

# The Fourth Time Around

In 2000, at the age of 38, I had been practicing law for 12 years. You would have thought I was living the "American Dream." I was married, was blessed with three beautiful children and had a beautiful home and my own firm with three other lawyers. I remember friends telling me I was the luckiest man in the world. Every time I heard those words I would cringe, and rightfully so, because you see I had been living a double life for many years. I gave the impression to those around me that I was on top of the world. The stark reality was that I was moments away from entering my first treatment center.

The truth in 2000 was that I had been hiding the real me, a person who was an alcoholic, addict and compulsive gambler. My life was in shambles. I would like to tell you that after two months in my first treatment center I saw the light and was ready to take the appropriate action suggested. Things didn't go the way I had hoped once I returned. I put things I thought were more important ahead of my recovery. I started trying to save my marriage and my position with my law firm. I continued to lie to myself. I would tell myself if I could save my marriage and practice I would be okay. If others could only understand what I was going through, then they would understand why I did the things I did. I was still unwilling to look at the truth about me, that I was the problem, not those around me. Around this time a wise man told me anything I put ahead of my recovery I would lose. Unfortunately, I found this to be true the hard way.

The next five years can only be described as hell on earth. I went through a divorce, was fired from my firm, tried two more treatment centers and was in

and out of half-way houses. I would barely manage to maintain my CLE credits and license fees for my law license. I did not practice law during this five-year decline. There were numerous bottoms I reached. My relationship with my children suffered greatly, not to mention the harm I did to family and friends who truly loved me.

For most folks that would be close to the end of the story. Usually at this point is when the addict/alcoholic ends up dead, in jails or in mental institutions. I truly believe without a shadow of any doubt that the prayers of many loved ones and friends are the main reasons I am still here today. That includes Jeanne Marie Leslie, program director of the Alabama Lawyer Assistance Program (ALAP). Lord knows I gave Jeanne Marie countless reasons to walk away from me. I am grateful today that she saw good in me when I was unable to see it in myself. She, like many others, loved me when I was unable to love myself.

In June/July of 2005, the pain of addiction became unbearable. I had been living in a week-to-week motel. Each week was a challenge to pay the \$170 rent. I really don't know how long I was there. I was scared like I had never been scared before. On August 1, 2005, I am grateful my pain led me to the parking lot of my soon-to-be fourth treatment center.

It was a little after 6 a.m. and I was sitting in my car debating what to do. I called Jeanne Marie and, as always, she was there for me. She instructed me to go inside and admit myself. I stayed there for 18 days and even though I had a better idea of where I needed to go at the end of my 18-day stay, Jeanne Marie, in her unique style, told me that a state-funded program, the one she had sug-

gested on several previous occasions to help me, had a bed waiting for me. She said I had been sick a long time and I needed long-term treatment; she also told me my best thinking is what got me here. This time she wasn't suggesting I go and I knew it wasn't up for discussion. Thank God I followed her direction.

While at the state-funded facility, God continued to put people in my life who were willing to guide me in recovery, provided I was willing to do my part. A local lawyer who graciously helps suffering lawyers through ALAP became my sponsor. He spent time with me and helped me look at the truth about me and then guided me in my recovery. He taught me how to live life free from addiction and he continues to be a major influence in my life today. I love him dearly. Through the help of ALAP, the lawyer who guided me, the workers and friends I met at that state-funded facility, friends and loved ones in numerous cities, a 12-step program, and the God of my understanding, I have remained free from my addictions since that time.

Today I have moved back home where my children live and I am a part of their daily lives. Our relationship is better than ever. Words cannot express my gratitude. My children teach me lessons each day on how to live life. I am practicing law once again. I am also able to share my experiences with others who suffer from the disease of addiction in hopes that they may find a new way of life in recovery.

As my lawyer friend told me before I moved back home, as I face life on life's terms don't forget to enjoy the journey. Today, thanks to those loved ones I have already mentioned and so many more, I am able to enjoy the journey of life. May God bless you all!