

Journey Through the Eye of the Storm

Lee Yaiva, *CEO of Scottsdale Recovery*

The innate qualities and intricacies of indigenous peoples is distinct and defined by tribal affiliation. The genetic make-up of who we are as a people rests in amazing stories of evolution, contrasting with historical and intergenerational traumas that impact our very existence. To understand the connection between two polar opposites that create an internal storm of unattended traumas and the unseen beauty, triumph and strength of native peoples, is to take a journey through the eye of the storm. Surrounded by chaos and confusion, the core is peace, balance, and harmony rooted in the foundation of cultural identity.

My evolution into self-destructive behavior through my abuse of drugs and alcohol could easily be attributed to peer pressure, my desire to fit in, or the curiosity factor. However, the reality of it was I was groomed to acquire a position as an alcoholic and addict way before I realized what and how it happened. I developed the ability to embrace a victim mentality, to justify my anger, to accept traumas that were not mine and as my predecessors, the inadequacies of manhood consumed me before the alcohol did, but it was not far behind.

I had my first drink at 13, that first taste led to my first arrest, one of many incarcerations to follow. I would think that this initial experience would have taught me to refrain from such behavior, but what it did was comfort my incapacity. Although my incarcerations were unpredictable and sporadic, I remained in bondage of mind and spirit with an inability to reach out for help. My light dimmed and I embraced a darkness that coincided with my outlook on life. I expanded upon my occupational experience as an alcoholic with marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, and other drugs; this became my full-time job. I fit the job description and although I lacked experience, I was relentless, reckless, resourceful, and careless; criteria fit for an addict.

Thirteen quickly turned to 27, and I evolved to become a homeless alcoholic and addict. I was not a victim; I knew what would happen if I continued to behave with conscious abandon and an open neglect of life. In fact, I embraced it. I soon realized that no one was telling me that they loved me, that they cared or that they were worried about me; what I would equate to “white noise”. I expected this from my mother, my grandmother, my siblings. The silence was comforting, there was no accountability, no responsibility, or expectations.

I was mimicking an unremarkable story of evolution. It was an evolution into alcoholism and drug addiction, one that had been told before. Over and over again, from one generation to the next, with similar characters, story lines and back drops. I had to decide whether or not I would continue to tell the same story with the same ending, a rerun with no significance, filled with a facade of memories that were half-truths and blatant lies told by a grieving mother, siblings and friends.

The insignificance of my truth leads me to distinct memories, sitting on the concrete sidewalk outside of a liquor store in San Pedro where people would flick nickels, pennies, and dimes at me as they exited the store. They looked at me with disdain and stepped over me with disgust in their eyes. The penny reflected my value as it rolled to a stop and settled next to me. The fire inside of me met their stares with a mental fortitude that spoke loudly, “Watch out, because when I come get mine, I’m going to take yours!” My interior had yet to match my exterior, but excellence is not accidental.

On February 11, 2005 I decided that the narrative of my story had to change; that I would not allow someone else to dictate the chapters of my life through an obituary but I would begin directing change and enhancing the quality of my life through a multitude of page turning events. The internal conflict between my current condition and the same innate qualities that enhanced by ability to evolve as an addict were what I would need to embrace recovery. Relentless perseverance, utilization of resources and an ability to remove my emotional response while in pursuit of my objective, recovery.

Journey Through the Eye of the Storm

Lee Yaiva, CEO of Scottsdale Recovery

Through this process I have developed a methodical and strategic approach to wellness, a blueprint created to navigate the recovery process. I became surgical with my trauma to ensure that it did not support my tragedy but confirmed my triumph. I created expectations of my own, established my foundation in recovery and nurtured my roots. I failed to recognize that the eye was the gateway to my salvation and that I lacked a sense of cultural connection and cultural identity, causing me to reach for something that was not mine.

The technical acquisition of knowledge will enhance a tactical approach to wellness, this will improve the quality of and change the summary of life. The merging of two worlds has allowed me to take a multidimensional approach to recovery. By understanding that I will be an addict for the rest of life, I chose to embrace the innate qualities of an addict rather than fighting it. I then manipulated these qualities and transitioned them to positive attributes that would serve others.

What I did not possess, I sought out to create certainty and confidence to replace inadequacy. This was filled by remarkable people; they would be my strength and my support. They loved me until I was able to love myself. They led me until I was strong enough to create a path of my own. Lee and Cindy Humes, Lisa Moody, Diana Yazzie-Devine, Richard Moreno, Kenneth Lewis and multitude of inspiring individuals that knew who they were because they understood who they were not.

I continue to be led by remarkable people that nurture my passion and enhance my skill set. Chris Cohn and Michelle Siwek have afforded me an opportunity that provide a platform to positively impact the lives of others like me. Who I am is a direct result of who embraced me, who led me, who taught me and who nurtured the innate qualities of who I am and for that I am eternally grateful.

At present, I am 16 years clean and I am the Chief Executive Officer for Scottsdale Recovery Center. I am a full blood Hopi from Shungopavi, Arizona with a deep-rooted history in beauty and fortitude. The chaos and confusion of my storm is fatherhood influenced by 6-year-old twin boys Franco and Vicente. My oldest son Isaiah has also brought to my life two grandsons Zion and Jericho, and a beautiful daughter in law, Carissa who will bless us with a brand-new baby girl in the coming months. Isaiah has inspired me by his strength and conviction, and I could not be prouder of the man that he has become. At my core is the peace, balance, and love of my amazing wife Crestina. Harmony is rooted in my firm sense of cultural identity and a remarkable story of evolution. Like the Phoenix, the legendary bird that rose from the ashes of its own self destruction, I am free once again.

Reconnect. Rebuild. Recover.

Note from the Author:

I am a full blood Hopi from Shungopavi, Arizona with a deep-rooted history in beauty and fortitude. The chaos and confusion of my storm is fatherhood influenced by 6 year old twin boys Franco and Vicente. At my core is the peace, balance, and love of my amazing wife Crestina. Harmony is rooted in my firm sense of cultural identity and a remarkable story of evolution. Like the Phoenix, the legendary bird that rose from the ashes of its own self destruction, I am free once again.

#SRCSTRONG #TEAMSRC
lee@scottsdalerecovery.com