

Addiction: My Path From Suffering To Recovery



PERSONAL
REFLECTION

**CHRISTOPHER
GENOVESE**

Growing up on Long Island was a very pleasant experience for me. I had great parents, a wonderful older brother and many friends surrounding me all of the time.

Throughout middle school and into high school, I began to feel that something was missing. Even though I was a "popular" kid, I still had the need to feel like I fit in. During middle school, I had social anxieties when I went out with friends. I was very sensitive to the general teasing that kids do with each other, and I would hold onto every little thing that was said and it would change my mood.

In high school, I would drink alcohol on the weekends to look cool, and this is what we kids thought was fun. The drinking relaxed me.



At left: St. Francis stands watch over St. Christopher's Inn.

I could talk to others more easily, and it helped me not care what others thought of me.

During college, I lived by the motto "live hard, play hard."

I was always concerned how things looked on the outside

— what I was doing, who I was dating. I was always concerned with what others thought of my life. I always made the exterior look good while something was always not quite right within myself. My occasional cocktails and use of recreational drugs helped numb all of that. I kept up my appearances well. I always had a job that was involved with medicine, and eventually my journey led me to medical school.

It appeared to others that I was on a good path in life, but I was actually in the darkest time of my life. I used and abused drugs to numb feelings. My problem became apparent to others, but I was so ashamed and in such denial I never wanted to give in and get help.

Dreams I had for myself vanished because of my deep denial and drug use to escape reality. In my life, there were a lot of emotional events just like everyone else has, I just dealt with them in a very unhealthy manner until I hit bottom.

The upside of my life was actually just beginning as I finally asked for help.

After my father's death, I was good for a while, but then became an emotional wreck as time went on.

I reached out to a place that I was already familiar with that would give me the peace I lost. That place is St. Christopher's Inn in upstate Garrison (stchristophersinn-graymoor.org).

There, I was able to see what was inside of me. I didn't love myself for a long time. I let my thoughts and feelings about how others viewed

me, my own co-dependency and my lack of self-esteem dictate my life. I decided to make a drastic change. I stayed there for five months, and I talked about everything that bothered me. I laughed and I cried. I got myself back to my age of innocence, when I was a young teenager who was happy surrounded by family and friends.

It is no secret that here on Long Island there is an epidemic affecting men and women. Many are young. I see this every day being in Recovery, being someone who intervenes, and being someone who helps the entire family get through this terrible disease. I offer help by telling them my story; they identify with me; and I help guide them towards help.

It would be hard for me to imagine that every single person who struggles with substance dependency on mind-altering drugs does not have feelings similar to those I once had about myself. I can completely identify with the complexity of expressing these feelings to anyone. The inside feelings of how any drug addict or alcoholic perceives themselves is usually in a dark and distant place.

The deaths are uncountable, as are the wakes I have attended of my friends and other families, and the number keeps growing across Long Island from the disease of addiction.

Many families are seeking a solution. The solution comes from within that person to be able to speak up at a young age about what is affecting them, what is making them depressed, what hurts their self-esteem. It is never a parent's fault when a child turns to a life of drugs, and often the child is the last person to recognize the problem.

Through all of my medical training and life experience, I have never seen a disease more complex and hard to deal with as the disease of addiction.

The beautiful thing about this is that I know there is hope. I know through speaking and listening that a child can feel as beautiful as at the age of their innocence.

My regards and love to all the families who have lost someone.

Christopher Genovese is a resident of Garden City who speaks to family and school groups about addiction and offers help to addicts and their families. Email: cvgenovese@gmail.com. Phone: 516-368-6497.



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