# RB's Story

July 11, 2016

***Editor's note:*** *This article was written by "RB," a student at at William J. Ostiguy High School, a recovery high school in Boston, Massachusetts. RB shares his experiences with a substance use disorder and other challenges. We are grateful that he has chosen to share his story with readers of The BASIS. In some places, we have supplemented RB's article with further details from the scientific literature; please see the Footnotes.* ***Please be aware that this article includes descriptions of substance use and its consequences.***

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### *The Day That Never Comes*

*April 4, 2014…*

The day that I decided to change my life. Much insanity was needed before I actually did. Winter had been cold and long in Boston, and everyone at Ostiguy High had been beaten down by the excessive snow and low temperature. I seldom showed my face at school on time, or at all. As days came and went, my apathy showed itself more, and its partner in crime came, too. Depression. The two would compose symphonies in my mind from the remonstrances of my guilt; these musical notes made more sense than a therapist's words. I didn't know what truth meant; what went on in my crazy mind was more logical than a rational person's. The folk that walked in professional attire, who seemed… *so normal*. I couldn't comprehend having a sane life in which I felt utter peace and serenity. Of usefulness to others. Living.

### *Misery*

"Dad, le'me get a smoke."

"They're in the car, kid."

I trudged with a gait that spoke of hopelessness–like an old man with a rusty hip replacement.

*He must have money in there. I can get high if he does.*

The car door creaked open as I pulled the handle to look inside. Deciding to sit down, I leaned back, fell to the car seat like a rag doll, and moaned as my bottom hit the cold, hard leather. As my anxiety increased, I searched for a cigarette and a lighter… Mind in a fog. Finding the two precious objects, I whipped my sleeve back with a sudden jerk of the arm, and rose the lighter to the cigarette. *Why do I do this to myself?* I ripped the center console open, hoping to God something of worth would be in it. Money or drugs, perhaps? *There's something, the light orange shine of a prescription bottle.* This was my father's bottle. He needed the pills, and I hated seeing him high, but I understood; who was I to say? We simply could not stop. I could almost feel our destruction breaking the family apart.[1]

Twenty minutes later, I realized that I wasn't going to sell the pills. *Too much of a hassle*. A few moments later, I had them in my hand, and in the next, a few in my mouth. I asked myself *why* I harmed myself again; that very sudden and fleeting thought lasted only a few seconds.

I knew of how bad opiates were, but I didn't care anymore. I needed to be numb, completely numb. Thus, my one last spree of using began.

*The subway, 10 p.m.:*
Waiting between stations felt like an eternity. All I could picture in my mind was the trash can, because I was so sick. Soon I will be at the station, and I'll be able to sit down and smoke. Throw up some more, perhaps.[2] *When will it end?*

*A friend's house, 2 a.m.*:
"Gimme more, I'm still not *okay*."

"You already had a lot."

"So have you, you sonofabitch."

"Whatever…"

I didn't wanna be high… Unconscious was better.

*Home, 4 am.*
"You look like a junkie," my mother cried to me as I sat in my underwear smoking. The bags under my eyes, the smell of sweat and misery radiating from me. Darkness. I could see why she exclaimed her opinion of my appearance.

“Just leave me the f*** alone; I’ve had enough.”

“You’re going into treatment tomorrow if you don’t stop.”

“Okay, now get away from me,” I mumbled wearily.

*Emergency Room, the Following Day:*

*It’s over.*

Hardly conscious, I leaned to the side in my chair. Something was off… I could still feel the pain. Never had this happened before. The drugs simply stopped doing their job; they stopped making me numb. All denial of my situation had been lost in that moment, and perhaps some time before, as well. Lucifer had me in his grips, and he wasn’t letting go. I knew then I couldn’t go on the way I was. Something had to change… *but what? I’ve been to detox over ten times, what could possibly be the answer?* It was simple*. Spirituality.* I knew this– it just wasn’t comprehensible.

### *Faith without Works, Is Dead*

“Five jumping-jacks please.”

*The typical drug check, before entering a facility. This is to see if drugs had been put up in uncomfortable places, because they will most likely fall to the floor.*

“Sounds good.”

*Thump, thump, thump. Here we are again.*

So there I was. Treatment, again; this time I wasn’t messing around. My high resolve to succeed came in like a hurricane wind, and blew away like sheets off of a clumsy clothesline. Hopelessness set in, and I began to isolate. I phoned my mother often, and I would proceed to beg her in vain attempts to bring me home. She never gave in. Adamant about her point, she exclaimed with much enthusiasm that I was sick and I needed help. Sometimes I would find the sharpest object possible and try to slice myself because of the mental agony. The sharpest thing I could ever find was a guitar pick, and I cut my stomach several times through my stay, because it was easy to hide. My emotions weren’t so easy to suppress, though. I was miserable, wanted so badly to go home, and somehow stay sober. I remember the day I was informed I’d be going to further treatment;

a few more cuts followed. I knew it was the only way, but it most certainly didn't appeal to me. No words can describe how hopeless I felt in that moment.

*Day ~20, treatment, Brockton:*
We were in the intake room waiting for a facilitator to come in. All the clients seemed to stick to a common theme of discussion: the drugs they did, how much they did, or how much they sold. *F****** idiots.* I wasn't like them; I was there to get better. I was better than *them.* I never bragged about that shit.

*Now I know that I was lying to myself. It was quite often I got into those discussions.*

"Everyone, shut up, it's time for group," said Will firmly.

*Why does it have to be him? Arrogant prick.*

I sat and waited, doing my best not to flip a table.

"So first off, I'ma inform ya'll that the Dr. ain't here to-day. Does anyone know how he runs his groups?"

A cacophony of "nahs" echoed from clients mouths apathetically. I wanted very much not to have to help facilitate, but since no one knew how the Dr. ran his group, I figured I would help. After all, I had been there many times.

"Yeah, I got you," I replied sensing some eyes rolling; it didn't deter me. "He usually talks about what he calls 'Climax,' how humans feel the need to be valued and such."

"Thank you," he coughed, with an obvious condescension. I wanted to hit him. *That m***** f**** asked me if I knew, and I told him.* As my teeth began to clench, I took a deep breath, and shook it off.

"You're welcome."

"I gotta leave the room for a minute, R. Take over."

"All righty."

I stood up to go to the board with a lazy and careless stagger. I began to speak and write, and then came the bullets.

“Stop actin’ like you know everything, kid, just shut the f*** up.”

*More insults came at once like a tidal wave. I could see that they weren’t going to stop until I sat down.*

Out of nowhere, an unfamiliar voice shot an insult. This particular one made me cringe from hurt. I looked over to see that it was a girl I hadn’t even met yet. She had just had her intake an hour ago. No words were exchanged before now. These were her first words to me. The fact that I had paid no attention to her, and that she already thought that way about me, caused a tear to form.

“What did you just say to me, bitch?”

“Excuse me?!”

“Yeah, you keep that nasty face, looks a lot better than your normal one.”

With that, I threw the marker across the room so hard it broke a mirror, and I left.

“What the hell is going on in here?” I heard Will bark from down the hall. My thoughts raced with incredible speed as I began to hit everything in sight. Knuckles bleeding, I continued until I was nearly restrained. They asked if I needed my clinician; Erik wasn’t there, but Kristen was. Luckily, she had always been my favorite staff member. As I approached her office, I tried, with much difficulty, not to burst into tears–It all fell out of my eyes anyways. Tears, short exasperated breaths, and a look of shame that couldn’t be described in words.

“What happened, R?”

I proceeded to tell her what had went down, and in the midst, I began to feel better. Weight began to lift off of my shoulders, but it wasn’t until Kristen responded that a wind of change came through the room.

“I’ve known you for a while now, R, and there is nothing bad I can say about you. You have the kindest heart out of any kid that has walked through the doors of my office. Don’t let these kids tell you who you are, because they are just as broken as you, and it’s possible that some are much, much worse. We all love you here, and I personally believe that you won’t have to come back here ever again after this. You have hit your bottom. I can see it in your eyes.”

*I was shocked.*

“Do you really believe that?”

“Yes, I really do. You have the heart and soul of an angel. The only thing left to do is give the rest to the Angels. That’s all they want.”

***Bloom***

“Yo, R, dog,” J hollered as he approached me from behind. “Where yo’ beak at? *waaaaahhhhh!*”

I had no clue what he meant by the question.

“Get away from me, kid,” I warned him adamantly. He began to laugh so hard that he cried, and then proceeded to jab me several times in the gut. I rolled my eyes and laughed along.

“See you guys tomorrow, it’s 10:14,” said Amanda.

As I walked out the school’s door and lit my cigarette, I began to realize how lucky I was. It had been close to eighteen months ago since I went into treatment. *I made it.* Here was life at last. Nothing could take me down so long as I kept doing the right thing. A smile began to form on my face, and I approached all of my friends, who were also smoking. They all began to smile back at me, and many daps and hugs were exchanged. It’s typical here at Ostiguy High.

Sometimes I become envious of kids who go to normal high schools, but the jealousy all fades away as soon as I set foot on the 3rd floor of Ostiguy High School each morning, for I know that I may be presented with the opportunity to help someone that day. Help them like Kristen did me.[3] Sobriety is an unmerited gift that deters me from going to my home high school. Hopefully, someday, I may impact someone so that they carry the hope, as well.

*Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.*
*Where there is hatred, let me sow love;*
*Where there is injury, pardon;*
*Where there is doubt, faith…*
*Where there is darkness, light.*
*O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek*
*To be consoled as to console,*
*To be understood as to understand,*

*To be loved as to love;*
*For, by giving, we receive;*
*It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;*
*It is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life.[4]*

**For more information:**
Do you, or does someone you love, struggle with substance use? Help is available. Consult the SAMHSA Treatment Locator or call 1-800-662-HELP (4357).

*What do you think? Please use the comment link below to provide feedback on this article.*

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[1] Addiction causes a great deal of collateral damage, including frayed or even severed family relationships. The addiction researcher Keith Humphreys has suggested that "for every person addicted to drugs or alcohol, half a dozen other people suffer." Dr. Howard Shaffer has shared his recommendations for family members touched by addiction here.

[2] Gastrointestinal side effects such as nausea and vomiting are not uncommon among new users of opioids.

[3] It sounds like RB formed a powerful therapeutic alliance with Kristen, and that this bond helped him make progress in his recovery. A review of studies revealed that children and adolescents who had a stronger alliance with their behavioral therapists had better treatment outcomes. Some researchers view therapeutic alliance as curative –particularly for children in therapy, and particularly when the child views the therapist as "supportive, attuned, and nonjudgmental." Others believe the therapeutic alliance is not directly curative, but that a secure bond with a caring therapist enables the child to do the hard work of therapy.

[4] From the St. Francis Prayer. This prayer and other prayers and messages (e.g., "Faith without works is dead") are part of the spiritual message of Alcoholics Anonymous. Many people find solace in the spirituality of AA and Narcotics Anonymous (NA). A recent large-scale randomized controlled trial found that AA promotes recovery, in part, by enhancing individuals' spiritual practices and beliefs. However, there are alternatives for people who want to

draw upon the social support and recovery strategies of 12-step programs but in a secular context. A qualitative study of one such alternative is described here.