

## YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT AN ADDICT IS

I sat across from a prison psychologist who explained to me that my addiction will convey a life of prison. I asked, "how do you control your addiction and not let it burden you?" He said; "I'm NOT an addict." I explained to him the definition of "ADDICT"(DEFINITION:"To devote or surrender [oneself] to something habitually or excessively"). Then I pointed out that his cup of coffee is by definition a substance and a stimulant that I was certain he could not go without and should he ever have to go without he would experience withdraw in the form of migraines and lethargy. He becamed appalled with me, telling me I don't know what I.m talking about and pointed out that I am not a psychologist. I said before i left his office; "and what makes you a psychologist? you didn't even know the definition of the ailment you attempt to treat. I doubt you would know an addict if you seen one in the mirror."

I went back to my cell and thought back on my life, having nearly a decade in prison as a prisoner of the war on drugs. I thought about where everything went wrong in my life. Me being prescribed opioids for a dislocated shoulder after attempting to surf in a hurricane. I made it through that (30) day prescription. Then weeks after, I experienced a foot injury and was back on prescription opioids. Only this time, I could not stop. I exploited my propensity to be an entrepreneur and made a lucrative buisness out of opioid pills so that I could afford to treat myself and continue my new"addiction." I made pills so cheap that unusual people became drug dealers for me. Manufactured out of my economic idealisms and all of our need to medicate. Neddless to say I was arrested and sentenced to (20) years in prison. A promise to my family spurred the stringent need to better myself. And so I studied every day. The psychology of addiction became my muse.

The history of the "drug addict" is interesting and opaqued from common knowledge. The very first drug to undergo scrutiny in our country was opium. Opium became illegal in 1870 as a reaction to an influx of chinese laborers who worked on the railroad out west, taking many limited jobs. Opium was the drug of choice for the chinese and so, as a way to reduce by elimination was to make their substance choice illegal. Cocaine became illegal in the early 1900's aimed at arresting and eliminating the african american comunity. March 12, 1911 the New york Times quoted Dr. Wright; "cocaine is often the direct incentive to the crime of rape by negroes" and "smoking opium is the large number of women who have become involved... with chinese." Marijuana became illegal because it was the "mexicans" drug of choice. There was no reason for racism to be clandestine at this point in history because people were ignorant to learn and understand. But we know better now, don't we?

Alcohol as we all have heard was once declared illegal also. This substance though was the "drug" of choice for politicians and the rich. Needless to say; prohibition only lasted a few years. And now we see euphoric commercials on television depicting happy families and friends getting high on their legal substance of choice. Never showing the families and friends that were killed by a drunk driver. (DEFINITION, HIGH: "excited or stupefied by alcohol or a drug").

Fast forward a bit, to "the war against the criminal elements" By President Nixon. The inception of "the war on drugs." This war was declared in 1971 and because of it; local police forces were given military weapons, vehicles, and training. Pres. Nixon stated "you have to face the fact that the whole problem is the blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to". So the DEA was also created. Laws were created so that this force could run into minority neighborhoods and conduct "warrantless searches." One infamous case would be; The raid on a 92 yr old african american lady, Kathryn Johnson. The police shot her five times, killing her after running into her house in the middle of the night. Later it was uncovered that the police planted drugs in her house. The police received sentences that ranged from five to ten years in prison.

While the war rages on, and corruption pervades through the police departments many Americans are battling drug addiction with a variety of drugs. Ranging from the U.S. government created LSD to the surreptitiously conceived Crack-cocaine. I will mention here that in the 1990's the CIA traded military weapons to a terrorist group in south America for an airplane full of cocaine. The airplane of coke landed at a U.S. military base in Florida and then disappeared from record. Compared to my Shoe-box amount of drugs that I received (20) years for I was appaled to have learned this.

Instead of attempting to understand what was going on with drug addiction our country decided to trust in the government and take the easiest and shortest route of "just lock'em away." Out of sight and out of mind, Right? But noone thought to check on how this approach affected individuals or their families. Mass incarceration became



apart of the business vernacular and many business men, close associates to our presidents, legislators, and governors bought into the prison industry. Then the opioid epidemic hit the country.

For those of you who haven't traced this epidemic to its inception allow me to enlighten. One word; LOBBYING (DEFINITION: "trying to influence legislators"). This is a legal form of corruption. A drug manufacturer pays off legislators, governors, or presidential candidates and their drug (prescription pills) are allocated in large shipments with incentives for those doctors who prescribe them. For those of us whose prescription ran out but addiction did not were left fending for ourselves. Some had to take up the cheaper version; Heroin. Others became lucrative drug dealers all of us though were soldiers of the opposition in the war on drugs.

But the BIG question remained unasked; "why are we all addicted?" A recent study by intelligent psychologist and recognized by the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) addiction was a disease called "substance use disorder". I brought this up at my N/A group (Narcotics Anonymous) and was nearly mauled to death. The opposing opinion is prevalent so I shall explain my thoughts. Because it was evident that my audience was oblivious I asked; for the sake of debate, let's be open minded. I read the definitions for "addict", "high", then DISEASE (DEFINITION: "condition of a body that impairs normal functioning and can be recognized by symptoms or sickness"). I had to explain to my peers that if you don't understand something, look it up.

We went around detailing all the things by definition we were addicted to. For some it was the "escape of reality", or "just the euphoria" or "pursuit of happiness". Some liked the feeling of being "alert" or "awake". Some wanted to "sleep." We spoke about how the officers become addicted to power and control, or abusing inmates. Politicians and the police becoming addicted to "mass incarceration." We realized that it is a common misconception and the word "addict" is synonymous with "scumbag", "disgusting", or "junkie." But only because we were trained to think like that. No one has taken the dictionary out to learn these words that affect us. We only know these words from the context of others.

In prison, the ignorance about addiction and substance use disorder has opened the gate for drug dealers to capitalize on the desperation of the addict to treat his/her ailment. The disease treatment medication, Suboxone, is sold for \$100 per tab. And if that's not available, for the addict anything will do to alleviate the symptoms. It is disturbing to watch so many struggle with this disorder, mostly stemming from the opioid epidemic. And the solution is right there in front of our faces.

Ironically, it is the administrations addiction to abuse and control that has precluded the program "MAT" (Medical Addiction Treatment) from progressing and saving. Had this program been a propriety back after World War II do you know how many soldiers we could have saved. Had I known about this program I may not be here and instead, be with my family.

I don't blame anyone for their cast of judgement. It is easy to dislike an "addict" when it's so promulgated to dislike. I hope now though that the cast could be directed in the appropriate direction. And the judgement befall those who made substance abuse and those with a drug problem look like trolls with an incurable form of Leprosy. This disease is curable, and prison was never a medication. President Nixon was repeatedly asked to decriminalize marijuana but he needed the excuse to raid minority communities. It doesn't make sense, but it's true. Our government made a mistake that needs to be emended.

This information could be googled or interneted and the definitions come straight out of our Webster's English dictionary. Knowledge has always been power. This is not something to be ashamed of. It never was. We are all addicts to something. Some of us lack control, some of us fear going to prison and that is enough. For some of us though, there just is no control, and medication or self-medicating is needed. Utilize this information and time not to be angry, but to make things right. Fix the opioid epidemic, there is finally a solution.

A sad thing to witness is those already in prison for their addiction being punished for self-medicating because the prison is ignorant and addicted to control. We are spending unnecessary millions on the wrong thing. One year after Governor Tom Wolf promised to indemnify taxpayers by allocating money into schools he gave \$15 million to the prison system to combat individuals from self-medicating. Let's get it together people.

The conception of our racist politicians views became what we as a society used to except. We are only ignorant to the things we don't know. Now that you know you are an addict too, do you still choose to persecute me?

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