

## Come join our Army

### Youth director in Boise, Idaho, shares his testimony.

by John Ramos –

In 6<sup>th</sup> grade I smoked pot with the older kids in the neighborhood, and when the kids my age found out, I instantly became the “cool kid.” In 8<sup>th</sup> grade I went to what I thought was a regular birthday party only to find alcohol being served, and when word went out that I drank beer, once again I was the “cool kid.”

Even though—at the time—it seemed kind of innocent, it was the beginning of a downward spiral. I had no idea that it would lead me into alcohol and drug addiction.

#### The cool kids

I hung around kids that did all the things that our parents told us not to do. After all, what do parents know? I thought they were old and didn't know what's up.

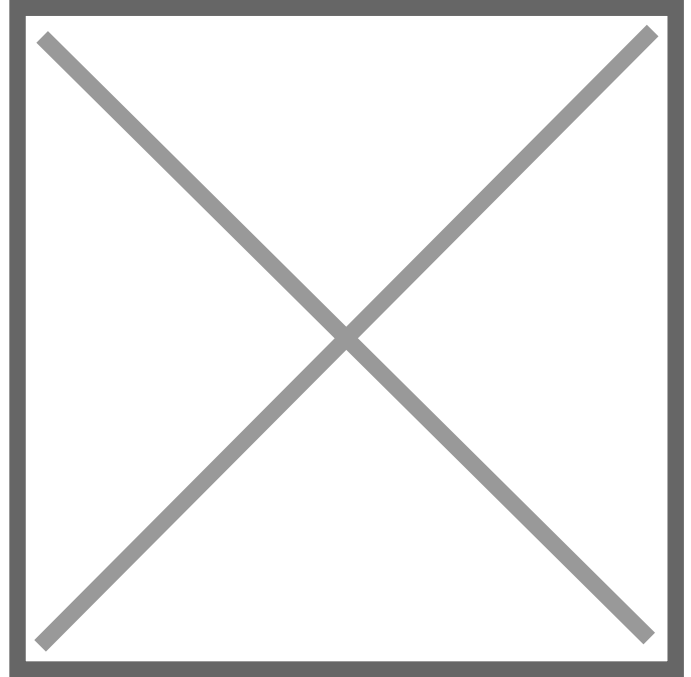
In the early years, I didn't have the characteristics of an alcoholic, but I wasn't looking for the signs. I went to backyard parties in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade and mainly just smoked pot and held onto one can of beer all night so that I could blend in with all the other cool kids.

In 1982, when I was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, I heard punk rock music for the first time. I fell in love with the fast tempo, and the energetic, sometimes violent, beat of rebellious kids. A skateboarding friend turned me on to bands like The Adolescents, Black Flag, The Germs, and The Circle Jerks. It was wonderful!

Soon I joined my friend's band, and we started playing backyard parties that had all the drinking and drugs you could imagine. I quickly learned that being in a band meant girls, girls, girls. Girls literally threw themselves at me. And I loved it! I was having tons of fun; nothing was going to bring me down from the mountaintop.

#### Partying hard

I lived this lifestyle for years. I partied hard and had lots of girlfriends. At age 25, I had no idea that I should slow down and think about my future. Even after arrests for being drunk in public and drunk driving, I never realized anything was wrong. Eventually I lost all the girlfriends, lost multiple jobs, and



burned bridges everywhere.

For 10 more years I lived as a drug abuser and drug dealer. Finally the police caught up with me and put me behind bars. After a while I ended up in The Salvation Army adult rehabilitation center in Anaheim Calif., under Major Oliver Stenvick. There I learned about addiction and how Jesus could see me through all my problems. Although it seems as simple as “just stop using and everything will be all right,” it was hard to break years of bad habits.

### **Recovery through grace**

I am a different person today. I thank God that I don't use anymore, and that I never have to use again. I am a “Christian recovering addict,” living a joy-filled life because of the grace of God. God's love for me has no bounds, and I am certain that he will see me through life's journey with all its challenges.

My wife, Rachel, and my sons, Asa and Ezekiel, are also thankful for the change in me. Jesus took a washed-up loser, forgave his sins, set him on a road to recovery, and made a man of God out of him. Thank you, Salvation Army, and thank you, Jesus.