

YOU THOUGHT QUITTING DRUGS WAS THE HARDEST PART, BUT WHAT IF YOUR FAMILY CAN'T ACCEPT THE NEW YOU? WHAT THEN?

When Lily finally went to rehab to beat her drug addiction, the last thing she expected was for those closest to her to abandon her when she succeeded...

When I was a child, every adult I knew took drugs. My family were part of an artistic community of hedonists, who were pioneers in forming a fashionable 'cool' neighbourhood and style of living in London. Ours was a multi-generational social circle, where young people hung out with older people – and where the older people took drugs. I remember being seven years old, at a concert with my dad and

sister, and one of my parents' friends having a cocaine seizure, falling off the back of her chair and an ambulance being driven into the back of Wembley Stadium. The adults wouldn't rack up lines of cocaine in front of us, but there were times when, as a kid, I got out of bed and walked into a room and saw things I wasn't meant to see. My dad told me not to take drugs – while taking them himself in the next room.

I first took heroin when I was 18. I was with a family friend, a woman much older than me, whom I admired very much. I was left in a room on my own with it all racked out on a table and I tried it. I didn't take it again for six years – although I continued to use cocaine and smoke hash, which I had been doing since my early teens – but that first heroin experience stayed with me: I always thought about it. Perhaps it's not surprising: my first addictive behaviour was aged five with sweet food. I was an addict long before I ever took drugs and and it turned out heroin was a better anaesthetic than sugar.

Even now, it's hard to be sure exactly what I was numbing myself against. All I know is I've always felt deep anxiety, especially around my family. I didn't think drugs were 'cool', I wasn't trying to fit in. They just made me feel, for a while at least, more able to cope with the enormous pressure I felt to be what I assumed people expected of me: to be a leader, to take control of situations, to never have questions, only answers. To be glamorous and witty and charming, beautiful, thin, stylish. Not because I particularly cared what strangers thought of me, but because I desperately wanted my family's approval – and I could get it if everyone else thought I was worth talking about.

I was a heroin addict for six years. It was exhausting – meeting dealers and finding times and places to use takes up a huge amount of time. And taking drugs enables other, even more exhausting, behaviour: cheating on my boyfriend with an ex and, when that ended, cheating on my new boyfriend with the man I'd just split from; going to four dinner parties in one night – I'd go to the first for one course, then jump in the car and go to another for dessert. I wasn't even at the parties for any reason other than I thought I should be.

Over the years, my life spiralled downwards until eventually I could no longer pretend I was making a recreational choice. Where once I was an addict ➤

AS TOLD TO ANNABEL BROG. NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED.
PHOTOGRAPH BY RAYMOND MEIER/TRUNK ARCHIVE

with a life, operating socially and professionally at a high level for my age, I was now... not. I missed two flights in 24 hours because I lost all sense of time, hunkered up in a flat, scared to leave, losing days to cocaine and heroin. Before, I thought I took drugs to enable myself to function. Now, even I couldn't believe that.

Addiction is all deceit, while staying clean means being HONEST. People around me didn't want to be honest'

I had tried infrequently over the past six years to get clean, but I couldn't do it on my own. So finally, aged 30, I spent three months in rehab and a further three months in a halfway house, picking apart my emotions and learning to live without the crutch of heroin. I was excited at the prospect of undoing the damage I'd done to myself, but that didn't make it any easier. It was brutal. I felt like an ice cube in boiling water. I knew I had a huge capacity to love, but years of working at being the coolest girl in the room meant I'd hidden any way to show that long ago. I remember one rainy Friday afternoon when the counsellor turned to me in group therapy and said: 'The thing is, Lily, I know you have one, but I can't see your heart.' Afterwards I curled up on the floor and wept.

I knew rehab was the right place for me because I'd exhausted every other option. I learned to work through the anxieties I'd had since childhood; I didn't try to predict an outcome for myself, but I knew I wanted something more 'normal' than the life I'd been leading. I wanted to like myself. I saw how self-harming my behaviour had been, masked under the guise of glamour.

After I left rehab, I went back to my old neighbourhood. I was back at the scene of the crime, but without the old coping mechanism. People are advised to find new friends after quitting drugs but, although some of them were recreational cocaine users, none of my circle were heroin addicts – that was something I did on my own – so I deluded myself into thinking I would return to a world where everyone else was normal and I'd now feel I belonged.

I was wrong. My friends and family found being around me uncomfortable: I wasn't the fun, glamorous, albeit drug addicted, girl they knew. Instead of going to parties, I went to Narcotics Anonymous. I gave up my media career and tried to learn who I was if I wasn't my father's party-girl daughter with a high-status job and cool boyfriend.

I found myself single for the first time. I'd thought I would come out of rehab to the man I had been with for seven years – first as a boyfriend, then as my lover when

I moved on to a new relationship – and that we'd finally settle down together. But that didn't happen. I thought I truly loved him, but I slowly saw he had been just another way for me to chase happiness, all-the-while knowing I would never achieve it. For all those years together, I'd made him a hero and myself a villain, blaming myself for not being faithful and worthy, but it wasn't just me – he was incapable of being open. Friends, too, struggled to accept the new, low-key me. They found me strange and melted away after it became clear I wasn't the life and soul any more.

Addiction is all deceit and secrets, while staying clean means being honest. The people around me didn't want to be honest because it can be challenging, uncomfortable. That was the hardest thing: understanding that my desire to change was not contagious, that it would not create an emotional domino effect.

My family had been unhappy about my addiction, not because I used drugs – everyone used drugs – but because I was embarrassing, out of control. My dad never acknowledged my addiction. Even when I was 7st and crazy, he rewrote the situation as 'She's having so much fun'. After rehab, he wanted to pretend the problem had never existed. I, of course, needed it to be acknowledged so I could deal with it. But a family, I found, is like a machine, and I had been part of a machine that worked and stuck to its beliefs: hedonism was cool with no downsides. Except now I was a cog that had fallen out, making the wheel not turn, so they simply tried not to be around me.

There were so many times I wanted to talk to Dad – not to blame him, just to deal with my past – but he just ran away. 'Sorry darling, I'm too busy,' and then he'd go *shopping*. I wanted to scream: 'I took drugs with you to be a part of your club, but now you don't want to deal with your part in my addiction.' But I didn't. It wouldn't help.

My family ignored my recovery or made a joke of it. On my birthday, we all went out for dinner with my closest friend. Dad arrived incredibly late and barely spoke to me all evening. I was newly out of rehab and all I could talk about was how I needed to find something to trust, to feel I'd be looked after. I remember him murmuring to my friend: 'Can't you talk her out of all this God nonsense?' God wasn't cool enough for him. 'I'd rather she joined the Jehovah's Witnesses than have her go back to heroin,' my friend replied, but he didn't get it. Perhaps I shouldn't have expected him to: years earlier, when I was trying to get clean the first time, a big gang of us went to Thailand for Christmas and my dad invited a heroin addict to join us. It didn't occur to him this might derail what I was trying to do, as maintaining his social circle was more important than my disruptive attempts to break away from the drugs that had been a part of all our lives.

I had expected my family to be proud of me getting through rehab and to accept the new, sober me, but I think that was the most naive of all my dreams. I have felt angry, betrayed and resentful at how they dealt with my recovery. I have felt very alone, like I didn't belong in my own wolf-pack any longer and that was the scariest thing: the absence of belonging. But, ironically, their resistance to my becoming clean helped me, because I learned to break my dependency on them. I even, slowly, began to feel compassion for the way they had needed to hide from the situation rather than confront it.

For the past two years, my relationship with my family has been very different. Sometimes I still look to them for things they are not capable of giving me, but I spot it early and instead turn to my friends. I know who I am now, and my family know who I am, too. I don't need them in the same way, but I do love them and I know they love me. At last, I feel fortunate I have this life. ■