

My name is Kara Roth and I am a person in long term recovery. What that means to me is that I have not use illegal drugs since 2007. Recovery has allowed me to be present in my daughter's life, my family's lives, and my community. I am proud of myself and my choices today.

I began drinking at the very early age of 13 and I strongly believe this ultimately led me to my drug of choice – heroin. I became addicted to heroin in 1998 after using cocaine and not really liking the feeling. Someone introduced me to heroin and I thought to myself, “Jackpot, this is how I want to feel forever!” I wasn't really aware of the nasty withdrawal potential of the drug so it was a huge surprise to me that after I woke up about four days later, very sick, in withdrawal and needed more heroin to alleviate it. I was off to the races from there. I lost everything in six months: my kids, my home, my job, my car, and my self-respect. I was living in a tent in an empty lot. I have slept in abandoned buildings, park benches, you name it; I have slept there.

I have watched friend after friend die from overdoses. I woke up next to a girl in an abandoned home who had over dosed and died while I was sleeping. I cannot even tell you the number of times that I personally have overdosed. This happened when I was alone, with people, in dirty bathrooms, and even after getting out of the ICU from a three-day coma from an overdose – I overdosed again within two hours of leaving the hospital. I contracted Hepatitis C from using dirty needles. If the horrors of addiction apply, I probably have lived it at some point. I was in and out of jail and prison for the thefts and frauds I used to fund my addiction. I was using within hours of leaving these places. In 2003 I was living in Chicago to be closer to the main supply of heroin and I was overdosing on average three times a week. I was dying and I needed out. I came home to Minnesota and tried the usual route of inpatient treatment, twice. I was using again within one week of leaving treatment. I have “died” so many times from overdosing on heroin, I honestly cannot say WHY I am here to tell you my story except for the fact that I feel I have a greater purpose.

In 2004 I heard from someone on the street about the methadone clinic. I thought to myself, "Why not? It cannot be any worse than my life." During this time, I heard that my boyfriend who had introduced me to heroin had died of an overdose. I was so tired of my life. I walked into my first methadone clinic in spring of 2004. I was accepted onto the program and quickly became stabilized on my dose within 2 weeks. This changed my life. I am not going to lie to you, I was still using heroin almost daily BUT the huge change was that I was not sick when I woke up and I was using less. I was no longer doing the criminal things to get the drugs. I got a job, an apartment, and a car all within the first year of using methadone. Yes, I continued to use heroin but I was no longer suffering the tragic criminal consequences I had been before I found out about methadone. And, I was no longer overdosing. I used less and less each passing month.

After about three years I had a life altering conversation with my dad. He said that he and my mom loved me and they were always worried they were going to get the call that meant they could never tell me again, "I love you". My dad had told me this many times before, and I don't really know why his words hit me so much differently that day, they just did. I stopped using heroin about two weeks later on November 7, 2007.

Then the hard part of recovery came into play, getting my total life back. Existing was one thing – living a life of recovery – another. It meant I had to stop thinking like a criminal. After so many years of thinking like a criminal in order to survive, this was VERY difficult to do. It took me about three years before I was able to say to myself, "Hmm, it has been a few months since I have even thought about getting high. It is time." I told my counselor at the methadone clinic the next time I saw her and we started tapering my dose down. That took another two and a half years. I needed to be sure I was stable in life before I decided to give up a drug that saved my life. My last dose of methadone was July 12, 2013.

My daughter moved back in with me about four years ago. I was the extremely lucky recipient of a newer Hepatitis drug that has cured me of the virus. I am officially Hepatitis C clear as of February 2016! I am doing my internships and will complete the Addiction Counseling Program at Minneapolis

Community and Technical College by the fall of 2016. I am happy, I am whole, I am here and most of all, I AM NOT ASHAMED! There is hope. Medication-assisted treatment saved my life.