

"I'm drinking all the way up to treatment," Jon said. "I wasn't thinking about 30 days (of rehab) or whatever, and then my mom pulls out her checkbook and wrote a very substantial check, and my mom doesn't have... (that kind of money). That registered for me."

Reflecting on this back-to-reality moment, Jon said, with a tinge of re-commitment to sobriety, "There isn't a second check for me."

A 12-Step recovery program focusing on sobriety, strength, and serenity worked for Jon the first go-round, a rarity in a field where 90 percent of alcoholics relapse at least once over the four-year period following treatment, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

180 degrees

Today, sober since May 2007, Jon does not miss his previous ways. But he was not the only one who had to adjust. For the first year

of his sobriety, his mother called him every month to check if he had paid his bills.

"She has 10 years experience of me not paying my bills," he said.

Making amends and rekindling trust with family members

"What it looks like for me to be a sober person is a complete 180-degree turn from where I was. The fact that I'm thinking about anyone else at all is huge."

- Jon, future nurse and Real Life Angels scholarship recipient

is no easy feat, especially when they still have "visual memories" of the old Jon.

"Their experiences around my drinking and using were so real," Jon said.

People who have not experienced addiction do not grasp the full picture of recovery, Jon said.

"All they know is that I stopped drinking, I go to meetings, and so I show them through my actions that something has drastically changed," he said.

No longer being dependent on drugs or alcohol means "everything" to Jon.

"A lot of times I don't think I deserve it," he said. "I understand how elusive it is, but to me, to say those words 'I'm sober' is

something that I don't at all take for granted.

"What it looks like for me to be a sober person is a complete 180-degree turn from where I was. The fact that I'm thinking about anyone else at all is huge," he said.

Back in School

Jon heard about a scholarship opportunity with Real Life Angels through The Center for Students in Recovery, which hosts a regular, open "Students for Recovery" support group on UT's main campus. He was not sure whether he would meet the criteria

but he was hopeful that he did.

Scholarship recipients must participate in a substance abuse treatment program, graduate from high school or complete a GED, enroll in a continuing education institution, provide a recommendation letter, and must be "currently living in a manner demonstrated by a commitment to sobriety."

Jon was awarded the scholarship and now plans to transfer from Austin Community College into the UT School of Nursing.

"I have had first-hand experience with the important role that nurses play in the recovery field, and I hope to use my experience to make a difference in the lives of others through nursing," Jon stated in his scholarship essay.

Real Life Angels

Jon was flabbergasted when he learned the mission of Real Life Angels, which is funded by donations and run by volunteer board members.

"Knowing that people out there, (who) to my understanding

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