

Mike's Story

Mike worked as a longshoreman at Vancouver ports for 20 years. He worked hard and loved the night shift. It was social and there was plenty of work. Mike and his wife owned a townhouse and made their life in Port Moody. Together they were making over \$100,000 a year. They had no children permitting them the luxury of travel, playing lots of golf (especially in Hawaii) and thinking about early retirement.

But Mike wasn't happy in the marriage and decided that after 10 years, it was time for him to move on. For Mike this was the beginning of the end.

Wracked with guilt for leaving his wife to be with another woman, he drank his guilt away and wound up with an impaired driving charge. Eventually he lost his driver's license making it difficult to get to work and cocaine helped him to feel better. Mike started to miss work and the coke use was hurting his nasal passages so he started freebasing the drug – smoking it.

Mike's life then really became unravelled – he sold his town house and downsized to a trailer park in Port Moody – smoking all of the revenues from the sale of the townhouse. Within three months in the trailer park Mike was in arrears for the rental of his trailer pad. So he sold the trailer (at a loss) and moved to Coquitlam to rent a small apartment where he managed to stay for a year.

Mike collected bottles, worked on occasion and got high as often as possible.

Soon he was evicted – he was not working at all so couldn't pay rent and now he was homeless. He couch surfed for awhile, but with no money to pay a portion of rent, even friendship would not put a roof over his head.

Mike slept on Port Moody streets – the last place that felt like home. He would sleep near dumpsters, in motor homes or wherever he could find a dry place. Mike spent his days getting up from wherever he had laid his head the previous night at 6:30 am. He collected bottles until 9:30 when he would phone his dealer to buy \$15 worth of crack. He would get high and by 11 am he was out looking for bottles again so that he could get high again in the afternoon. He repeated this cycle several times a day until the bottle depots closed and he found a place to rest his head later at night.

Within a year Mike knew that this had to stop and with the help of Marilyn – a woman who befriended him at the Port Moody Starbucks, and Hope for Freedom Society he went to rehab, but within 10 days he was back on the street. He subsequently contracted pneumonia and with Marilyn's help once again, he decided to go to reconnect with his wife who is now living in Kamloops and to see if a different environment would provide him with what he needed to live life drug free. It worked for three months. He got a job and made a go of it until he relapsed except this time he had introduced his wife to drugs too. The drugs had significant impact on his wife and her health rapidly deteriorated so

he sent her to her parents in Alberta and he came back to Port Moody – or to what Mike calls ‘Hell’. He managed to reconnect with Marilyn once more and ever so slowly he regained some dignity. He started to feel like he had a life worth saving and tried to reconnect with his wife one last time up in Salmon Arm. Within two weeks he had a job at Safeway and soon afterward he was back into a normal routine as a taxpayer and a golfer! Mike says he put down the crack pipe and picked up his golf clubs!

Mike recently moved back to the Tri-Cities. He is renting an apartment with his wife in Coquitlam. He has returned to work as a longshoreman and he struggles every day to stay clean. He knows that if there hadn’t been several hands for him to grasp on to – he wouldn’t be alive today and making a ‘go’ at having a life with a roof over his head.