

FINDING YOUR WAY

ONE MAN'S SEARCH FOR SANITY,
SOBRIETY AND SUCCESS

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FINDING YOUR WAY: One Man's Search for Sanity, Sobriety and Success
by Dr. David Marley, Pharm.D.
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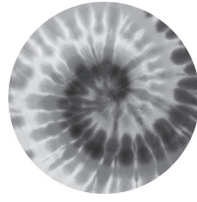


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**HOOKE
D,
LINES &
SECOND
CHANCES**

“Casey Jones”

I muddled through my sophomore year in pharmacy school with a fairly decent run of B's, and took a job bartending at DiMaggio's Bar when I moved back home with Mom and Dad during the summer of 1987. It was the hometown bar where the locals hung out before work, during work, and after work, tripling in crowd size when all the college kids came home on breaks.

DiMaggio's was your typical Upstate NY bar in an old brick building with equally scuffed hardwood floors, probably no more than twenty or thirty feet wide. Neon bar signs flickered, the toilets seemed always on the verge of overflowing, and the air was exactly what you'd expect when everyone inside chain-smoked like fiends. There was a pool table and a DJ who played everything from Bon Jovi to the Bangles, depending on the crowd.

Old Man DiMaggio was like a character out of *The Godfather*. He sat at the end of the bar and read the local paper, sipping on Dewar's and water, shooting the breeze with his customers. He was happy as long as the cash register was ringing.

"Davey, how you doin'?" he'd say every time I showed up for work. Not waiting for my answer, he'd add, in his thick Sicilian accent, "Make sure you take the money and put it in the cash *regish*. You don't put it in your pocket."

He watched me like a hawk. He never hid the fact that he expected me to steal from him, but I never did. Not really.

I did trade drinks for dope, though.

"Hook me up with drinks, I'll hook you up with a gram." I got that a lot. Cocaine flowed freely in this little Italian town, and I was making a couple hundred bucks a night, so I could afford it when I couldn't trade for it.

I started my junior year of pharmacy school with a pretty strong cocaine addiction and some serious alcoholic tendencies. Although I had signed a contract to live in the dorms, I jumped when a spot opened up at the Tau Kappa Epsilon house.

It wasn't your typical fraternity house. Like most colleges in 1987, the University of Buffalo was still reeling from the '70s anti-war stuff, and official frat houses weren't allowed on campus. Instead, eight guys from the same fraternity rented a two-story house near the bars and hosted parties there.

Before I moved in, I had to break my contract with housing. The only way out was to plead financial hardship, so I got to work.

I called my high school buddy, the one I confronted about bullying me and whose dad worked at Remington Arms, the factory in my hometown. "Larry, can you get me some letterhead from Remington?"

Larry came through, and soon I'd typed the perfect, most official-looking letter: "Per your request, I am submitting this letter to let you know that your father was laid off from his position at Remington Arms due to temporary cutbacks. We apologize for any financial inconvenience this has caused."

It was so easy for me to scam my way out of housing. But what did it get me? A God-awful room in that filthy frat house. It wasn't even a bedroom; it was a glassed-in front porch with no heat and enough cracks for snow and ice to make it through. They were nice enough to give me a space heater, but one night I shoved it out of the way, and it melted the paint off of my dresser. I'm lucky I didn't burn down the house. None of that mattered, though—that room put me close to the bars and at the heart of all the best parties on campus.

The bars in Buffalo closed at 4 o'clock in the morning and classes, started at 8. That became a problem for me. If given the choice of staying in and studying so that I'd be prepared for class, or hitting PJ Bottoms and Third Base for \$2 pitchers and wings, school quickly became optional.

After a night of alcohol only, it was possible for me to wake up and decide if I could make it to class, depending on whether or not I felt like puking. If I had added weed the night before, the probability of waking up on time the next day decreased a bit. But on the nights when coke was on the menu, forget about it: school wasn't happening.

During Christmas break back home, I was behind the bar again at DiMaggio's, binging on coke to the tune of a gram every night. For three weeks, I hit it before I walked into the bar, again as soon as I started my shift, I found an excuse to run to the bathroom to keep the snoot going, and made sure to plan for more after I clocked out. Whatever my night's tips totaled, that's what I'd spend on coke.

Second semester will be different, I assured myself, broke and coked out of my mind. I'll settle down. Focus. And everything will get better.

**Your words mean nothing
when your actions are the
complete opposite.**

But it didn't.

Back at school, I found a new Italian-run bar called Mickey Rats. Carmine, the bouncer, had Buffalo mob connections and gave me the hookup on all the coke I wanted. I wanted it all, and school became near impossible to keep up with.

Spring Break that year was insane. I drove with a few buddies through the night to Fort Lauderdale, drinking and partying all the way down. We didn't have reservations anywhere, but one of the guys had big-talked the whole way and said we could stay with some people he knew. Typical plans made by drunks. I had already blown most of the money I'd made over Christmas break, so I didn't ask too many questions about the details.

I don't know how we made it, but we finally pulled into a random apartment complex and passed out on the loungers by the pool. One of the guys didn't wake up until late the next day, burned to a crisp on his right side, still white as a ghost on the other.

It felt like one of those buddy movies where the friends fall into mishap after mishap, somehow escaping death and prison, and it all eventually turns out great in the end. But even in my compromised state, I had serious concerns about making it back from Fort Lauderdale alive.

We started hitting the bars and partying hard as soon as we rallied, and I happened to meet an older guy in the bathroom of The Candy Store.

“Hey,” he struck up a conversation, as you do at a urinal. “You and your buddies here looking to score coke?”

“Oh yeah!” I replied.

“Then we’ve got to get out of here real quick,” he ordered, grabbing my arm. I didn’t even have time to wash my hands.

A few minutes later, we were chatting at the bar when six cops ran by and rushed the bathroom. Whoa. That was close. How did he know?

“Dude, you just saved my butt.” I trusted him immediately.

“No big deal.” He waved away my thanks. “I like to have fun with all you college kids.” He pulled the woman next to him close. She was six feet tall, at least.

“How would you like to have fun with me and my girl? We’re going to drive down toward Miami to pick up some pink Peruvian flake. Want to come?”

We were in central Florida during the era of *Miami Vice*. The way I’d envisioned Spring Break included me snorting the best coke on the planet, but I had less than \$300 in my pocket. This guy had me at pink Peruvian flake, which would have cost me triple that, at least.

I left without telling my buddies and spent the next two days freeloading like a pro. Forty-eight hours of coke, alcohol, and sex. When I finally got back to Fort Lauderdale and found my friends, it took just one night in the bars, paying for my own drinks and drugs, and I was broke.

Broke.

In more ways than one.

**They say money doesn't
bring you happiness. I say,
neither does being broke.**

I scrounged some change and called my sister from a payphone. "I'm in Fort Lauderdale with three days left and I'm broke. Send me some money!"

"Are you kidding me?" she yelled. "What's the matter with you?"

She begrudgingly sent me \$50 through Western Union, and I made it last. I lived on one slice of pizza a day and got as many drinks in me as I could so I could pass out on whatever pool lounge I could find. Finally, we decided it was time to head back to New York.

Just five hours into our drive back to school, we hit up a bar and got completely wasted. Regardless, we all piled into the car, drunk and still drinking, and I started driving again. Right away, I drunkenly veered into the next lane and almost hit an oncoming car. Before I knew it, the car I'd almost hit made an illegal U-turn, pulled up next to our car, and started yelling at me. I chucked the beer bottle I had in my hand at them, and it hit the guy in the face.

"Pull over!" he yelled. So, we did.

We threw hands until we were all exhausted, then got back in the car and made it back to Buffalo. I woke up the next morning and wondered why my fists were sore. When I looked in the mirror and saw the bloody, bruised marks on my face, I remembered.

Usually, the post-bender crash was pretty intense for me; I'd fall into a deep depression when I'd come down. This particular time, I felt more hopeless than I ever had before, but then I got notice that I was failing every single one of my classes. Failing.