

Gareth Chamber's walk from addiction



Part 1

Gareth Chambers, a former employee at DWR Distribution, is out of rehab and starting his life anew. "I didn't know what rehab was all about and had preconceived ideas," he is the first to admit. "I didn't want to go, but I think I knew deep down that I needed to."

In the entertainment industry, addiction is common. "I wanted to share my story, not for a pat on the back, but hopefully there is someone who can identify and who may be going through the same thing. It's a tough industry with long hours, high pressure and often being away from home. Much of the time, alcohol, drugs and even over-eating is a coping mechanism. My message is that if you have a niggle in your mind that something is wrong, it's not a niggle. Something is wrong. If I can do it, you can do it too."

Gareth was booked in at the Wedge Gardens Treatment Centre in Lyndhurst on 30th April 2018. The centre offers a holistic approach to rehabilitation to equip patients to reintegrate with their families and the community at large once again. "I would recommend rehab, yet having said that, with the costs involved and putting your life on hold for an undetermined amount of time is just not always viable. There are, however, numerous meetings, outpatient programs and support groups. Most people don't realize how much help is out there, but in the same breath it's what you make of it," said Gareth. "You have to want the help and want to make the change. If you don't want it, somebody else can't fix you." On the 30th August 2018, after three months, he returned to the real world and is attending supportive meetings on his road to recovery.

The drug dealers are still on the corner, and the bottle stores are still there. "But if you are following the recovery programme and sticking to it, there is a new life out there," he said. "Some people don't follow the programme and relapse because they think they can do it on their own. Before your addiction, you feel alone, but you find that other people in the recovery programme are going through the same issues and feelings as you are. So, you identify with them and you don't feel so alone."

With any addiction, there is something deep inside that just doesn't sit right with the world and the way you feel and interact with people. "For me, most of that came from childhood. There are people with horror stories, but I

don't have one – I come from a good home. But it definitely stems from when I was a kid, feeling inadequate.”

While admittedly a bit of a rebel, Gareth was opposed to drugs and only took his first fix at the age of 28. That said, from his school days until he recently celebrated a fortieth birthday just prior to booking in at rehab, his life revolved around alcohol, drugs, cigarettes and girls. “The more broken relationships I had, the more I felt I didn't fit in, and I found more ways not to care and to not feel. I think at the end that was it... I didn't want to feel anything anymore.”

At the end of his rope, Gareth could see the pain he was causing his family, friends and his self. “I didn't want to live in that place anymore. For me, rehab saved my life.”

At a cross road, Gareth lost his job, his car and very nearly his home. But thankfully he found his life again.

“There are five-star hotel rehab centres and the State ones,” said Gareth. “The Wedge Gardens was meeting the right people at the right time. If you are considering rehabilitation, you have to do it from the heart. While it may seem noble to do it for your spouse or children, it will only work if you are doing it for yourself.”

No magic wand will stop you from being an addict. “You don't become an alcoholic or addict overnight, and nobody is going to ‘fix’ you,” he has learnt. “You're going to have to put the work in, and part of that is getting real with yourself. In the end, though, it leaves you with a sense of freedom and release.”

Gareth is back home again, attending AA and NA supportive meetings, running and cycling. Lior Manelis from rental company Pristine Moods has appointed Gareth as a lighting designer and technician and has been very supportive. “For the first time I'm living life instead of going through the motions, living life on life's terms, not trying to control everything,” said Gareth. “You see things different when you are sober. The sky is clear and the fog is gone. It takes a while for the fog to disappear, but when it does, things have a totally different perspective.”

The most significant problem with addiction is that we are inherently selfish people in the sense that they are always looking for a place or person to lay the blame. At least for me. “You get very resentful of people and resentment is the number one killer in addiction,” said Gareth. “Now I've stopped living my life for me, and I'm living my life for other people... and that makes me happy.”

Part 2

Sex, Drugs, Booze and Rock n' Roll

Gareth Chambers tells his story

What happened, what I was like and what I'm like now.

From the earliest time in my childhood I can recall always feeling different from all the other kids. That I didn't quite fit in.

That feeling of inadequacy that began to rear its head in my life, grew into a tornado that ripped through the lives of everyone around me, leaving a trail of destruction.

I come from a small tight-knit family... my father, mother, aunt, brother and myself, the black sheep. We had our disfunction, like every family does, but there was never any great upheaval in my upbringing. I am blessed with

parents who are still married after 52 years. It was a working-class family and we never had loads of money but my brother and I never wanted for anything, and my parents provided for us and raised us to the best of their ability and handed down knowledge. There's no manual or toolbox for raising kids or keeping a family together.

Good morals, values, honesty, respectfulness, work ethic and good Christian principles were instilled in us from early childhood. My childhood, for the most part, was filled with adventure, laughter, happiness and love. There was never any arguing, shouting or swearing. However, I always had this feeling that a lot was left unsaid, and I somehow felt that I wasn't good enough, as accomplished or smart as my brother.

I guess things started to go astray for me early on in primary school. I was always a small kid, but keen and eager to participate, fit in and be *one of the gang*. I, however, was never really good at team sports and always found myself on the reserve team or the bench, even though I gave it my best shot. I was an average pupil in my grades but never really excelled at anything, so I never felt good enough. I began to start to think and act differently.

Fear started to creep into my life, fear of what people thought of me, judgement, opinions, criticism, fearing to try anything lest I get rejected or fail. Fear is a slow growing progressive cancer that starts to infect every area of one's life and leads to deep seeded resentments. Resentment is the "number one" offender. It destroys more addicts and alcoholics than anything else. From it stem all forms of spiritual disease.

I began listening to 80's Rock n' Roll, which was all about drinking, drugs, sex, excess, rebellion and because of this, automatically labeled a devil worshipper. I remember in guidance and bible education classes being called a Satanist. How ridiculous, but it began to cultivate my aversion to religion and anything GOD orientated. I began to feel more and more an outcast and different.

It was in standard 4 – 5, (Grade 6 -7) when I began to start experimenting, drinking, smoking and being sexually active with my girlfriend at the time – an early bloomer. I was far too young to be indulging in sex and intimacy and had no understanding or any emotional maturity to deal with it. This confused the concept between love and intimacy and lust and sex. I began to see sex as acceptance and being wanted and worthy. The lines had begun to start blurring for me and the first pale horse of obsessive, compulsive, co-dependent behavior reared its head.

At high school I really started to nurture my rebellious behavior and dislike for authority and institutions. My first two years I spent tormented and bullied by a group of older "cool kids". This cultivated my fear of groups and social interaction, what people thought of me or what they possibly were going to do, or what I imagined they thought or were going to do.

So, my friends and I gravitated to the smoker's corner – we were the ones who weren't the 'in', cool kids, but rather the dodgy, dysfunctional crowd. There was a shebeen near where we lived at the time, we would pool our money together for the weekends, and my friends would send me to buy the quarts. This made me feel accepted, useful. We would lie to our parents about where we were staying on the weekends and what we were up to and off we'd go to Emmarentia Dam to stash our booze. Lying, deceiving, wearing different masks had already started early in my life and I was beginning to master it by High School. We'd head of Roxy's Rhythm Bar in Melville to watch bands and get wasted. Then we'd head back after closing time to the dam, get our stash, and drink it up there until the morning.

I remember drinking wasn't the same for me as everyone else. It gave me a sense of ease and comfort. After a drink I felt confident, outgoing, fun and I could now talk to and manipulate girls. I had found something that made me feel all the things I wasn't, and the fear would leave. It felt like the solution and that I was part of something. I was lying and deceiving, drinking, smoking and having sex. Wasn't I ahead of the curve? As far as I understood wasn't this what grownups did? I felt better than "those other people!"

We began searching for greater thrills and escalated to stealing our parent's cars when they were away. Bearing

in mind we were fourteen or fifteen years old at the time. We would go joyriding, drinking, picking up girls and going to places all over Joburg where we were obviously totally underage for and should never have been at. The recklessness of adolescents and danger of it all. My parents were oblivious of my escapades and what I was up to. Doing what I wanted, when I wanted, to get what I wanted to with no regard for anyone else. In fact, wasn't it owed to me? Life is shit after all and out to get us.

The road trip to selfishness, self-seeking, dishonesty, inconsideration, arrogance and fear had started to get some mileage and gain momentum, and I was good at it!

The rest of my High School consisted of changing schools, starting Maui Thai, which allowed me to be aggressive and start fights, getting suspended, etc. My school career pretty much continued like this.

After High School I took a gap year, as I had no idea who I wanted to be or what I wanted to do with my life. I remember feeling terrified at this prospect, as everyone around me and all my friends were planning their futures to go off to university or college.

I was, however, fortunate to travel. I had worked four jobs in my final year of school to raise the money and off I went. I look back on that travelling as one of the happiest, most awe inspiring, exciting times of my life. Yet I was still plagued with drinking binges, casual, meaningless sex to make me feel accepted and to fit in. Wasn't that what you did on your travels anyway? I was living life to the full.

When I returned to South Africa I started my studies at the advice of my parents in Sound Engineering. I also got involved in a long-term relationship with a girl I had been good friends with at school and who I thought I knew very well.

The next few years were interspersed with studies and jobs, drinking, fighting, being held at gun point numerous times, victim of robberies and the underlying feeling of inadequacy. So, the two of us packed up our things, and immigrated to the UK. Believing we'd leave our problems behind, we went to live in Manchester. But where you go, there you are, and a change of scenery doesn't fix the problems within one.

In hindsight, deciding to leave the only friends I knew and family to live in a place that promotes work, drink, work, visits to the pub with constant raining and grey skies, was not one of the smartest of choices for someone who suffers from depression and a deep self-loathing. This was one of the unhappiest times of my life and I drank a lot to "cope." Needless to say, two years later we returned to South Africa.

On my return, I managed to get a job in the field I'd studied for and my girlfriend started teaching. We bought a two-bedroom townhouse, furnished it, bought myself a nice car, got a dog, had disposable income and did what seemed to be the logical next step, and got engaged. I was twenty-five. Things were going well and I'd arrived. Was I not taking the next step expected of me, was I not doing what people and the society expected of me? Yet for all the possessions, sacrifice, hard work and doing what was "expected" of me I still felt empty, unworthy, misunderstood and unappreciated. This was gasoline on the fire of my resentments.

There were drunken episodes and outburst, horrific fights, tantrums, emotional abuse and undermining from both sides.

Work was great, however at this period, and I applied myself, worked hard with long hours, days away and roadshows with little sleep. I was doing well and learning a lot. The company was growing and I was promised partnership. The problem is expectation and the feeling of being let down, because expectation is a dangerous path to tread. This never materialized. However, work was exciting and I was starting to live up that Rock n' Roll lifestyle I wished so much for as a teenager. You know the old saying, "be careful what you wish for!" I could now have a job which promoted drinking with the clients, partying, and meeting new women, being away from home and travelling. It was great. I felt interesting, accepted and filled with false courage. The truth was I was so full of fear that someone would see right through the façade and see how I was faking it, that they'd see I

wasn't any good, or that I'd fail.

Eventually the inevitable happened and the relationship with my fiancé came to an end. The separation was ugly to put it mildly and got very unpleasant, eventually ending up with lawyers. At the time this completely made me disillusioned with people, their integrity and whether or not you really ever truly know someone and can trust them. Not to mention the legal system and life being fair. I felt cheated and unfairly treated. My anger and resentment had now become a scorching forest fire. Fear, worthlessness, inadequacy was the kindling. I'd lost everything I'd worked for and gained, my possessions, my money, my belief in love and people, the justice system, my home, my self-respect, my identity. I swallowed my pride and went to live with my family again.

Of course, in the time after that, I filled those feelings with a few flings here and there, drinking, partying and my work. I ended up in another relationship, terrified of being alone and thinking to myself that nothing could be as bad or end up like my previous relationship.

It started off as a wild rollercoaster ride of highs and lows! We drank, we partied, and I tried drugs for the first time at the late age of 28. Desperately seeking her approval and acceptance at the expense of anyone and anything else, my job, her child, my family and friends. It was completely co-dependent and I was totally needy and seeking affirmations. The relationship was rife with jealousy and mistrust from the get go. We were sailing turbulent waters from the onset. Filled with extreme highs and devastating lows it was totally dysfunctional and narcissistic.

Now not only was I resentful, devastated, hurt but I was angry and spiteful and as mad as a demon released from hell at the world. I blamed everyone, hated everyone and was going to do what I wanted at the expense of anyone who got in my cross hairs.

Partying, drinking, drugging, random one-night stands, new friends and people that could help sustain the life style. Isolation of real friends and family. I also now had the access to the drug that could get me through work and the long hours. The myriad of ways addicts find to justify our reasons and actions. It was during this time I ended up in a relationship with another addict and alcoholic. This went on for four years of sponsoring each other with drugs and drink, stealing from each other, lying, cheating, emotional blackmail, abuse and wreckage. My life was out of control, I was suicidal and desperate, but I could stop on my own.

It was at this point I decided to come clean to my family and friends about the drugs. I stopped using, but was still drinking. I had my own flat, resigned myself to being on my own, changed jobs to something more stable and regular working hours and things seem to be on track. I was doing well at work, reconnecting with family and friends, my finances were getting back in order and I was dealing with the past. This was the illusion, I believed. I was 'white-knuckling' it – a clean addict. It is one thing being clean and sober and, of course, that is the first step towards recovery. But it is a very different thing living in recovery and being active in others' lives and my own recovery.

As I mentioned, I was clean, but the problem hadn't changed. And the problem was me. I was still looking externally for solutions, for validation and purpose. My character defects were still with me; selfishness, self-seeking, dishonesty and inconsideration. I really was just a frightened boy inside. I got involved in a few relationships here and there but to be honest my heart wasn't in it and I wasn't emotionally invested. Sure, it satisfied the sexual need, but not the emotional.

It was about a year into my new job, being clean, that I was to get involved with the woman I fell head over heels for. That one that makes all the others blur into oblivion. I rode that pink cloud and bliss for a year, becoming more dependent on her to make me happy, evermore co-dependent, evermore narcissistic and neurotic. That old familiar feeling of inadequacy, not being worthy and fear of rejection crept back into my days... as if that was a surprise. But at the time it certainly seemed it. At first, I started increasing the amount I was drinking to bring about that old feeling of ease and comfort. Every now and again using when I could get away with it. Cunning,

baffling, powerful and a sneaky mother.....

My behaviour started to change, dishonesty crept in, lying, mistrust, missing work and deception. It goes without saying that she was on to me, people at work were suspicious, I could no longer hide it as well as I used to, and keeping up with my lies was catching up with me. The fact is I was starting to believe my own lies. She confronted me about it and, of course, as any addict does I lied and denied it. Well, at least until she caught me and I could no longer deny it. Once again, I was out on my arse again and living with my parents.

The next 3 years revolved around going to see an addiction counsellor, random tests, white knuckling and living between two homes. And soon, no matter how much I wanted to stop, no matter how many times I said 'the last time', no matter how sincere my apologies and promises were, I had become powerless over drugs and alcohol. I became needy, resentful towards her, expecting her to support and stick by me, angry and bitter and started blaming. The problem with pointing your finger at another is that there are always three pointing back at you. This is where it had taken me and how it made me treat the woman I loved. Self-sabotaging, self-destructiveness and the inevitability of addiction. That woman forgave me so many times, gave me so many chances, helped me and lifted me up so many times, made me accountable for my actions and I repaid her by breaking her trust, her support, her love through dishonesty, manipulation, resentment and selfishness.

When this ended I was devastated. Now, you'd like to think and believe that any normal person would, at this point, take personal inventory and realise the position they were in, where addiction had brought them, and simply stop. The key here is I said 'addiction' and that is the insanity of it. Doing the same thing over and over, expecting a different outcome. The insanity of 'never again' or 'the last time' or 'the last one'. The insanity of 'one is too much' and a 'thousand is never enough'. The insanity of believing you are in control and can stop.

I had a new position and work and new responsibilities, new creative projects on the go and a team to lead. This brought about new stresses and, of course, I needed that drink and that drug to get me through. To numb the pain, deal with the loss, the pressures, the responsibilities – *you would too, if your life was like mine, wouldn't you?* The pity party had begun again. The problem with the pity party is you don't invite anyone else.

I was drinking and using more and more. My behaviour had become erratic, I had become unreliable at work, I was aggressive towards people, hating and blaming everyone but the real problem. A real Jekyll and Hyde. People started to notice, I started to get warned at work, started to isolate myself from everyone. I didn't feel anything. No remorse, no compassion for others, just a void and complete apathy. That feeling of ease and comfort that it had brought had now become a living hell. My life had become an endless series of drinking, drugging, one-night stands, disappointments and deep self-loathing.

Eventually, it led me to where it always ends. Arrest, loss of job and the obsession and planning and carrying out of suicide. I was just another day closer to ending it all. God had abandoned me, my friends had abandoned me, my family didn't understand, the woman I had loved had rejected me and moved on. Work had cast me out, the police were unjust and unfair – what was there left to carry on for? I had lived my life, experienced amazing things, travelled, loved and lost, been successful and lost everything more than once, was rapidly approaching 40 and what did I have to show for it?

The sense of ease and comfort drugging and drinking had given me had disappeared and it had turned its ugly head on me. I spent my 40 birthday alone, isolated, jobless, hopeless and in my own personally constructed hell, wanting nothing more than for it all to end. The day after my 40th I sat down with my family at an intervention and it all came out. I knew I needed help. I was powerless over drugs and alcohol and my life was completely and utterly unmanageable. I couldn't control the drugs or alcohol anymore and they had total control over me. The denial I had been living in came crashing down, and the stark bleak reality of addiction was now my life.

Looking back at the fear, shame and guilt and feelings of hopelessness of that day, I thank God for the support

of my family and the friend that drove me to rehab and paid for my recovery. I owe them my life.

I, at this point, truly believe that the God of my understanding, higher power spirit of the universe intervened in my life out of my desperation and brought me to recovery. Too many variables and people came into my life to help and selflessly give of themselves to help me for it to be pure coincidence.

When I went into the NA and AA rooms I had this preconceived idea of what it was all about. That stereo typical Hollywood depiction. But what I found was people of all walks of life, status, race, sex, religion who felt and had gone through what I had been through. Here were people who 'got it' and 'had been there'. But, more importantly, who had recovered and were living life on life's terms. Who had freedom from self and release from dishonesty, who were happy and hopeful and had something I so desperately wanted.

Recovery is not for those that need it, but for those who want it and do it with all their hearts. They have a saying in NA that addiction ends in three places – jails, institutions or death. Two out of three was enough for me. I've never done half measures in my life and I did my mid-life crisis to the best of my ability. I stayed in rehab for 3 months and worked the programme with all my heart and, more importantly, took action. I attend meetings and have found something in the fellowship that I was seeking in drugs and liquor. A sense of ease and comfort. I know who I am for the first time in as long as I can remember and I'm good with him and content. I have a sponsor who helps me takes accountability and puts me straight when my EGO (erase God out) gets in the way and my character defects start up. I work the steps and I do them with honesty and my heart.

No addict or alcoholic became addicted overnight and each day has its challenges. I have to be aware and work at it every day. Not one of us, as a child, thought to ourselves I want to grow up and be an addict, so I remain vigilant, consistent and do what I'm supposed to do because I want to. But more importantly I have gone from belief to faith and hope. My self-will ran riot in my life so I hand myself over to the will of the GOD (good orderly direction) of my understanding.

The promises of the programme have begun to materialize in my life as long as I stay clean and sober and hand my life over to the care of my higher power. Renewed friendships, relationships, health, peace and freedom are just some of the gifts already. Some of these materialise quickly some slowly, there is no overnight fix or pill one can take, it takes time and effort. I am now grateful for the things and people in my life and the chance to start again and to help others. To be able to let go of resentments, fear and the past.

My hope is that this story resonates with someone who is fighting their own demons and the disease of addiction. That they know that they are not alone and that there is help and recovery, a life worth living and loving available to us all no matter what we've endured, experienced, people that have hurt us and who we have hurt along the way. No matter how far down the scale we have gone we will see how experience can benefit others. We will not regret the past, nor will we wish to shut the door on it. We cannot change the past, nor control the future, but we can have the life of recovery one day at a time – JUST FOR TODAY.

I leave you with the NA and AA prayer:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.

