

This interview can be read to get a sense of what people go through that causes them dependency problems with psychoactive drugs and compulsive behaviors. The interview also helps one grasp the forces that propel people into recovery and keep them there.

Aggravation of the schizophrenia in this client occurred originally in conjunction with the use of LSD. There is evidence however, that the potential for the condition and mild symptoms of the disease existed beforehand. Often it is difficult to make an accurate diagnosis of schizophrenia or other mental illness in someone who also abuses drugs since heavy use of many psychoactive substances mimics a psychosis.

Norton, a 28-year-old man in treatment for schizophrenia and drug addiction

Q: When did your schizophrenia symptoms start?

“Well it started out when I took acid. It started like a spiritual trip and I thought I was kicked out of heaven in my acid trip. Ever since then it was like my brain was almost split in two. Like I thought I had a good side and an evil side and they would wrestle each other for control of my mind.”

Q: Had this been happening before you took acid?

“No. Before I took the acid I was fine. I’d go ahead and drink with some of my friends sometimes and smoke marijuana sometimes and I felt pretty normal.”

Q: You said you noticed some small symptoms before you took the LSD.

“I remembered that in the past there were times like when I’d be in a job and the stress level would get really hectic. I’d start to feel that maybe it was time for me to move on and get into something else. So like most of my jobs, I got to a level of supervisor but when the stress came on, I’d quit the job and move on.”

Q: Did your early upbringing affect your mental condition?

“Just maybe some of the violence that I experienced from my parents had an effect. My parents had a troubled marriage and they’d fight and argue and my mother would get beaten and I think that some of the rage and some of the anger manifested itself into the schizophrenia too.”

Q: Do you have any relatives with schizophrenia?

“Yeah, my great uncle got schizophrenia. My nephew’s got schizophrenia too. It seems like it came directly through the women of the family and it was the first-born women of the family.”

Q: Could you describe the schizophrenia some more?

“Well for me it’s like I have thoughts, my regular thoughts. They’re mostly good and normal. Then there’s other thoughts that come into play just like somebody might be walking across the street and the thought would come into my mind, ‘They’re going to get hit, or a car’s going to hit them, or if a car hits them it’s your fault.’ And so lots of times you feel negative thoughts that condemn things around you, that condemn your actions.”

Q: Negative thoughts about things that you do?

“Negative thoughts that you do or that other people do. It used to be bad. It used to be thoughts of suicide and murder and you couldn’t control the thoughts.”

Q: Did you try to control the thoughts with drugs?

“Yeah. I kept on thinking that if I went on back on acid that it would get rid of the negative side of me. The acid would get rid of all the negative thoughts. It would like clean out my system but it just made it worse, made the conflict greater.”

Q: Did you try to control it with alcohol or marijuana?

“Marijuana did the same thing. It made me more paranoid. It would make me feel that I had to be saved or my spiritual side wasn’t quite up to par and I’d have to find some way to get it back up to par. I’d go to church or something like that. And alcohol, it brings out more of the positive side effects in your personality but too much alcohol makes you lose control. You can’t control thoughts.”

Q: Does your psych medication stop the thoughts?

“Yes. It stops the bad negative thoughts from being really bad, like you can almost feel the thought coming and before the thought actually enters your brain, you can stop it and think about something else. But it also softens really high really good thoughts and good energy.”

Q: You mentioned that a religious conflict also caused you problems.

“It was basically my dad’s Methodism versus my mother’s Jehovah’s Witness. They were both ingrained in me. When I take the Haldol[®] [haloperidol], it just stops the conflicting religious thoughts. The conflict when I was on LSD however got really bad and I thought I questioned God and something in me was cursing God every time I got the chance. The haloperidol stopped that, stopped the anger. Also I don’t have emotions for anything, no great joys, no great sadness.”

Q: What else triggers your schizophrenia?

“I got pretty involved in the Grateful Dead and Jerry Garcia when he came to town and that was when I was doing acid and the whole thing started with my schizophrenia.”

Anytime I got too involved in the Deadhead scene and the acid started to trigger it with flashbacks, that sometimes made me want to use. I was drawn to it like a moth to light.”

Q: What happened when you stopped the medication?

“One time I quit using because I thought it was stifling my spiritual growth, like I couldn’t get to the highs that would bring me closer to God, and I thought that the haloperidol was stopping that. It was like way back when I started having hallucinations. That’s when it was really bad. It’s a lot better now. When it was really bad, I thought that the haloperidol was actually trying to kill a part of me that was spiritual but people convinced me that it was for the best.”

Q: How do you feel about it now?

“I don’t know that it’s really a positive because I’m missing a lot of jobs and there’s a lot of good parts about me that feel stifled and I really resent that but I’m glad it helped get rid of the bad parts.”

Q: What is your double-trouble [co-occurring disorders] therapy group like?

“It lets me know that other people have gone through the same thing that I am and that when you hear problems, you realize that you’ve been through some of the same things. You don’t feel quite as bad. Sometimes when the group’s smaller, you get more personal and they talk more about things that really bother or affect them. When the group’s larger, it tends to be kind of vague sometimes and I don’t get as much from it. But I really enjoy the groups compared to NA [Narcotics Anonymous]. NA seems like they have their problems but their problems are dealing with work, dealing with life. But to us, dealing with things is like getting through the day each minute. I’d talk to you about how you experience life when you’re not on the medication because for most of us when we’re not on the medication, then we’re bad, you know. We have a lot of bad feelings and sometimes we forget that it’s always better to be on the medication than have those bad feelings. However I can go without the group sometimes but I can’t go without the haloperidol.”