

Hello, my name is Taylor and I am an alcoholic and addict.

So, I'm here to tell you my story. The story that defines who I am. Do you want to know the best part of this story? It's not over yet. It has really just begun. So, let's take a stroll back through time.....

I was born the fourth of six kids, right in the middle. Three older brothers and two younger sisters. I couldn't beat up the olders and wasn't allowed to touch the youngers. I got my butt kicked. A lot. We were raised in the Mormon church, not too strictly, but we followed the rules set by the church. Well, most of us did. We had a pretty happy and carefree childhood. Until 1984. My mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. I remember the day after she started chemotherapy, I woke up and started to walk out of our bedroom and saw a bald person sitting in the chair in the living room that my mother always sat in. I was scared, so I peeked around the corner, trying to figure out who this was. Then she laughed, said "My stars and garters, Taylor, it's just me, come feel this bald head." I saw her smile and knew it was her and ran and hugged her. I believe that was the first time I knew nothing would be the same ever again.

My mother died from the cancer in February of 1985, I was 8 years old. My world was gone. I remember going to see her at the hospital the night before she died, her eyes were rolled back in her head, she had dropped so much weight it hardly looked like her. I remember wondering what was wrong, how could I help, when is she coming home? She was too tired to sleep, they said, but she wasn't in pain. I was taken home that night by my aunt, her sister, and we went to bed. I remember laying down in bed and holding tight to the blanket my mother had made me – she made each the siblings a blanket – and crying because I knew something was wrong. That is the last time I remember crying for about 30 years. My brother just older than myself and I shared a room. Our aunt came in and told him she was gone, that our mother had died. And I know it sounds kind of selfish, but I was never told she died, something I think might have helped me transition in the grieving process in a lot healthier way than what ended up happening. But, I digress.

Going to the funeral home the next day or two, I sat there silently watching everyone else crying, sobbing, and mourning. I showed nothing. No tears, no sorrow-just blank. Inside though, I was screaming. I was raging. I wanted her back, she was my rock. She was my world. I know I had my father still, he was a great man as well, but that was my mommy and it wasn't fair. I had no outlet for my pain. I definitely didn't have any coping skills, I'd pick up some unhealthy versions of those in a few years, but we'll get to that. After the funeral, I remember one person giving me a hug and offer comfort. I think I got lost in the bustle and with that many kids around that was kind of expected, but that didn't make it hurt any less. The reception ended up being a mess with one brother and his friend nearly trampled by a moose that they were running from in church shoes, but again, a different story.

We settled into a routine after this. We moved into a new house after she died, one big enough for all of us to have our own rooms with a few rooms left over – it was pretty damn big. My father worked up on the slope two weeks on, two off. We were left to our own devices a lot. I had to take on the role of getting my sisters up and ready for school, making sure they were fed, etc. My brothers were all in their teens so they kind of did their own thing. We had the ladies from the church over to help out with cleaning and such. Some of them taught us to make a few meals. It wasn't exactly a hard life, but I felt so alone. Even in a room full of people I felt alone.

Fast forwarding through a few years, those years were full of trials and a lot of learning. My dad meets a woman from Utah. You can probably guess where this is going. She was an absolute Mormon, strict and by the book. So, they get married in 1989 down in Utah at one of the temples. We have met this

lady once and now she's our step-mother. I'm sure it was scary for her being thrown, nearly literally, to the wolves. We were borderline feral, doing what we wanted when we wanted. Then, this disciplinarian shows up, throwing down rules. That went over like a bag of rocks. An extremely hard learning curve followed there. I spent most of my high school years grounded. Between the lying and stealing – I almost always got caught – I rebelled and acted impulsively. Always doing what I wanted first, consequences be damned.

I don't remember feeling anything but pain for years. Until I turned 14. My brother who was just older than me had a birthday present for me. We rode our bikes up Huffman road and down Birch a little bit to some totally safe tire swing he and his friends had assembled, over a 20 foot drop off. There, he gave me my first cigarette. And my god. The feeling, the rush. The dizziness. I was hooked. The next day we went back and one of his friends produced a pipe. The feelings I didn't feel anymore were outstanding. Good god. I was super hooked. I never looked back from that day. Once I got a single dealers number and learned how to make a pipe out of a can, I didn't need my brother or his friends any longer. I could go wander the woods and be alone not feeling. My stepmother caught me with cigarettes or chew a time or two and she figured out a way to make me never smoke again. Of course the best way to do that is to make me smoke a few packs in a row and eat some chew. That worked real well. I finally quit smoking last week. So, try a different method, please.

I had found tobacco and marijuana but we're in AA so let us get to that. I had a few drinks here and there throughout high school but never had that defining moment with booze that a lot of people seem to have. I really just liked my weed and left it at that for a while. Throw in some acid and mushrooms and I was good to go. However, July 4, 1996 was the turning point for me. I came home to find all my stuff bagged up in garbage bags and my dad waiting for me on the porch. "Today is your Independence Day, Taylor, you can't follow our rules so you cannot live here any longer." I was working at a catering company at the time and we were doing a BBQ at Valley of the Moon Park that afternoon. We were catering the food and providing the kegs. Boy, did that turn into a problem.

I had a co-worker let me move in with him that night, as he had a spare room. That devolved into drinking regularly and my first foray into cocaine. I was young, had hardly any responsibilities and was just living it up. So I thought. I followed a friend down to Utah for a year, their 2.5% beer sucked, and promptly came back home to Alaska. Got my job back at the catering company and continued the lifestyle. No real career path, no real ambitions, no real future. So, I got married.

I met my ex-wife through a friend. Well, stole her from a friend, anyway. She sparked something in me I'd never felt before. She had a son, so I got a family from the get go. Of course I thought this would change me, force me to grow up, make me want to start planning for my future. Nope. I continued on doing what I always did. Lying, cheating, and stealing to get what my body said I needed. My drinking escalated more and more. At this point it was still manageable, just drinking at night after work. Occasional drinks during work if it was acceptable and of course I could rationalize the acceptableness.

That's what we do. Our alcoholic minds can rationalize anything if it serves our purpose. Still something I struggle with today. I was constantly stoned, I had discovered pills during this time and REALLY liked those. The methods I would use to not feel were quite remarkable. A friend would say "hey, I heard if you did this it can get you high." So, of course I would try it. I was reliable in the sense that if I told you I would be somewhere you could guarantee I'd be there. But, I never specified what condition I would be in. Normally to do anything in public I'd have to be a bit buzzed. And my method of getting buzzed far exceeded any normal person's idea. Such was my life. I'd be working along, living this way, make a

major screw up or steal something and get fired. Find a new job, do the same thing. Over and over and over again. My wife at the time put up with so much crap. But, apparently I was charming and a smooth talker. Even to this day she says she has always seen the good in me, I am now trying to show her that she was right all along.

We had a daughter 15 years ago and I again had the hope that this would change me. Once again I was wrong. I made promise after promise that I would cut down on my drinking and drug use. Promises I broke again and again. I could go a day or two without but then I would have one of anything and be right back at the level I was before. And it usually escalated each time. A couple tall boys turned into a six pack turned into a twelve pack turned into an 18. On and on. Start throwing booze in there and it wasn't pretty. I went through my tequila "phase" - that last 4 years or so. Then came the whisky phase, another 5 years. Until finally, it became whatever I can get my hands on phase which is what it was until the end. And unfortunately for me, I was not a blackout drinker. I remember a lot of what I did and how I behaved. Those memories still keep me awake at night sometimes.

I was lucky enough to never get convicted of a DUI, although I was charged with one. My stepson got home late one night, I had had a few with a friend that came over after dinner with my wife at a local sushi place. I apparently felt slighted and started an argument. He decided to swing on me, well if you remember from earlier I had three older brothers and don't get hit normally. So he missed but I didn't and popped him right in the nose. He took off on his bike, his mother went after him, my friend left and I followed him to his house. Soon enough, after slamming nine Budweisers, the police showed up at his house looking for me. I was pretty trashed by this point and the office asked me to take a field sobriety test. Inside my friend's house. In his tiny living room. It was three steps across. I told the officers that I wouldn't be passing the test. They asked if I was refusing. I said No, I just won't pass. They said alright, please turn around and place your hands behind your back, installed my new jewelry and placed me in the back of the car, after much stumbling. I felt extreme embarrassment as a lot of the neighbors came out and were watching the proceedings. The drive down to the jail was long and extremely uncomfortable. A lot of us have been through the booking process so I won't go into that, but just know I was miserable and drunk and trying to make light of the whole thing. I don't remember what I blew BAC wise but I remember the office saying "Wow, I thought you should be unconscious at this point."

The next 18 hours were terrible. I couldn't get a cup to get a drink; I had to use the plastic bag my little care kit came in. I couldn't sleep, my head was pounding with the hangover, I tried to eat but puked it right up. I felt defeated. Finally bail out and another friend who picked me up told me I looked terrible and I stunk. I definitely could tell and that applied to my whole life. It stunk. Long story short, the friend whose house I was at testified I drank a bunch very quickly upon arriving at his house, the police never saw me driving and I got a decent lawyer(who I still owe an amends too) so the DUI charge was dismissed. Teflon Taylor, right there. You might think I would've learned my lesson, but you'd be wrong. That's not how my alcoholism works. I wasn't ready at that point so I just took a short break and picked up where I left off, as per usual. I made up with the wife with empty promises(they weren't empty in my mind) and we continued on with life, if you could call it that.

My drinking stayed steady and didn't really escalate for a while. But, then along came cocaine. I picked up a pretty bad habit after being reintroduced to it at a party. After a certain point it became my obsession. It slowed my brain down, something that could finally make my thoughts less jumbled. On top of that I would take any and all Vicodin, Percocet, whatever I could con, lie to get, or steal. This was my life for several years. Going from job to job, always falling into some other job to keep the habit going. My whole household was miserable. My daughter would half the time be embarrassed by me,

my behavior. The other half she'd like because I would just throw money at anything she wanted. There was no forethought in anything I did. Just get what I needed when I needed it.

January 4, 2016 was the day that started my final spiral into addiction. I had just gotten home from work and received a call from my sister. "Dad has collapsed at the hotel and isn't responding to the paramedics." I will never forget that call. The other thing I won't forget is that I was too high and drunk the night before to answer when he called. That still haunts me to this day. My dad was my hero. In the previous ten years his health had really gone downhill. He could hardly walk, he had dialysis three times a week and he was effectively blind. And for a man who loved his reading this was especially painful and difficult for him. He and my step mother were in the process of moving from Washington to Utah and were at the hotel just for one last night before moving into their brand new home. He got to eat his favorite food, Mexican, right before this happened.

My first phone call was to my best friend for moral support. My second was to my coke dealer to spot me a bill until tomorrow. It was going to be a rough night. I had to be numb. The beer was flowing, the lines were forming, the pot was burning. Numb was on its way. One of my brothers was there, staying at my house at the time – he has his own issues – and while I was crying and wailing I saw him just standing there. No emotion on his face. I was always treated as the baby of the family and this just cemented it in my head. I was pissed, lashing out at him a bit. We all show emotions in different ways, I just couldn't look past myself, as usual. I had just lost my final parent. I felt something break inside me that evening but the worst wasn't even here yet. That month sucked. My sisters, one brother and I all went down for the funeral in Utah. I got sufficiently shnokered before heading to the airport and on the flight down, relying on others to drive once there. Always relying on others to pick up the slack for me; a common theme throughout my life. Being there for moral support to get the arrangements set wasn't too bad, but my thoughts were on getting a bottle due to the Utah liquor laws. I made it my goal and like normal, when booze is involved, I succeeded. Have you ever attended an event at a Mormon church while heavily buzzed? I have more times than I'd like to admit, but this was the worst. I cried like a baby during the viewing, not wanting to believe he was gone. The second time I remember crying since I was 8, the first being the day we got the news he was gone.

After the funeral, we all went to someone's house, my stepmother has family in that area, I stayed to myself, going out to the car several times to refill my drink. I wasn't fooling anyone but I didn't care. I wasn't feeling much by this point. That night, at the hotel – they comped us rooms since he died there – I started going off on my brother about how the three of them always looked down on me, how they always treated me like a child, how no one ever told me mom had died. I was in rare form, exuberantly stating my point. I was never a violent drunk, but I could get talking. I am extremely remorseful now that that was the last conversation I had with him. Before he went to prison.

Upon returning home, my youngest sister was having a reception as she had just gotten married in December. The whole family showed up, something that is very rare these days. All except for my middle brother, the one from the hotel blabbering. His wife and all his kids were there, though, so that was quite odd. As we were preparing to leave his wife came and gave me a hug and said I'm sorry, Taylor. I asked "For what?" She didn't say anything and I left confused. Until I was driving home. Another brother called and asked if I could come back. I had just slammed a drink on my drive and really didn't want to so I said no. One of the few times I had said no to anything. I was told to stay home and that they'd be right there. Turns out my middle brother was arrested the day before for crimes that I don't need to go into, let's just say it involved someone under 18 years old. I believe that this was the straw that broke me. I went into a massive downward spiral. I didn't think it was possible but my behavior got even worse. Hanging out with people I would normally never want to be

around. Ignoring my family, ignoring any responsibility, losing my awesome job because I would purchase things on their account that I didn't need and without permission.

Although I never touched heroin and only experimented with meth (it was too good and I knew I would get stuck if I continued) anything else was fair game. I would leave my house without saying anything, which led to my wife finally filing for divorce. That wasn't a surprise; the only surprising thing was that it took her 19 years to do so. I was hardly talking to my brothers and sisters; the only family I had left. I was pushing friends away, pushing everyone away, unless you had something I wanted. This madness lasted until September 16, 2016. My wife had finally thrown me out, I got myself fired from the place I was working for stealing money. I picked my daughter up on that last day, took her to the mall before her dance class to let her buy a few things. I knew, subconsciously that the end was nigh, one way or another. I dropped her off at dance class, called my dealer, and called a friend to see if I could crash on his couch.

I was miserable, depressed. I was at rock bottom. I had finally reached the end of my rope. I was out of options. I had thrown everything I loved in my life away. I couldn't think of any reason to keep living. So, I just needed to find a way out. I didn't have a gun, scratch that off the list. I couldn't bring myself to cut myself, scratch. I didn't have a garage to get carbon monoxide poisoning, scratch. Then I remembered the Seward Highway is one of the most dangerous roads in America. I could drive head on into an eighteen wheeler. The driver might get hurt but surely I would die. I had my mind set for the following morning, checking the traffic cameras to see when the heaviest and lightest amount of traffic would be. I didn't want to hurt anyone else; I just wanted to be gone. I was done, I was worthless, I gave nothing positive to society. Or so my mind was telling me. I woke up that morning on my friend's couch. Nowhere to be, no one to care, with nothing. I showered, wrote a note to my friend saying thank you and left his house, I thought for the last time. Getting in my truck, it stank of the Mikes Harder Blood Orange drink that had spilled the night before. I grabbed it and drank the rest, throwing the empty in the bed of my truck, cracking open another immediately. I drove off, thinking of my plan and when to do it. I started crying out of nowhere. Thinking of my daughter and how I'd miss seeing her grow up and have a family, but I was just a drain on her life and she'd be better off without me. I'm sure my ex-wife would be grateful this giant burden was finally gone out of her life. I figured the few friends I had left would think of me on occasion but would be fine. The thoughts in my head were painful and dark and I thought at the time totally correct. Everyone would be better off with me gone. I was sobbing, driving around aimlessly. But right as I was getting ready to head out on the highway, the miracle happened.

My youngest sister texted me. "Are you okay?"

I see this as my first miracle due to the fact that we hardly ever randomly texted each other. Birthdays and holidays? Sure. But a random Monday in September? Not the norm, at all. I immediately responded NO. I am very far from okay. There were tearful conversations back and forth. I called my therapist I hadn't seen in ages, hoping to leave a message but for some reason, she answered. I had never called and had her answer before. Miracle two. She instructed me to get a ride to Providence, but I was way ahead of her. I was driving myself there as we were talking. My sister had beaten me to the hospital and was talking to the admittance people and told me to wait in my truck for a few. I sat there smoking cigarettes and drinking my Mike's Harder Lemonades. I was exhausted, depressed, broken. I needed help and I was finally ready to ask for it and more importantly, ready to accept the help. Upon walking into admittance, I sat with the nurse and she started asking questions. In between sobs I could answer some questions, but thankfully they could tell I was broken, beaten and scared. I had no idea that Providence has basically what amounts to holding cells, but that's where I found myself that Monday. I had a pillow, a blanket and a camera staring down at me. I was unaware of much of anything

as they gave me something to help me sleep and I slept for 18 hours. I woke up looking at the camera and trying to figure out where I was. It all came rushing back to me. I just sat there still scared and completely uncertain what the future might hold.

Once the hospital staff noticed I was awake, they took me up to the psychiatric ward, and I soon found, the start of my new life. My first couple days in this ward were a blur, simply detoxing my body from the years and years of abuse I had done. The third day I was introduced to a Big Blue Book, this very book right here. Miracle number three. I absorbed this book immediately. I read through it once in the next couple days. It spoke to me unlike any book had ever done before. I could feel what they were saying in my heart. I could relate to nearly every story in here. I wasn't sure how I was going to do it, but I knew that I wanted the kind of life that was spoken of in here. A life second to none, one that was happy joyous and free.

The next few days passed all too quickly, but my sister had been busting her butt getting my next step in recovery set up. I learned I was headed to Lakeside Milam Treatment Center in Kirkland, WA. She flew down with me to ensure I didn't drink or use on the flight and to make sure I didn't run away. By this point, I probably would have used again but there was no way I was running away. I had finally had enough and this was the longest I had been sober in years – and we're only talking about seven days. I will admit I was scared as hell at the uncertainty ahead. I had never been to rehab, treatment, hell I hadn't even been to a single AA meeting. But, scared as I was, I knew I needed it, but even more, I wanted it. I desired it. I had to follow through, I would follow through. I was never so resolute than I was at that moment.

I could probably go for a full 45 minutes just on what I learned at treatment. I will just say this. The tools I acquired there, the support I gained there, the people I met there – my fellow inmates and the staff – are things I will never forget. I learned I can deal with other people, especially if I don't want to. I can push aside my anti-socialness, shove down my germaphobia, do whatever it takes to stay sober. I still work on a lot of this today, but it's so much better than it was. I learned that I can be a leader and I can think outside of myself.

I did 32 days in a 28-day program, always the overachiever, and this was probably the best month of my life so far. I never knew that what I learned there was possible, never thought I would be laughing again or as soon as I was. I probably couldn't tell you the last time I had a deep belly laugh unprovoked by booze prior to treatment. The greatest things I learned I can hardly put into words. I dealt with things from my past. I finally put into words how the whole situation with my mother made me feel, I didn't have to shove it all down deep inside myself any longer. I actually shared with a group of strangers how this all made me feel, I was able to recognize my addiction. I was taught that alcoholism is a disease. I fought that for a long time but there are scientific facts showing and proving this. There were so many things I learned there is no way I could share it all. I think the most important thing I learned was how to love myself, not resent myself.

Yeah, I screwed up in the past, I will be making amends for that for a long time as more things come back to me, my memory isn't what it used to be, but that's okay, I will get to them as I can. I was so angry with myself for all the things I had done that I wanted to die. Now I can forgive myself, which for me is the best. I hated myself for so long that I didn't feel I deserved to live. I don't hate me anymore. I despise some of the things I did but I was sick. I will always have this disease but I don't let it run my life any longer.

That is going to bring me to a subject very important to me. In fact it is the cornerstone of my recovery. Prayer and meditation. While I was down at treatment, my daughter ran away from home. It was only a few hours but I lost it. I finally knew what true powerlessness was. She was in Alaska, I was in Washington. I was crying and yelling back behind the building. One of the counselors came out and asked if I could keep it down, I was apparently scaring the new patients. I said no, I am hurting and can't do anything about it. So, he asked me if I prayed about it. Of course I said no, I hadn't done that since I was a kid. He asked if I would be willing to even try. I said sure, I guess. So, I went to my room and got on my knees for the first time in decades. Praying the only way I knew how, I had an immediate feeling of calmness spread through me. Once I gained my composure, I went back outside to apologize and I heard an announcement about a meditation session starting. I figured what the hell, why not? So, I went to that and the calm, peaceful feeling was compounded. Since that day, every morning and every night I get on my knees to pray. I will then do a meditation session depending on how much time I have, the meditation is how I let my higher power speak to me. You learn more listening than you do talking.

I can't offer you all much advice; I am still working this program myself. There was an AC (associate counselor) at the treatment center that hardly any one liked. She kind of looked like a witch. She was a stickler for the rules which any addict would have issues with. She told me that you have to work this program, do the steps, and get a sponsor but the most important thing you can do is go to meetings. It's a cliché but meeting makers make it.

If I can do this, you can do this. There is not much we cannot recover from if we are willing to let our higher power work for us. I can't, He can, I think I'll let him.

I hope my story might have helped you or shown you that there is hope. It sucks, it's hard but it is so worth it. Sponsor up, work the steps the best you can, get yourself to meetings. There are always people willing to give rides and even more are willing to answer the phone if you need to talk. Stay strong, love yourself and never forget you are worth it. Thank you for listening.