

Chad's Story

BEFORE RIA

Growing up, I was blessed with a great family. I was great at sports and a straight A student. Looking back, I had all these gifts from God, but I wasn't able to fully understand or use those gifts in a healthy way. Eventually I dropped out of college, receiving (if anything) a degree in partying. I just really didn't have any sense of direction in my life. I had no idea what I was doing. I had so much potential and every opportunity in the world. By the time I'd hit 25, I knew there was more to life and I really felt like I had wasted a lot of it. I asked myself, you know, "How can I rebuild?" Before I moved into the Recovery In Action house, I was the 25 year old sum of the parts of my life that made me an alcoholic.



When I joined Recovery In Action, I was definitely at a low point in my life. I had a job but it was on the fritz. I was losing everything and the relationships I had with my family and friends were withering away. I remember that all of my high school friends were going to college and getting jobs while I was staying up partying until 4 AM on a Monday. One day I finally realized that I needed to try something different... I just didn't know what that thing was. I was living with my parents where I wasn't taking care of myself. Because I didn't know how to. When I finally started going through treatment, my parents told me "You know, when you get out of here, you can't come home. We've heard it all before and you need to do something different." So I knew I had to find somewhere to go.

There was a flyer for RIA at my treatment center that I walked by every day, and after talking to my counselor I finally called. The people I connected with at RIA told me I needed to find a sponsor, go to four meetings a week, and have legal employment. I also had to pay my rent every week. *On time*. No exceptions. I remember thinking that it was going to be impossible. I didn't have a car, I had just moved to the city from a small town, and I didn't know of anyone who could be my sponsor. I was scared to death because it seemed like so much to me. They made sure that I was starting out on the right path. They showed me the bus route that was near the house and how to use it. Greg was already living there when I started to settle in. I had no idea how much of an impact he would have on me later on.

DURING RIA

Before I moved in they wanted me to understand the guidelines. I needed to follow all of the rules if I wanted to stay there, and the biggest one was not to break the law. Others included cleaning up after yourself, making your bed in the morning, and doing your own dishes. Truthfully that stuff was scary for me. I thought for sure I was never going to make it. The idea of making myself dinner every night seemed impossible. Even doing laundry scared me. They taught me the little things... things that other people just get. Others are taught these things and they follow them, but for a guy like me, my drinking and using always came as a first priority. As time went on it really hit me that this was the last place on the block for me. Because of the push from RIA, I was willing to put all my eggs in one basket and really try. After a while, I found that I was happy when I was doing those everyday things, as if I had a sense of purpose. Whenever I was having a bad day, I would come home to a bed that was made and it would make everything better.

Once I got started there Gregory just swooped me up and took me under his wing. He showed me around and introduced me to everyone. I quickly knew that I wanted him to be my mentor so I tried to stick with him. He was the main guy in charge. He butted heads with a lot of people, but he only did that because he was doing his job. He was serious about recovery. When I first moved in, I was about two weeks sober. My sponsor was coming to pick me up to go to an important meeting, and I cancelled on him that day. Instead I went to my work Christmas party where they were serving free booze. I didn't drink but I was just more comfortable in that kind of environment. Once Greg found out he got in my face and told me, "If you get an opportunity like that, you don't miss it again". I was mad at first but once I calmed down I wanted to show him that I was serious just like him. Once he saw that that I had changed my mindset about getting healthy we developed a very strong relationship. It was also nice that we shared common interests. We were both into sports so there were times when we would just sit down to watch a game and talk.

Having a curfew really kept me grounded and when I was living in RIA, the thing that really helped me grow was the fact that I didn't have a T.V. in my bedroom. Before recovery I was the guy secluded in my bedroom playing Xbox all day. So for me to come home and have to read a book or have a conversation with someone really helped me interact with society. I had no idea how to listen to people. I had no problem talking. (*Laughs*) It was the listening and asking people about their day that I find difficult. If I had a hard day at work I knew I could come home and there would be a couple guys hanging out making food in the kitchen, a couple guys sitting down watching football in the living room. I knew that I could bring them all together and have a "mini meeting" about recovery. That's something I missed when I finally moved out of the house and into my own house.

One time, I started crying. It was in a Walmart, because I was buying envelopes and stamps so I could pay my bills. (*Laughs*) It was such a small thing but I thought to myself, "Oh my God! I'm buying stamps. I gotta call my mom." So I called her up and said, "Mom, I got bills now!" She responded with, "Son you've always had bills, you've just never paid them."

A really tough point came when I knew someone was using in the house. I had grown up with the mentality that you don't rat out your buddies. It was hard for me at first but I respected RIA, and respected the integrity of the house, so I let the houseman know. I had to look the guy in the face and tell him I knew he was using in front of everyone. I grew so much from it. Our house became stronger as a result and I welcomed that guy back later on when he was ready to make some changes in his life.

Because of that single moment, I believe the board really saw how much I cared for the house so they gave me Greg's old position, the Houseman. I was honored. Once Greg moved out and became liaison for RIA, he would come over every night and make sure everything was going as we said it was. I went to the store with him a lot. Our friendship and brotherhood with one another only grew stronger because of this relationship.

HOUSEMAN

I believe I got the most growth out of being the houseman. It's technically the only paid position because they get a discount on rent. The houseman is really the guy in the trenches. At first I really didn't want the position, mostly because I didn't want the responsibility, but more so because I didn't want to kick people out. After a while I came around and took it. Before I took the position I talked to my boss at work. I said, "You're the greatest manager I've ever worked for", and asked if he had any suggestions for me. He gave me books and advice. That's when I knew I wanted the role of houseman.

One of the most beautiful things about being the houseman is that you are the first man who gets to welcome a new guy into the house, and of course seeing the finished product of guys when they leave and move back with their families. All of that made it worth it. You might think that when you go to kick someone out they're going to be furious and that there's going to be a major problem, but that happens about like 5 % of the time because they're not trying to harm anybody else besides themselves. Yes, I had some guys take swings at me, and sometimes we would have late nights, but most of the time when somebody did get busted, they were immediately filled with remorse. They would call me and say "Hey man, I've been using this weekend. I'm gonna have my wife come over and get my stuff. I'm so sorry. You've done so much for me. I'm just so sorry."

You're also kind of the mediator, even when it comes to the small things. "That guy's been using my toothbrush." was a common phrase I would hear. I would encourage the guys to work it out themselves because I believed they needed to build those tools on their own. RIA also entrusted me with a \$500 credit card to buy these guys supplies. One day I looked down at the card and thought, "I'm managing someone else's money..." That was a huge step in my recovery.

Another beautiful thing about being the houseman is that you get to be an example. I definitely held myself to a higher standard. I didn't want to ask anything of anybody else that I wasn't willing to do myself. Once I was at that high standard, if guys weren't meeting me at the same place, I wouldn't get down on them. Instead, I would try to meet them where they were at. If they wanted to go hang out with different people and go to different meetings I would encourage them to let them find their own way. Everyone has their own way.



LIAISON

Being liaison was just another growth opportunity for me. After I moved out I followed in the steps of Greg and moved into a house with a group of friends. I saved up enough money to buy a car, I could invite my girlfriend over to stay with me, and while I wasn't living on my own yet, I was still one step closer. I was very proud of where I was in my life.

The liaison position is sort of like being a father figure. I was responsible for making sure the men had toilet paper, food, and supplies. I had to start asking myself questions like, "Do they have a vacuum?" I remember walking through Walmart with two shopping carts filled with paper towels.

When you're living at the house, it's not like it's the house guys against the board members by any means, but you definitely feel a stronger connection with the guys you're living with. When I became a liaison, I was kind of in the middle. Once I was a board member, I didn't have those emotional connections, but I had a greater understanding of why the rules were in place. Being on the board now, I've found that I want to incorporate more rules into the system. (*Laughs*) I sit there and think "Well of course I do, I don't live there anymore."

AFTER RIA

What I did with my life was nothing new, I didn't reinvent the wheel. It's a well-worn path and there were many guys that walked it before me. I was at a low enough spot in my life and had enough desperation to accept help from somebody else. I wanted help from people that were in my shoes at one point and so I finally turned to RIA. They weren't shoving a degree or a badge in my face and they weren't pointing a finger judging me. They told me that if I was willing to make the change, they were willing to give all they had back.

I've been able to go back and make amends with my relationships. I rebuilt my whole relationship with my parents. I'm the trusted guy in the family now, people come to me with their problems and that's just a total 180 degree turn around. I had some goals, I wanted to be self-supporting, I wanted to start a family, and I wanted to be successful at my job. Through these things, I wanted to be a good role model to my nephews and nieces. Here I am, almost four years later, and these things are coming true in my life.

I met my fiancé, now my wife, in my sobriety. I just got married last week. We did it right. We dated for two years, got engaged in our second year, and married in our third year of being together. My sister is going through a tough time raising four kids on her own and she's recently asked me to help out her out with that. My parents love me to death and now I call them up just to see how they're doing. I am no longer asking the question, "What can I get out of this conversation?" Now I'm asking, "How can I help?" I've learned that there are just some things I should do without expecting anything else in return.

The relationships I had before RIA are nothing like the relationships I have now. They are so much stronger. The most important relationship is my relationship with God. Since RIA I have joined the Catholic Church. My program didn't insist I do that, but I felt like I wanted to. I was able to feel right in the world. I hadn't put any effort into that relationship before I went to RIA, and now God is the central, most important figure in my life. There's been an inside change... it's so hard to describe, but I've really been given a new life. If you know the story about the prodigal son in the bible, I'm just an example of that.

In my darkest times I asked myself, “What the point of my life was? What am I doing here? I’m just here to work to drink and drink to work.” These were thoughts that entered my brain quite frequently. I always told myself, “I hope one day I die and figure it out.” But I didn’t have to die. I didn’t have to die to figure that out. I’m so honored and blessed to have the life I have now. It does not resemble the life I had before and RIA definitely helped make it possible. The guys in the house and the guys that are volunteering all make it worth it. It’s not something I did by myself. As I stated earlier, I didn’t reinvent the wheel. I just followed the guy in front of me and was willing to do the work.

