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There was no school for me. It was a place for me to go and hang around. My father committed suicide when I was 7 and me and my siblings heard it and found him on the floor. My mother was an alcoholic. She cared about me going to school in her own way, but I didn't listen to her. After my father died, I was a hellion. It was tough at home. There was rarely food because my mother spent any money on parties. Half the time I didn't know where we'd be staying because we'd get evicted all the time. Wherever we lived, it was always in the slums.

I'd been drinking since I was 8. My older sister let me because I'd pass out and not be in her hair. My mother always had a string of guys around, and I didn't want a new dad, so I'd act up and do whatever I could to make them not want to be around. It didn't work.

I'd go to school here and there. There were always fights so half the time I wouldn't get on the bus. My mother tried to punish me, but I wasn't listening to her. I felt abandoned growing up. There was no lovey-dovey stuff, tucking in at night, or pats on the back.

In 7<sup>th</sup> grade I got a job in landscaping. We were living in a tough area with the cops knocking down doors. It was easy to stop going to school, so I did. Nobody at the school tried to get me to go back. My mother was still partying and had rough boyfriends who'd chase me around trying to hurt me. I started drinking my pain away.

By the time I was 14 I was completely kicked out of my house because I wasn't going to school. I was also drinking and smoking weed all the time. For the next 3 years I slept in basements, under benches, wherever.

When I was 18, I met a girl, and we had a daughter. By the time I was 19 we had another daughter. We got married and divorced 6 months later. I was working as a

mason making decent money. I left my kids and didn't even try for visitation. I buried myself in booze and drugs.

I worked for myself for 10 years. I was still partying. One other contractor I worked with was in a 12-step program. He recognized that I needed help and would get me to come to meetings. I tried to quit a few times, but it didn't hold.

The only guarantee that I had was death. I finally decided enough was enough. I got tired of the rat-race and hurting people. The only way to stop was to but down the booze and drugs. I went to a bunch of meetings. I wasn't perfect, but finally it stuck. Twelve years ago, I quit for good. I'd met people who had good stuff and did good things, and I wanted what they had.

My back has been messed up for years and I knew I needed surgery. I'd never be able to work in the trades again. I wanted to become an addiction counselor but didn't even have a 7<sup>th</sup> grade education. The folks at HireAbility introduced me to CVAE.

It's been awesome at CVAE. I have a great teacher who has worked well with my disability. There's a lot I never learned because I never went to school. I go all in on everything. If I have a goal in mind, I'll reach it with the help of people around me. My goal is to get my diploma, then become a certified Addiction Coach, and then go to college to be an Addiction Counselor. I want to work with others. People need help and I have experience that I can share. I donate my time to feeding the homeless one day a week.

At CVAE I learned that I wasn't as smart as I thought I was. I have street smarts but not book smarts. I'm learning those book things and also learning that anything is possible . I'm getting my high school diploma by June 30 and I feel awesome and smart.

Thank you for your time.

