

# Hooked on Recovery

## *Nearly Snared by Oxycodone*



In "Take Your Medicine! (as prescribed)", I talked about how the influence of the recovery community deterred me from using pain medication that would have helped me. The same recovery community also helped me avoid getting trapped again by addiction. I nearly got snared by oxycodone.

My thirty-sixth and final radiation treatment was on the last Friday in July 2010. That Sunday, we were scheduled to begin our annual two-week Cape Cod vacation. My family went without me. I stayed at home to gain some strength before I ventured out. Mom stayed home with me to help. I was hurting. Nutrition came solely through the feeding tube. Cans of Jevity provided no levity. (Sorry about that.) Even though the Jevity had brevity.... Wow, I am way off track.

### **Looking good?**

I did OK at the Cape. Looking back, I realize I was just a shell of a man, living in pain and fogged somewhat by narcotics. I didn't look well. Although people were very fond of saying "you look good." What's that mean exactly? It means you look like hell and they don't know what else to say.

Well today I am looking good. That means I still have a face for radio. Even though, seven months after the last treatment I still feel side effects. I have a dry mouth and throat. Makes eating difficult, not impossible. I lost the whiskers on my chin and neck. Also, I have this weird tingling and numbness in both feet, an after effect of chemotherapy. Sometimes, I swear my feet are freezing and I touch them and they're warm. What's more odd is a sensation when I tuck my chin down into my chest. A buzzer goes off at the base of my spine, like a cell phone on vibrate against my lower back. That is a result of the radiation. It's called some kind of "syndrome" (I can't remember the name). All these are physical side effects, things I can deal with and are small prices to pay, considering the alternative.

I'm still recovering from the emotional ones. I went through some serious stuff. The treatment was super aggressive. Intense. And praise God, it worked. I didn't

realize there would be so much difficulty after the treatment. Some part of me thought that once treatment was done, all I would have to do is drink a few large glasses of water, one good pee and back to life as usual. Wrong.

### **The medication-induced rollercoaster**

It took a lot longer than I anticipated for my body to heal. But heal it did (and it is still). The pain in my throat and mouth finally became manageable, so I wanted to get off the pain medication, yet both my oncologists strongly advised going cold turkey. The withdrawal would be too severe. They advised a taper period. I began reducing the amount gradually. I would test myself now and then by trying to stop completely. One morning after several hours without the oxycodone, I sat on our family room couch and slid into despondency. I am not a despondent person by nature. Tears rolled down my cheeks. I was drowning in hopelessness. Sandy was really worried about me. She said, "Take your medicine!" I went to the bathroom, got my medicine, rolled out a tiny pill into my palm and held it between my thumb and forefinger. I eyeballed it for a long time. With a sigh, I swallowed it.

Thirty minutes later, I was smiling, talking, ready to go for a walk. That stopped me short. I uncovered the trap. It almost had me. One more step and I would have been snared. Isn't it amazing that a tiny little pill could make me feel so much better? Yet, I knew deep within that this too would be a fleeting feeling. I'd end up chasing it endlessly. Just like the despair and hopelessness, the euphoria would pass. Life on an even, elevated emotional level was way better than this rollercoaster, cyclical ride of being on medication. I longed to get back to emotional stability. When I described this to my oncologist he said, "Oh, that's the euphoric effect of the narcotic." Ya think? I tried to explain recovery, the danger, all that...he didn't get it. I needed to get off this stuff. I followed my taper plan and I did not deviate. Finally, the day came where I didn't take any.

### **Tested**

During the first part of abstinence, I was full of anxiety, my emotions ran raw and my joints throbbed. It stunk. The power of the withdrawal is a strong indicator of the power of the drug. Yet, it was wonderful too. Because as I wrote in "Encountering God", it was a time I will always remember. When I knew I had taken my last pill, it was like a spiritual block was removed. God poured into me and transformed me, again. I am looking at life through a new lens. I'll explain this in more detail in future blogs. But for one thing, I am appreciating moments more.

My sponsor came over one day when I was rattling and rolling. He put into action

the recovery slogan "move a muscle, change a thought" and got me outside, out to lunch, etc. We talked about passing a test. Maybe the test I passed was not so much the treatment for cancer. Maybe the test was not to mess around with the medication. Because it would have been so easy to do.

Thank God I had many deposits in my spiritual bank of recovery. All I had to do was make substantial withdrawals. I was in some very dangerous waters. Many people in long-term recovery do not navigate them safely. I believe the number one cause of relapse for people with long-term recovery is misuse of prescription medication. I heard the Sirens. I experienced the temptation. I appreciated the escape from reality offered by the tiny little pill. Yet, for some reason I resisted. No, many reasons.

Today, I have been more than three months without pain medication and have no desire, none, to take any. In fact, I have an internal aversion to it.

Praise God.