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When recovering addicts talk about their addictions.

DEA image in the public domain. Recently in the supermarket, one of the employees stopped to look at my toddler son. The man -- looking to be in his fifties -- looked carefully at my boy, then laughed, and remarked that they both had about the same number of teeth. I got a good laugh out of that, ready to share it with my friends who appreciate such humor. I figured his tooth problem resulted from eating too much sugary food, not brushing well enough, and not going to the dentist enough. The same man came back a few minutes later, and said he lost his teeth from cocaine abuse, proclaiming that he now has been clean for thirty years. He also volunteered that next year he will have qualified for dental insurance that will be able to fill the gaps in his teeth. I told him I am a criminal defense lawyer, and did not realize before that cocaine can cause tooth problems. He rubbed his gums to confirm the risk. Once an addicted person starts admitting the addiction, the floodgates seem to open for the recovering addict to publicize his or her addiction far and wide. For instance, a few years after I graduated from college, a local man one day asked me if I knew he had been a drug addict in college, at one point having done over one hundred hits of acid in one year (or was that two hundred hits?). During the next year or two, he asked me the same question at least two more times, and I replied that he had already told me, and that I was fascinated by his stories of his college drug use; I wonder whether some of his memory had been erased with the acid, or whether he just lost track of the people he had told of his addiction. A recovering alcoholic several times told me about the Alcoholics Anonymous meetings he had attended, including multiple meetings during a two-day weekend out of town. He later told me about having faced substantial stress, and hitting the bottle on a subsequent weekend as a result. He kept going to the AA meetings. Two Maryland drunk driving probation officers told me they were recovering alcoholics, and one told me that each day sober was an accomplishment. At the time, they said the program required that the drunk driving probation agents be recovering alcoholics. Recently, another probation officer told me this is no longer the case. A manager at the Second Genesis drug program several years ago told criminal defense lawyers visiting his facility that he was a recovering drug addict, he would not hesitate to inform the law enforcement authorities when any of his program members failed his program, and we should expect our drug addicted clients to lie. An alcoholic client of mine -- arrested for drunk driving -- admitted he was an alcoholic, and said he would keep drinking as a way to help deal with his problems. These are but a handful of tales from addicted people and the different ways they address their addictions, running from continuing with their drug of choice, to trying to stop (with varying results), to becoming assistants to law enforcement (apparently thinking such a path is beneficial to people with drug problems). To well-represent my clients, I need to know and understand where they are coming from. Many have addictions, including addictions to drugs and alcohol, the Internet, and sex. Their stories run from the fascinating (including those from members of the marijuana culture) to the disgusting (including those from clients sexually attracted to minors). The lies fly, too, including from the clients who have, but deny, addictions that are at the very root of the criminal prosecutions against them. What have been your experiences with addicted people? Jon Katz.

Posted by Jon Katz in Drugs at 00:00