

Back – from the brink

**Nick learned about using drugs the hard way.
By the time he had his wake up call, it was almost too late.**

➤ It's one of those strange anniversaries of mine today. Seven years ago today I botched a hit in my groin that almost cost me my life. It did cost my left leg, but ultimately it probably saved my life as it led me to stop using drugs.

At that point in my life after 20 odd years of using various drugs, I had a very big habit and had given up any idea of ever stopping. Sooner or later I knew the drugs would kill me (as they had already, for most of my close friends) but I couldn't see any way out. I'd had countless attempts at stopping, but these were all followed by failure and an even greater sense of hopelessness.

Immediately following the hit, I knew I was in serious trouble with a pretty good idea that I was going to lose the leg. It had become completely immobile and was turning a dark purple colour – and it was accompanied by a level of pain that I had not believed possible.

Throughout that day and night in hospital I was given massive doses of diamorphine without any relief. The surgeons operated the following morning to try and unblock the arteries in my leg, but it was no use and my kidneys had now packed up as a result of poisons from my leg. Into the bargain, my liver function was poor due to hepatitis, I had shingles running right around my chest, unhealed sores at various locations round my body and I needed daily blood transfusions, as I was so anaemic.

Apparently, my sisters, brothers and my Mum were telling each other that maybe it would be for the best if I did not make it. Anyhow, at that point I decided that if I lived then maybe this would be my last chance to stop, as I knew I'd be in hospital for a number of months. I was put on a large dose of methadone and after some difficulties with the local Substance Misuse service I was allowed to control when I reduced my methadone. I was in hospital for three months and managed to come off the methadone completely in that time, although I did use on top a few times in the early weeks. When I look back now I think that it was probably not the best time to detox, as I was still quite ill and had to have dialysis every second day. But it worked out, and I haven't used drugs since.

The first year was hard as I had daily cravings, and at times I just could not think of anything but drugs. I still did not believe that I could stay clean and thought that I would inevitably 'fuck up' at some point. As time went by I started to realise that it really was just up to me whether I used drugs or not. I have coped with many things without using drugs.



'Apparently, my sisters, brothers and my Mum were telling each other that maybe it would be for the best if I did not make it... At that point I decided that if I lived then maybe this would be my last chance to stop.'

I've faced up to disability, my partner's death, constant physical pain and some very traumatic brain surgery and not returned to heroin.

I feel proud of what I have got through and of what I have achieved in the last seven years. One of the best moments for me was when my Mum told me how proud she was of me. At last I have started to make up for all the pain, worry and misery that I put her through.

In some ways the last six months have been the most difficult, as my health has been bad and I had

to take a step back from some of the things I was doing in my life. I've had to start taking strong painkillers, which have had unpleasant side effects. At times, this has been depressing, but I am just starting to feel like I may have turned the corner.

Drug addiction really does not even feel like an issue for me any more. I do not use drugs as my life is better when I don't use them. I do not need any convoluted theory of what addiction is or is not; nor do I need complicated programs or religion. My life is better when I don't use drugs, so I don't use drugs.