

A LADDER & A TORCH

For Broadcast:

Interview with Darryl

Interviewer: Thanks Dazza for sharing a bit of your story with us. For a start, what do you love about life?

Darryl: Today I feel like I've been set free.

Interviewer: It hasn't always been that way?

Darryl: No, it hasn't. I feel like I've been on the ball and chain, in a deep hole that I couldn't get out of.

Interviewer: Can you think back to where that started, was it right from childhood or somewhere along the way, where did things get ugly?

Darryl: Yeah, it really did start from childhood I guess, from where I had a stepfather who reared and raised me. I never knew my real father, and he was pretty heavy handed with me. I was never ever patted on the back for anything that I did right you know. There were never rewards there and I got beat up pretty heavily when I did things wrong.

Interviewer: Where did things go from there?

Darryl: I got into a life of petty crime sort of with the young fellas, you know breaking into factories and I think it was just boredom really, you know for me. I went to 2 boys' homes between the ages of 12 up to 18 years of age yeah and then I graduated. I ended up going to jail for crime you know petty stuff again.

Interviewer: What was that experience like being in boys' homes and prison?

Darryl: I felt totally shattered. I had no-one to turn to. I cried all the time in the boy's home. I was lonely inside myself, I had nothing.

Interviewer: and then the drink became....?

Darryl: I got introduced to alcohol at 16 and I found this wonderful feeling of release, that I could be somebody that I always wanted to be. I felt the loneliness disappear, it enabled me to be outgoing. I got a wonderful feeling of control. I got a heightened experience of being bullet proof, invincible. The vulnerability was taken away.

Interviewer: How much did you have to drink to get those feelings of confidence?

Darryl: I'd probably have to drink in those days probably a couple of 6 packs of beer you know and that's quite a lot for a young fella, even those days I'd always drink heavy alcohol you know. Well they never had light alcohol in those days really anyway.

Interviewer: Did you find that you needed more and more to get to the same place?

Darryl: Yes I did, and that's where I found that I couldn't control it. I started to oblivate myself and I got to the stage of drunken stupors and I didn't really know what I was doing. I'd be talking and communicating with people but when I was asked the next morning "do you know what you got up to last night?" I couldn't remember nothing.

Interviewer: Was there a point in time when you started to realise that the thing it was doing good for you back at the start, when it stopped you feeling lonely and gave you confidence, at what point did that change?

Darryl: I started to realise that I couldn't be like the bloke next to me would have 3 or 4 beers and put it down. I looked at it this way, my 90 percent good times and 10 percent bad times that most of us experience did a full circle on me, and it became 90 percent bad times and only 10 percent good times. I had disastrous relationships, all through alcohol. They were there one minute and gone the next. I also got introduced to making home brew and for me with an alcohol problem and being a person who couldn't put it down, well I spiralled out of control. That's where I stood on the land mine and everything exploded in me face.

Interviewer: So how is it that we're talking to you today?

Darryl: Well what happened to me was my boss pointed out that he thought that I was an alcoholic. I didn't like that word at all you know, very uncomfortable with that word, but I was relying on the alcohol I could not function without alcohol. I couldn't even put it down for a day, you know I was totally powerless and I came to the conclusion that something had to be done so my boss took me off to a couple of detox units. I failed miserably when I got out of there. I picked up the drink again and finally what did it for me, I found myself in a straight jacket in a mental health unit with Cleveland hospital. It was there that I made a decision that I needed to do a long term programme.

At the same time another thing had happened to me. I woke up one morning and I was bright yellow. My stomach was way out here, my ankles were ballooned up and my liver was failing. I went and had a liver biopsy and they said "In 3 months time, we are going to bury you, you're going to die." And I said but I'm gonna stop drinking, I'm going to rehab. They said "we know, but it's too late and no matter what you do now it doesn't matter, it's out of our control. You have 80 percent sclerosis of the liver and the Hepatitis C is eating the rest of your liver away. But I decided to carry on, I wouldn't give up there.

I decided to go a long term programme of rehab. I went into that programme and the worst part about it was for me I was an atheist, you know. I had no belief in god. And it was a spiritual programme in a Salvation Army run rehab. Anyway I faked it that I knew God. It was a 43 week programme and I'd done 33 weeks. I had ten weeks to go and I got back on the drink and was kicked out of rehab for being on the drink. Zero tolerance. I stayed out for 6 weeks and I drank twice as bad. I realised that it was over for me but I was still alive. I couldn't believe it. There was something absolutely in my path that I was still alive.

I went back to rehab 6 weeks later. They accepted me back on programme. I started the programme and the turning point of my life was basically that I was told I'd never make the programme and I said 'Why is that?' and they said "you need to find the higher power" and I said "Why's that?" and they said "well, no one has ever completely stayed sober and alcohol and drug free without a higher power, a god of their understanding." I said to them "That's not true, I know plenty of people who are

in recovery without the higher power” And they said “name someone.” I couldn't name anyone.

I knew that I had to find a higher power, a God of my understanding. Now I've only ever believed in things that I could see. And that was very hard for me there. So I thought what do people do and I thought they pray. So I thought well I'll become willing to have a go at this. I'll go and pray. I'll pray for one thing only and I prayed. I remember laying in bed then saying God, if you're for real, I said can you help me get off the grog. I said lift the compulsion, desires and cravings from me. If you're there. Show me. And that's all I prayed for and I was praying and praying and I just didn't feel like anything was working and I believe I had a gift come to me this one night when I was sitting down and I call it the gift of a self awareness. I had this awareness that I hadn't been fighting the alcohol. Something had changed. It had been lifted off me and I felt quite excited about it you know.

There was one case worker in there and guess what, he was a pastor. I didn't know these things were in place for me. This was God working. I talked to him and I said I believe something's changed in me, something's happened. And he said 'What do you think that is?' And I think I might have found a higher power, something's working for me. And he said "what do you believe your higher power is? And I didn't like the word God. I would never talk about God or anything like that and out of my mouth came the word I believe it's God. I couldn't believe I said that.

So what happened for me from there is I opened the door and became willing, and I surrendered and I handed my life over to the care of God and everyday it's just gotten better. The rewards of sobriety. My marriage is back on track, we've worked hard at it. I've been given my job back. I've been given my life back. My mother has even said to me in the last couple of years. "Welcome back son. I've got my real son back." I didn't know what she meant by that. And I realise now what it was. She had a wonderful loving son there as a young fella. Got introduced to drugs and alcohol and was totally taken away. She didn't know me. I was a total stranger. But she's seen through the actions of working that programme, the 12 steps of recovery that I've been given my life back. And my praise is to God that what he's done in me that I couldn't do for myself and I humbly get on my knees sometimes and thank God for what he's done for me. And this is where it's brought me today. It's just been a wonderful experience for me and I call it transformation that the old Darrell is buried and this the new Darrell. I've got out of that hole. I've been given a ladder and a torch and it is great to be back in life again and living life on life's terms, because these days I know that I have battles like everyone else but I don't have to run back to the drink.

Interviewer: How old were you when you when you became sober

Darryl: Ah I was 56 and I guess on that testimony of how God works and praise him the lord, never been able to stay sober more than 3 months, next month on the 23rd of July, I will be 5 years clean and that is through the grace of God and that is God's grace to me because he's given me something that I really don't believe I deserved at the time. But today I know God heaps his love on me so yeah I think it's great mate.

Interviewer: That's awesome! So yeah you feel like because of that childhood you had, where you were beaten and didn't feel you were worth anything, have you managed to deal with those because I guess they were what drove you to drink in the first place?

Darryl: Yeah it was it was fear and shame and just that I wasn't worthy of anything and I've had to face my fears. I've had to deal with shame. And I've faced it head on and I've worked hard and I've worked through it and I've come out the other side and the reverse side of the coin for fear is faith

Interviewer: How would you describe this relationship with God? It's a fairly new relationship really isn't it?

Darryl: It is but you know I find that relationship with God is a deep and personal relationship. It's a great friend that I've found but I just can't see him. I know he's there. I know he's never abandoned me. I've had some wonderful conversations with him. That's how it is with me - it's a personal relationship that I have with God.

Interviewer: What has helped you to deal with those fears? Was it just a conversation with God or were there other things happening? How did you get through that?

Darryl: It was God giving me confidence that things were alright. That he was there when I needed him and that helped me get through fear. And if I stayed close to god and handed my will over to him and I have to do that on a daily basis because I still find there's a comfort zone of my own will. In 5 years and yet I had 40 years of my own will, that's still extremely hard. I like to drag my own will back and I want to do it my way, but my way is not the way because everything is just unmanageable. I am only one arms length away from picking up a drink and I can easily slip back into addiction. So I find I have to be very vigilant of my own will, that I have to hand it over because I can't do this on my own.

Interviewer: Thanks Dazza.

Darryl: It's been a pleasure mate to be able to share my testimony that I may be able to be of some impact or help to someone else.

Interviewer: If you were to say one thing to someone who's listening to this who may be facing a drinking problem what would you say to them?

Darryl: I would say please become willing to invite God in coz he's there and waiting. All you have to say is "God, please come in and help me - I can't do this on my own." They don't need to go through what I went through. Not at all. They can get this because we're all on equal terms. No one is any better than anyone else.