

Honesty Liller

Trusting Her Higher Power

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

HONESTY LILLER is the executive peer coordinator/administrator at the McShin Foundation, and she's only thirty-one years old. She's poised and no-nonsense, fields questions of peers and gives directives to staff like a seasoned professional. John Shinholser, founder of McShin, says Honesty is his right-hand woman.

Her office walls are peppered liberally with photographs of her husband and daughter and blood family and extended family—peers in recovery. Honesty may do her job so well because of her intimate understanding of addiction and the downward spirals that ineluctably come with it. For Honesty—and her name mirrors the way she tells truths on herself—it all began when she was just a kid, living with her family in Studley out in Hanover County.

"I started hanging out with older guys and girls at age twelve and did whatever I wanted to do," she says. "I was sneaky and manipulative so I kept it hidden from my parents and I kept my grades up. I started at a party house where the father worked at night. I started with weed and alcohol and acid at age twelve."

In the years that followed, as Honesty left Chickahominy Middle School and entered Atlee High, she began experimenting with more and more drugs. She attended Phish concerts in Hampton and Virginia Beach where she tried 'shrooms, and found them to her liking. She dabbled with cocaine, but discovered that she was "definitely a downer chick."

And then she graduated to heroin at the tender age of seventeen; she'd graduated high school the year before. One night her entire life might have changed for good and all if it hadn't been for a chance meeting and a guardian angel. At Friday Cheers, Honesty ran into an old friend she'd grown up, a girl who was drug free. Honesty was already somewhat wasted but she wrote her friend's telephone number down on a sheet of paper and tucked it in

her pocket. That action, very probably saved her life.

Later that same night, Honesty attended a going away party for a friend who was about to begin a jail term. All night long she did Jell-o shooters and then someone offered heroin which she snorted in an instant. In a short while, the drug took effect and she had apparently overdosed. Honesty found herself locked in a back bedroom. She was fading fast and her skin had gone bluish-purple. No one at the party wanted to call 911; they were afraid of getting arrested.

Somehow though, Honesty had the wherewithal to pull the slip of paper out of her pocket and call the old friend she'd hooked up with earlier that night. And the friend answered and Honesty told her, "I'm not doing good. I think I'm dying."

"She rushed right over and saved my life," Honesty remembers. "She was my guardian angel. It was my higher power intervening."

Honesty had stopped breathing that night for a full two minutes and her brain had shut down for an eternity of sixty seconds. On the ambulance trip to the hospital she was injected with Narcon and soon thereafter introduced to recovery. But this experience would not do it for her.

A couple years later she would meet a man who would become the father of her first child. "We stayed together for six years," Honesty recalls. "It was just straight chaos and drama." Two years into their relationship, Honesty got pregnant and continued using opiates through term. "You would think being pregnant would stop you, but I was in active addition," she says.

After the birth, Honesty's daughter went through two weeks of detox and her mother, in order to keep her child, went on methadone. Honesty would do whatever she could for child, but she was still with her first husband who again began taking pills. She followed suit and by degrees they worked their way back up the drug ladder. One night, her husband, at the time, dropped a heroin pill on the floor and Honesty found it and popped it.



"And that was all she wrote," says Honesty. Things began to spiral out of control with dizzying speed until her family intervened. Honesty spent 28 days in rehab up in Winchester. She finally broke it off with her daughter's father and began taking stock of her life. In rehab, she also met a man.

He joined Honesty back in Richmond with her daughter, but, in short order, things began to unravel again. "It was the worst relapse of my life," she says. "We hit rock bottom quickly, lost everything within eight months. We sold everything in our apartment from furniture to clothes to shoes. We would do whatever it took to get money for drugs."

Fortunately for Honesty, her stepmother knew of an oasis called the McShin Foundation. "And I came and met John and he said: 'Come stay with us,'" says Honesty. "I stayed for a day, used and left for about four days."

But John, who saw the Divine spark in Honesty, allowed her to return. And she became a strict adherent to the Foundation's 52 rules, which have always reminded me of the Rule of Saint Benedict of Nursia.

Honesty broke up with her boyfriend, at least for the time, and put her trust and faith in her higher power. "I threw up my hands," she says. "I just gave up. I was in complete turmoil."

A short time later her boyfriend came back to McShin and the couple started dating. Honesty moved in with her sister and enrolled her daughter in kindergarten. Things

were finally coming together.

She and her boyfriend rented an apartment and Honesty began understanding her own worth as a human being, thanks in part to Daniel Payne and JoAnn Cockey, who hired her to work in their homes. "They saw that I had the ability to work and to be a productive member of society," says Honesty.

After she had been clean for about five months, Honesty began visiting the McShin Foundation with regularity. "I was trying to give back," she says. Shortly thereafter Honesty was hired by the McShin Foundation. "I started working here January 2008," Honesty says with a broad smile.

She and her boyfriend eventually married and now have a three-year old son along with Honesty's daughter, who is now ten.

"I kicked, I screamed, I cried and whined," says Honesty. "But I finally started listening to people and it has gotten me here. That and my faith and trust in my higher power."

She tells me, that to date, the McShin Foundation, which opened its doors back in 2004, has somewhere in the neighborhood of 600 alumni.

Honesty Liller considers how she fits in at the McShin Foundation, why she is such a great peer counselor. "I know where they've been and what they're going through," she says. "This program literally saved my life. If it weren't for John I don't think I would be alive today."

And what a loss to society that would have been. **NJ**