

Never in a million years would I have thought the worst experience in my life would turn out to be the best things that ever happen to me. A new person was birthed through the cycle of acknowledging a problem, addressing it, seeking help, and moving forward.

Traditional quotes and a number of calculated theories, state "The hardest battles are given to the strongest soldiers", this quote justifies what I have personally experienced for the last year. In today's society the "pretense" of struggle, hardship, addiction, problems, commitment and normality are all looked upon as less than. When in reality tough experiences, are the ones that shape who we are in life, they allow us to see potential, hardships, develop character and most importantly the opportunity to come back time and time again, after each and every failure more profound, more disciplined and most importantly with a "Life experience" you can nurture and grow from.

When I was arrested for a DUI twice within a month span followed by being released by the Minnesota Vikings, I immediately felt panic, my mind ran to feelings of abandonment and neglect. I was fearful of my mistake and that my weak moment would not only taint my family's legacy but my own brand that I work so hard and persistent to make sure is pure and respectful. I prayed I would be forgiven, I asked for clarity, a new heart, mind and soul. And followed by my answered prayers I was given an opportunity to seek help, and embrace that I not only a professional athlete but a Father and Husband, had done something that would represent ugliness, judgment and desertion. But I could either sink or swim, and overcome this circumstance and learn from my mistake and emerge back into the world stronger and vast than ever.

Individuals with adversity must hit their rock bottom before they decide to make a change. For me that was January 1, 2014 when my life as I knew it came to a screeching halt. As I look back on it I cannot be more grateful.

I was arrested and spent almost 24 hrs in a holding cell and had nothing but time to think about the path my life was heading down. Coach Fraizer would often tell us "show me your vision and I can show you your future." That night I had a vision of my future and knew I had to do something to better it. It was at that moment I realized I could not do it on my own and made the decision to seek the help I needed. I was released January 2nd at around 2pm. By 4pm I was packed up and headed to Hazelden in Center City.

When I arrived I wasn't sure if I was coming or going, but I knew I was in the right place. I was assigned to the Cronin unit and for once I finally felt like I fit in. I found myself surrounded by a group of men whom knew my struggles before I said a word. Not only because they read about it in the papers but also because they were battling similar demons. After a little skepticism I dove into treatment headfirst. I removed my many masks and allowed myself to be myself. Over time my addiction had me convinced that I needed it for people to accept me. My brief

period in Hazelden proved otherwise. Sober Erin's light shines 100 times greater than "using" Erin ever could. The dark cloud hanging over my head was not the shadow of anyone or anything else. Rather my addiction hiding my brightness from the world and my endless abilities that followed.

I had a teammate visit me while I was in treatment. He brought with him the perfect words for me at the time. My teammate told me that God had been beating on the door to my heart and was waiting for me to let him in. It hit home for me because I've always felt I had a relationship with God but nowhere near as close as I needed. My teammate then told me that I had always been in God's favor. My first reaction was if I am in his favor then how could he let terrible things happen to me. But as I thought about my life for a second I immediately able to see that he was right. I was able to look at my life from a completely different perspective. I realized what I had instead of looking at what I had yet to obtain. I've been blessed with a beautiful and loving wife, an awesome son that blows my mind on a daily basis. He blessed me with the tools to have a career in the NFL that far exceeded the expectations of most.

I had become so caught up in others idea of success that I wouldn't let me be proud of what I had accomplished. I managed to make myself unhappy and forgot to enjoy the journey. With my faith restored and a new outlook, I feel equipped to take on any more of life's challenges thrown my way. With the choices I have made I no longer have much control over what happens with my professional football career; I do believe god has a plan for me and it will include furthering my legacy on the field. Football is my god given talent, and that is something that will thrive through triumph. However the most important thing to me right now is maintaining my sobriety. If I continue down the path I have started on I know I will leave a legacy off the field that my family and I can be proud of for years to come.

Sincerely

Erin Henderson