

Both of Me

I'm lucky to be here, that is both of me are lucky to be here.

You see I've got two sides - the early me with meth, and today's me with a whole lot more.

So yes, I'm lucky to be here in this little community called Adams County. My first few years here started a bit on the rough side. I didn't smile much, and really didn't care about much of anything. Now . . . I grin from ear to ear when thinking about the future.

My friends call me "Flip." In my 38 years of existence, I've seen most of the lower 48, both as a chef's son and later a traveling carpenter. My parents split early. I couldn't rely on them, giving me more reason to look inside for strength to live another day. Even up to six months ago, with four children, I figured I was the only one I could count on.

You see I've always internalized things. I always looked to myself for the answer. I still cringe thinking about the time when I thought meth helped me be a better person. It made me someone I wasn't. Today there are two sides to this guy. The pre-jail, meth-abused, angry me - I'll call him Early Flip, and the Flip you see standing here today.

Early Flip started using drugs in high school with a common "gateway drug" – marijuana. They told him grass wasn't damaging . . . they lied. Once he arrived in Adams County, the suppressed forces began to mount. Marital problems, worries about the future, and the challenges of a new home all contributed to one evening when a friend supplied him with his first hit.

Meth became his way to deal. It made him think he could carry the weight. It made Early Flip think he could fix everything. All it fixed was nothing...he got a failed marriage, he lost a good paying job in carpentry, he was put in jail, and he was stuck in front of the Adams County Drug Court. Early Flip was one big mess.

The Flip you see here, me, Today's Flip, knew a change was needed.

No doubt my nickname sort of explains my life. I looked up the word on the computer, it said flip means to "*move, push, or throw (something) with a sudden sharp movement,*" such as "she flipped off her dark glasses." Those glasses the girl was wearing weren't going to move until she forced them off.

That's what happened to me...someone...or maybe something, told me to walk away from Early Flip. Something was pushing me to force him off like a cheap pair of sunglasses. It wasn't any one thing, but a combination of events:

- The day I was arrested - as the deputy's cruiser entered the jail's intake port through a rising overhead door, I heard, and I still hear, the policeman's caring voice, "There's your door opening to a new life,"
- The Berne Mennonite Church's jail ministry, now my church family,
- The personal story of my pastor,
- The great people at the Adams County Drug Court, and
- A long-overdue realization I wasn't alone.

About a year ago, I thought I was done...I'm now in a good place. I can now look at someone with similar struggles and know what they are doing, thinking, and feeling. I know they may be still struggling with their "early self," but now I can help them. I can look them in the eyes, and tell them "You and me spent way too much time showing people how we do it, now let's show them how God does it!"

Today, I'm building a life, a great life with a foundation of faith. I don't rely on me, or meth, or those early friends who didn't care about me. Of course, I still face temptations, but now my response is simple: I now lay them at the foot of the cross. One of my favorite Bible verses helps me remember who's on my side. It's John 14: 21 – "Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them." Each day when I look in the mirror, I see Today's Flip, and I thank God for my life . . . actually both lives . . . Early Flip, and Today's Flip. That's right, I thank God for Early Flip. Without him, and without Him-God, I may not be standing in front of you today.

I'm excited about the future. I'm excited about the future of my children. I'm excited about seeing friends in my Tuesday night Bible study group. We call ourselves "The Misfits," sort of a summary of who we are - misfits according to some standards, but a part of the team in the eyes of God.

There are times when I just start smiling, thinking now I'm part of the solution instead of the problem. I'm thankful for many of the successes I've had, especially the time I now spend with my boy. One of our favorite things to do is go fishing at a local pond. We talk of Early Flip – I want him to know how someone can really screw things up and still find favor with God and make things right. My former wife and I still talk, and we work closely together to help all our children make the right decisions. I need to make sure they know how a simple, stupid decision can ruin someone. But they also need to know there is a friend waiting for them, to support them if they do something wrong.

Like I said, Early Flip still calls me to come back. I dream about using meth, and almost everywhere I turn here in the county, drugs such as marijuana, meth, and heroin are easily available.

But today I'm building a new life as someone who is giving back. I want to work with others here in Adams County to develop a job-placement program for fellow recovering addicts. I know God gave me a skill in carpentry, but for now, God has me in a good position. Who knows, maybe on His time, I'll get back to building things again, but for now, I need to build up the many things meth and Early Flip damaged.

I don't shy away from talking about Early Flip when asked...he's part of who I am. What's different for me – now clean for almost a year – is this new life includes a network of good friends, supportive close family, a caring church, continued access to the programs offered through the Adams County Drug Court, and most importantly, and I mean this with a whole room full of thanks, God's hand in my life! I always wanted to fix stuff, but now I know I can...with God's help!

It's true. I'm lucky to be here. Both of me.

As told to Tim Ehlerding