

'I knew I was going down the wrong path'

RECOVERY continued
from front page

changes," she says. "Meth is what got me."

A family history of addiction led Clark to choosing partners with drug and alcohol issues. One abused prescription medication. Another was an alcoholic.

"The guy after that, he was addicted to meth," she says. "I was always trying to fix people, not realizing that I couldn't fix him."

A combination of a child custody fight with her ex-husband, domestic violence and family tragedies created the perfect storm.

"All of these stressors just added up," Clark says. "My boyfriend at the time used meth and always said I never would do anything he wanted. ... So, I decided to try it."

This led to a two-year downward spiral that began in 2015. Urged on by her boyfriend, who promised to take care of her, Clark quit her job. Two weeks later, he moved out. She asked her ex-husband to care for their four children and began living in her vehicle.

"I had to figure myself out," she says. "It wasn't my ex's fault that I did this. It was my fault and my fault alone. ... I knew I was going down the wrong path."

Living in her car and using drugs made Clark feel "like I was in a matrix. I wasn't sure what was real and what was not real. ... Mental health was also a huge part of my drug addiction."

During this time, court proceedings involving her children were ongoing. To help deal with the stress, Clark took Zanax while she was using meth. This came to a head when she was drug tested after court officials suspected she was high.

"I thought they would just take a urine sample and I would pass," Clark says. "But they took hair samples. I was bitter and had so much resentment about being called out for it."

Hair samples can detect if someone has used methamphetamines for up to 90 days, whereas a urine sample only covers up to four days.

"That wasn't even the turning point for me to get clean," she says. "I just couldn't forgive myself for the choices I was making."

Looking back, Clark realizes that many of her decisions to use drugs were a way to self-medicate and escape from early life traumas.

"I do a Facebook Live every Tuesday at 11 a.m. and a lot of things come from childhood trauma," she says. "People have to realize that it is not their fault and they are worthy of love. Society is very quick to judge people who use drugs without knowing the entire story."

One of the ways people who battle addictions cope is through sobriety meetings such as Narcotics Anonymous or Alcoholics Anonymous. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, those services switched to a mostly virtual formats in March 2020. A

Smoke Signals seeking recovery stories

Have you struggled with alcohol or drug dependency? Have you been able to find help through abstinence-based programs, medication-assisted treatment, behavior modification therapy, or a combination of things?

If so, *Smoke Signals* would like to hear your story. Reporter Danielle Harrison is writing a series on addiction and recovery, and she would like to talk to Tribal members who are in various stages of the recovery process.

What has worked for you and why? What services do you wish were more readily available? What are misconceptions people have about those who struggle with drug and alcohol misuse?

Your story is important and we would like to hear from you, no matter where you are in your recovery journey.

Please contact Danielle Harrison for more information at danielle.harrison@grandronde.org or call 503-879-4663. We also have a private Recovery Stories subgroup on the *Smoke Signals* Facebook page if you would like to join and share your story there. ■

combination of pandemic-related isolation, stress, financial problems and loneliness has led to many relapses during this time. Preliminary data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention project an increase of almost 30 percent in drug overdoses nationwide, from approximately 70,000 in 2019 to 100,000 in 2020, the highest number of overdose deaths ever recorded.

This is why Clark has been very grateful to be attending in-person Narcotics Anonymous meetings at Lighthouse Church in Grand Ronde, which are held Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday at 6 p.m.

"You really need that in-person interaction and accountability," she says.

Clark's first attempt to quit using meth came in 2016 after she called the police after an attempted break-in at her home.

"That was the kick start of looking at what I was going through," she says.

Although the first attempt resulted in relapse, which is very common, she didn't give up.

In May 2017, Clark was involved in a car crash in Sheridan. She hadn't used meth for a day, was dehydrated and exhausted, and fell asleep at the wheel.

"I was arrested and spent three days in jail," she says. "Quitting wasn't easy. I went through a lot of emotions and told a lot of people off."

She has been sober for four years now and says that continuing to be so requires a lifetime effort.

"You fight with it, to some degree or another, for the rest of your life," Clark says. "I don't have the urge now, but that doesn't mean it won't ever be there. Now I am on the road to recovery of my physical health as well. I take every day as 'just for today.' Sometimes I have to take it second by second. I don't want that lifestyle back ever again."

After being released from jail, Clark told the guard on duty, "You're not going to see me here

again." She remembers the woman replying, somewhat unconvinced, "We'll see."

A year later, Clark ran into the guard while shopping at Wal-Mart.

"I said, 'Remember me?' She said, 'No, should I?' I replied, 'I told you that you weren't going to see me in jail again.' I felt good being able to say that."

The road to recovery hasn't been an easy one. At one point, Clark lived at the Women's Transition House in Grand Ronde, which helps house women and women with children, and assists with their transition back into the community. It includes behavioral health, alcohol and drug counseling, post-treatment services and cultural support. However, that living arrangement didn't work out.

"I had a lot of times where I wondered why I was bothering," she says.

Ultimately undeterred, Clark kept plugging away at her recovery. She began working for the Tribal Employment Rights Office, moved in with a friend and secured a full-time position with the Tribal Facilities Department as a housekeeper.

She encourages Tribal members who are struggling with addiction to be willing to forgive themselves and move forward.

"Don't be upset with people who won't enable you," she says. "Those who helped me the most were the ones who pushed me to make my way out of addiction. Helping people and not enabling them can be a fine line."

Clark adds that society in general can be extremely judgmental of anyone who struggles with addiction or mental health issues, especially if they are homeless.

"If you haven't eaten for days, you get the same hallucinations as you would if you were on meth," she says. "So just because you see someone out there yelling at something that isn't there, it doesn't mean that they are high or mentally ill. They could just be hungry. ... We should be here to build people up, not tear

them down and judge them. We should want them to know that they have value."

Clark adds that being able to talk with an addiction counselor she trusted was very helpful in her recovery.

"If you're a Grand Ronde Tribal member, call your insurance person and ask who is in your network, and look for the counselors who have been open for years," she says.

Substance misuse and abuse have long been prevalent in rural areas, especially with alcohol, cigarettes and meth, according to the 2014 survey on drug use and health conducted by the Rural Health Reform Policy Research Center. Contributing factors in rural communities include poverty, unemployment, isolation and lack of access to treatment options.

The lack of treatment options is why Clark hopes that one day there will be a center close to home so Tribal members can get assistance close by instead of traveling more than 30 miles each way to do so.

"I hope that one day, I can plant the seed to help with recovery," she says. "Having someone you know who has gone through it helps a lot. That is what I would like to do, be in community outreach for sobriety."

The thing she enjoys most about being sober is having her children, ages 13 to 18, in her life more.

"I'm looking forward to the first summer with my children," she says. "The other thing I enjoy about sobriety is my own personal growth. I've learned to listen to my body and take a break when I'm tired."

Clark says as a Tribal member, there are an abundance of services to help those who want to stop abusing drugs or alcohol. However, when someone is in crisis, it can be challenging trying to navigate through these.

"We have a lot of services, but I would love to see a rehabilitation center out here for our people and those in the surrounding areas," she says. "Let it be culture based through Native ways."

She connected with Wellbriety while at the Women's Transition House, and says the concept of providing culturally based healing is one that resonates.

The mission of Wellbriety is to utilize culturally based principles, values and teachings to support healthy community development and leadership, and to support healing from alcohol, substance abuse, co-occurring disorders and intergenerational trauma.

She encourages those who are suffering not to be afraid of judgment, as most of it is comes from within.

"You are worth sobriety," Clark says. "People say they would die for their kids. Ask yourself if you will also live for your children. You can go to a NA meeting even if you're high. They will still accept you. I also recommend doing a lot of journaling. Try to build yourself up, not knock yourself down." ■