shifted that summer, and it became more – it became a bigger part of my life. That was the time when alcohol settled something from within. There was something that was – that felt missing. And when I took a drink, everything was okay with the world. I could breathe.

The way that I describe it is, for a person like me, who is an alcoholic, the more that normal person drinks, the more out of control they feel, and the more – they may take a few chances, and a few risks, and have a good time, but they feel a little bit more out of control, which is kind of the idea, is just to let go of everything. And for me, I take a drink, and I can breathe. And the more that I drink, the more out of control I get, but the more in control I feel in my mind.

And with every drink comes more control in my mind. See, now I can handle you, and I can handle that job, and I can handle all of the mishaps, and the things, and the failures, and the people that I've disappointed. I can handle all of those things. So drinking took on a proportion that summer. It just made everything okay. And I came back, and I was going to go to school. I was going to start at Tulsa University.

And really quickly, what happened is that my priorities were two things: and it was booze, and it was finding someone to be around of the opposite sex. And that's all I really cared about, and school kind of fell by the wayside. And I didn't make it a full semester at TU before I dropped. I met a young lady, and pretty quickly she became pregnant.

And so at 18, I'm pregnant, and I go home to tell my very conservative family that they're going to be grandparents. And the way that I was brought up, you don't get pregnant unless you're married. And so we had a shotgun wedding. So by the time I was 19, I had a newborn baby, and I was married. And at that time, I was able to – for some of us, there's this thing that they call the imaginary line. And the imaginary line is that once I cross the imaginary line, there's no return. I can't stop drinking no matter what.

I can't control it or stop it. And some of us are able to cross that line later, and I believe that that was the case for me. Because during that period, that three years of that marriage, I could control my drinking, still, at that time. I could go weeks or a couple months or maybe a few months without drinking. But the

problem was, as soon as I took a drink, all bets were off until something stopped me. That may last for two days, that may last for three days.

And then, as they say, I'd put the plug in the jug, and then I could kind of handle it for weeks or a period of time. We ended up getting divorced when I was 21. We were just two young kids and never really meant to get married. And when that happened, I really wanted to – I was really trying to do the right thing by getting married.

I was trying to do the right thing for my dad and not be a disappointment for my family. But I knew deep down it wasn't the right thing to do, but I did it anyway. So we got divorced, and what happened for me is that I watched all my buddies go to college and have this college experience or go to the military and have a military experience.

I remember distinctively thinking to myself, I have some catching up to do. I missed out on all these fun times that these guys had, and I've got to now make up for that. And I quickly became a barfly. I'm a huge barfly. I remember as a kid, I would see the neon lights in bars as we drove by, and I would ask my parents, "How come we never go there and eat? I want to go to that place." They would go, "That's just not the kind of place that we go to." And it was because it was a bar, and I was always infatuated with it, even as a kid. So I started going to the bar, and that became my second home.

There was a local – anybody who says "This is my home bar," you're probably just like me. I had a home bar here in town in Tulsa, and that's where all my friends were at, and that's where I was at. That's where you would find me after work. If I didn't have that little girl, I was there. And I loved that place. They had two happy hours, four to seven and ten to close, and they had

\$2 24-ounce beers, and it was everything that I could ever want. Had dirty carpet and old pool tables and crappy dartboards and really gross bathrooms, and I loved everything about it.

It was just the most amazing place. And so I'm not going to be the person that is going to sit here and say that drinking was misery for me for a long time, because it wasn't. There were lots of good times, and there were times at the lake, and there were trips, and there were weekend getaways and camping and parties and friends and lovers and all those things that come along with it.

My favorite kind of booze is whatever you got. If you put it in front of me, I'm probably going to try it. And that carried on for a while, and then we fast forward to that last year of drinking, things had shifted, and I was in a relationship. Again, I'm really good at finding people who know how to take care of people and who will take care of me so I don't have to deal with responsibility.

I've heard it said before, it's like we know how to take hostages in a way, and we run rampant in everybody's lives. And that was the case for me, certainly. I was in this relationship, and at this point in time, I had gone back to court for more child support, and rightfully so, she deserved it. I didn't think so at the time, but she did. Looking back now through the process of some personal inventory, I've been able to see that. I ended up getting two jobs.

I never didn't work. I always went to work. I always showed up, still drunk, hungover. Whatever the case may be, I'm going to be at work, and most of the time, I'm going to be on time. I had a job for a long time that, because of the field I was in, my rent just kind of came out of my paycheck. So I never had to worry about if rent was going to be paid or if there was going to be a roof over my head.

There always was, because it just came out. I was a maintenance guy. It just came out of my paycheck. But there were plenty of times where I would bring that little girl home for the weekend, and there would be mustard and ketchup and beer in the fridge.

There would be plenty of times that there would be trips to the lake and no food would be taken, even if she came along. There would be times that I was always present. I would show up to the soccer game. I would show up to the soccer game, but emotionally and mentally, I'm nowhere to be found.

That last year of drinking really boiled down to me trying to control and manipulate my drinking. I had gotten a second job, and I was working at UPS slinging boxes out of trucks in the morning. I'd have to go in at 4 a.m. in the summertime. The closer it got to Christmas, the earlier that time got.

So in those November and December months, it was like going in at 1 a.m., and then I'd get off work at 8, and then I'd go to my day job, and I would work until 5. I found out really quickly I could no longer hang out at my second home, which was the bar. I couldn't drink the way that I like to drink and work these jobs. It just wasn't going to happen.

So I started controlling my drinking. I would get off work, and I would scrounge up whatever money I could, and I would get as much for as cheap as possible, whatever it was, whether it be the cheapest bottle of vodka, the cheapest bottle of whiskey, beers, whatever it was.

The entire goal every night was to get home before she got home, drink as much as I could drink, as fast as I could drink it, in the hopes that I could get drunk enough so that I could go to sleep and sleep through the night, and get up and go to work the next morning. That's what I did Monday through Thursday.

Then Friday would come along, and I would start drinking on Friday, and then I wouldn't stop until Sunday at some point in time when I had to pass out because I had to go to work. I did that for a year. I lived in this little apartment, this crappy apartment, and it overlooked this crappy house behind us.

It had just a dirt backyard with these rough pitbulls back there. I would sit on that back patio and chain-smoke cigarettes and drink and drink and drink. Those two pitbulls became my best friends. Those were the guys that I talked to every night. I would just sit on my back patio and overlook that backyard and talk to those pitbulls. Just normal social drinking stuff, right? That's just normal social drinking.

One night, long story short, every time that I drank until the last night when I drank, my mind went quiet every single time. One night, it didn't go quiet, and I drank and drank and drank and drank and drank and drank and drank and drank and drank. I'm a liar, thief, and a cheat when I'm drinking.

All those things happened that night. I will do whatever I have to do to get what I need to get to make it through the day. I drank and drank and drank, and my mind would not quiet. I remember everything that happened that night the next morning when I woke up. I don't know if anyone's like me, but I've passed out in a lot of bathrooms. Bathrooms are a great place to pass out. The tile floor feels good on my face. There's a place to get rid of things that need to be gotten rid of and a place to get a drink of water when I need it. It's all right there.

I woke up on someone else's bathroom floor once again. I'd done that a thousand times, but this time it was different. I felt different when I woke up. It was to the inner depths of my soul that I just felt miserable. It was to the inner depths of my soul. It's the best way I can describe it.

Before, I just would have a hangover, but that morning it was to the inner depths of my soul. I knew something had to change. I knew something had to give, and I didn't know what that was going to be, but I knew something had to give. I got up and peeled myself off that floor. I went home and faced the music at home. She didn't owe me anything. I went and I had to go pick up my daughter from her grandma's house.

I sat down on her couch and she told me in not-so-kind words, "You don't look very good." I said, "I don't feel very good." I had said that a thousand times before, but that morning it meant something different. It just felt different. We talked for what I thought was for 20 or 30 minutes.

I found out some years later when she came to celebrate with me in recovery that I had been there for two hours and she was pretty annoyed with me that day.

During that conversation, she mentioned recovery. It's not something I had – never been to treatment. I knew of it, but it wasn't anything I really knew anything about. She suggested, "Why don't you just try that out and see what happens?" For whatever reason, I heard it that day. I had heard a hundred times from friends and people around me, "Don't you think you drink too much?" or whatever. My response eventually just became, "How long have you known me? I'm a drinker. That's what I do. I don't understand what the confusion is here."

But that day I heard something different. I went home, faced the music again and said, "You don't owe me anything, but if you'll let me go to this meeting, I need to go to this place." I had called this hotline and I got this guy on the phone.

We talked for a couple minutes and he said, "Do you think you can make it till 6:30 without drinking?" I said, "I think I can make it till 6:30. I don't feel real good anyway." He gave me an address and said, "Meet me at this address at 6:30." I said, "How will I know who you are?" He's like, "Don't worry, it'll all work out."

I show up to this church on Peoria and Brookside. People started walking up and saying hi to me and introducing themselves to me. I'm just scared and miserable and hungover. I found out later there was dried blood behind my ear and I was sweating profusely. These are all things I learned after the fact.

This guy comes bouncing up and says, "Are you David?" I said, yeah. He told me his name. We sat outside that church for probably, I don't know, 15 minutes just talking. I don't remember a lot about what he said or what he said to me, but what I do remember is relating to what he said about himself. We went into this place and I sat through this meeting. For the first time I admitted I'm an alcoholic.

That was the first time I'd ever done that in not a joking manner. He's the only guy I knew in AA. He said, "Hey, if you want to stay sober, these are the things you need to do. You need to X, Y, Z." He's the only guy I knew. I said, "Well, will you help me do that?" He said, "Yeah, I'll help

you." He said, "What are you doing tomorrow at 6.30?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "Good, I'll come pick you up. What's your address?" That's how my journey started.

I got busy in recovery. I worked a 12-step program and I worked all those 12 steps. Then I started helping other guys do the same. Pretty quickly my life changed. It just became my entire life. I needed it to just become my entire life. I let go of the old friends and the old play places. I got a new set of friends. Everyone that I hung out with and almost everyone that I hang out with today is sober.

That little girl ended up coming to live with me full time when she was in eighth grade. Then I got some careers. I went through the market crash in 2008 and managed to make it through that. It was all because of people in recovery. They helped me get through that process. My life has become exponentially different. Today I get the pleasure of helping other people and watching their lives change. Really the joy in life today is watching somebody else's life change today.

To know that I get to be a part of that process is just something that's priceless. It's a priceless thing. I have this amazing relationship with that little girl who is now 24. She's getting ready to

move to Australia and start a life in Australia. Statistically speaking, she should not be in that position. By statistics, she should be just like me. Yet here we are.

She's the first person in my family to graduate with a bachelor's degree in college. She's going to be the first person in my family to take a job internationally. I've made restitution with my family. I've made restitution with the faith that I grew up with. It's not a faith that I practice

today, but I respect it because it is a faith that works for them.

I have my own spiritual path. I have a power greater than myself that I believe works for me today. What I found in recovery, the key that I found in recovery is that the finding a power greater than myself comes in the seeking.

If I just seek, in whatever capacity that looks like, a power greater than myself, the spirit of the universe, God, whatever you want to call it, finds me. Because of that, I have freedom today. Because of that, hopefully, on a continual basis, day by day, I become a better human being in general.

That's all I really want, is to become a better human being in general. Without recovery and without being sober, none of that is possible. I know that I hold it very dearly and closely. I never want to forget where I came from because I don't ever want to go back there again.

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