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Not One of the Guys

"It's nice to be just one of the guys ... even though I'm not."

You see, I'm a female member of DCD – Dentists Concerned for Dentists. I have been clean for a little more than a year now, and my story today is a whole lot different from what it was a year ago. Last year my story was that I did drugs to try to make myself feel better, got caught, and became overwhelmed with shame, wanted to get better but had little hope, and was pretty sure that I had lost everything I'd worked for! Now, with the help of others, I'm able to see how my life has changed for the better.

I grew up in a crazy family. Most of us came out of it with at least some depression and extremely poor self-esteem. Still, for most of my life I thought I was the "normal one". I took on the role of the "super-achiever" – the popular, talented, pleasing, outgoing "go-getter" that is every parent's dream. I had a huge heart and a global love for everyone (except myself). I was the one who tried to keep peace in the family, though later, in the privacy of my bed, I would cry on for hours.

I left home at 18, put myself through college and dental school, and never took a dime from my parents. I never asked for help and prided myself on the fact that I didn't even borrow money or access credit until I was almost 40.

I started my practice by renting space from another dentist. Eight years later I built my own facility in a strip mall and moved in. Within a year, my part-time practice had grown into a full-time one! I paid off my loans in two years! Nine years later I purchased and renovated a building that would allow the practice to grow even more, but things didn't go as I'd planned.

I began using Vicodin for relief of "pain" more than 10 years ago. The year I bought my building, what with all the stress, 7.5 mg of hydrocodone became 10 mg. I started writing prescriptions for myself. My production was going down despite my spending long hours at work. I was isolating myself from everyone but my patients. My husband and I stopped having dinner parties and socializing with our friends. I spent hours escaping into gardening, scrapbooking, and the drugs. I was helpless but could not ask for help. I was in deep trouble but didn't dare to let anyone know.

One day a letter came from the Board of Dentistry. They said a pharmacist had filed a complaint, and they wanted me to respond. I turned numb! It seemed like my world was collapsing! I was terrified, afraid I was losing everything I'd worked so hard for! Would I go to jail? How would my husband react? The shame I had been fighting for so many years came to a resounding crescendo! I finally had to admit that I wasn't perfect, that I wasn't in control of everything. In fact, I now believed I was bad, a terrible person with no real hope for redemption. I felt simply awful...

In truth, that letter, and the pharmacist who had filed the complaint, saved my life. In my anguish I called a member of Dentists Concerned for Dentists (DCD), who promptly assured me that my life was not over and that there was indeed hope. He helped me get in touch with the Health Professionals Services Program (HPSP), who in turn directed me to treatment, mental

health services, Alcoholics Anonymous, and back to DCD. I started to become more real about being human rather than some sort of super-hero. I let a Power greater than myself into my life, and I started asking for and accepting help. All of this made a huge difference.

My DCD buddies have become a central part of my life. They have accepted me into their ranks with open arms. It feels so good to have a safe place to go – a place where I can be who I really am and know it's okay. It's nice to be just one of the guys ... even though I'm not.

Anonymous DCD Member