

## Finding the right combination

by Glen Doss, Major –

*The following narrative is from an upcoming book depicting the life story of Conrad Watson, by Watson and Doss. The events here occurred in 1990. Michael Mason remains clean and sober today.*

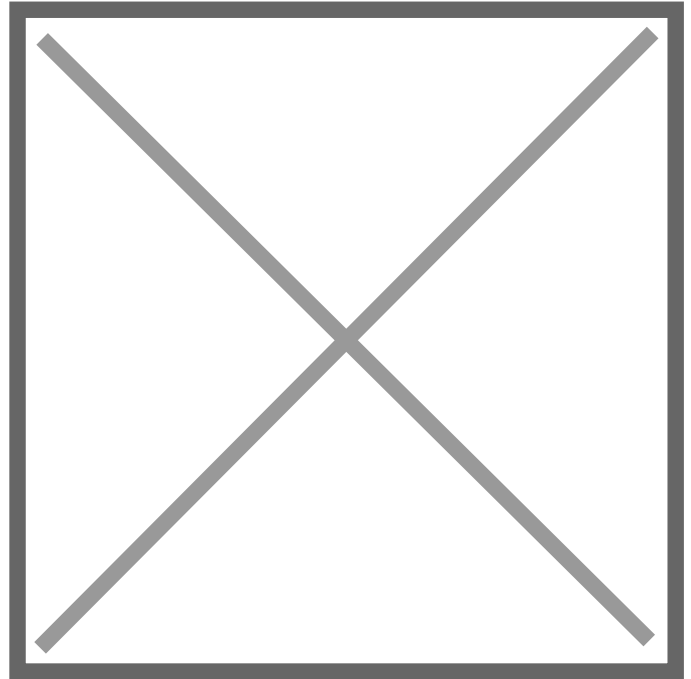
He lay on his belly on the floor of the Los Angeles Harbor Light detox ward groaning. Every inch of Mike Mason's long, thin body ached. At the age of 44, the hard work of quitting methadone, heroin, alcohol and codeine was torturing him.

A tall man in a three-piece suit entered the room. "Good morning, Mr. Watson," the staff greeted him cheerily. Conrad, the program coordinator, scrutinized Mike compassionately. "You look almost as bad as I did when I came in," he said. In his misery Mike couldn't manage an acknowledgement, but the remark impacted him powerfully. *This man, who looks so important, knows what I'm going through, he thought. He experienced it himself; in fact, he was in worse shape than I; yet he made it! Maybe there's hope for me!*

Over the following days, Conrad regularly stopped by on his daily rounds to chat with Mike. Seeking a sponsor—someone with lengthy, quality sobriety time who would guide him through the Twelve Steps of AA—Mike asked him one day to be his sponsor.

"Michael, I wish I could," he replied, "but since I'm program coordinator that would present a conflict of interest. However, after you've finished the program, I would be pleased to. Meanwhile I will always be here to answer your questions." Mike was disappointed but he understood.

After nine months, Mike accepted a position in maintenance at the Salvation Army's Bell Shelter, a transitional facility for the homeless, and Conrad formally became his sponsor. Eventually Mike was promoted to operations manager. Concerned about the stress of the job, he sought out Conrad's advice. "Just do me one favor," Conrad told him. "Before you pick up [drugs]—and you're going to have the desire to pick up, because everyone in recovery does—call your sponsor, call somebody! Don't go out like a sucker!"



Five years into his recovery, Mike felt the urge as he was driving to work. He had \$600 or \$700 in his pocket, so he was set. The thoughts very smoothly took control. It would be so easy: cocaine, heroin, a party, and a motel room for the weekend in Santa Barbara where no one knew him. In the midst of the scheming, however, a sudden thought came: "I've got to call somebody!" Mike immediately called Conrad: "Conrad, I'm thinking about using!"

"Stop! Have you?"

"No, not yet."

"I'll meet you in 30 minutes."

As he approached, Conrad could see that his friend was fighting a compulsion. "What's the problem?" he asked.

"I want to use, man!"

Scrutinizing the man he knew so well, Conrad's eyes twinkled, and suddenly he laughed out loud. Confused, Mike snapped, "What's so funny?"

"The disease of addiction has figured out the combination to your recovery!"

"Oh, my! What do I do?" Mike exclaimed.

"Change the combination!"

"How do I do that?"

"Start being of more service. Get in more AA and NA meetings. Pick up more commitments. And make sure you call me every day."

Mike's face lit up with tremendous relief that there was a remedy. "Okay," he pledged. *So this is how recovery works*, he thought as the compulsion suddenly lifted.

"One day there will come a time," Conrad stressed, "when no power on earth will be able to stop you from picking up, and you're going to have to turn to your higher power."

Alone one evening, the urge to use drugs once more invaded the Mike's mind, but this time Conrad was out of town. Mike thought of his girlfriend, who had 10 years sobriety, to help him, but she had said that she too would be away. He got down on his knees and prayed, "Dear Jesus, please help me. Give me strength, Lord. I know you're not going to let me do this. Just get me through the night."

Suddenly a knock sounded at the door. The door opened, and there stood his girlfriend. "I got back early and thought I'd holler at you," she announced. "What's wrong? You look white as a sheet."

"I was thinking about using."

“I guess I showed up right on time, huh?”

“Yeah, you just don’t know,” replied Mike in great awe.