

# Patient Story: My Journey to Sobriety

*"I first started consuming alcohol at the age of 3 with my family. I was given tiny little bits of sherry and wine. That was a regular occurrence at family meals. And the first time that I consciously decided to abuse alcohol and get drunk I was 11."*

When she was a child, Dr. Gadhia-Smith turned to alcohol to deal with emotional pain from her parents' conflicts.

*"As a young person, you don't always know that you're in pain. You might be suffering a lot, but if that's all you know, you think that that's normal. And what happened in my case was that as I continued to grow, the pain intensified and became more and more difficult to bear. And it just became really hard to be in my skin."*

Dr. Gadhia-Smith's alcohol use turned into drug abuse at age 12.

*"I had good grades and things kind of looked okay on the outside and I just sort of continued that way through the rest of middle school and through a lot of high school pretty much being stoned on pot all day every day."*

By the time Dr. Gadhia-Smith was in college, she was also abusing cocaine, pills, tranquilizers and opiates.

*"I was under the influence of something 24 hours a day. But it was truly the heroin addiction that led me to hit my bottom. It was a tremendous amount of work to get it, pay for it, get it, get it in me and then my tolerance to opiates kept going up. It became so difficult to keep up with the addiction, so much work it was another full-time job all day, every day."*

Heroin addiction. A second DUI. It was time to get help.

*"I found support groups in the community with people like myself and I went as often as I could. What I saw there were not a bunch of miserable people who were just hanging on. No. I saw happy, healthy, confident, functioning people who had lives, who were having a good time. And I was not having a good time for the many last years of my alcoholism and addiction. And so I was very attracted to what I saw in the recovery community."*

Dr. Gadhia-Smith Anita has been clean and sober for 32 years.

*"So in my recovery, I made some very big changes. I went to therapy. And I've continued to explore spirituality, a faith life, many different areas of life I feel contributed to my recovery. And I've kept it up. I did not get clean and sober and then say "Okay, I'm all better now. I'm done. No. I know the potential for relapse is always there."*

Dr. Gadhia-Smith believes it's important to share her recovery journey with others.

*"I think it's extremely important to share my recovery journey because this is a disease that thrives in secrecy and shame. And one of the main reasons that people don't seek help is because of the shame that they have around it. And that they feel that they will have been a failure and that people won't understand and they've invested themselves in looking a certain way. And the more people that speak out, the more the stigma around addiction goes down and the less shame there is."*

*"Finding purpose and meaning in my life, I believe has been an important ingredient in life satisfaction and recovery. Because I do feel that nothing I went through was wasted, that it all happened for a reason and it has helped me to be able to help a lot of people that I would not have otherwise been able to understand or help."*