

Making Life Worthwhile



Delphi House.

Jim Herman, 29, works as a counselor for East House, Inc., a halfway house organization for people with substance abuse problems. The territory he covers on his job is not strange to him. He has been the route and knows all the rough spots along the way. Herman began using alcohol and drugs at a young age and his habit evolved into shooting heroin by the time he was 18. With the help of a psychiatrist at Strong Memorial Hospital, he became aware of the many places where he could get help after his release from the hospital. He began treatments at Delphi House while living at East House.

Arrests, probations and four and a half years spent in jails in this area had been the highlights of his life, until he found help and decided to make his life worth more than popping pills and drinking. This is his story of how he turned his life around.

"I think that I had a pretty good childhood in terms of being involved with sports and everything. But it seems that later on school wasn't very interesting to me and my relationship with my parents started to change.

"I didn't feel like I could talk or have a very good relationship with my father and at that point in my life, I really had nobody that I felt close to or could talk to. As I look back now, I can tell that's when I started to withdraw a little from life and from school in particular. School became a drag and I had no real interest in anything at that point. It was the beginning of the end, of my leaving school

which happened a little later when I was 16.

"I started to hang around a bit with the guys that would get into trouble. I started to drink and took Valiums to begin with and through that I found that I was able to become more comfortable with myself. It was then that I got away from the real me, who I didn't even know at the time but didn't like at all. I started to develop a "front", being somebody that you're really not; a "cool" person.

"As I said, I didn't like myself at all at that time in my life. I didn't like too much about my physical appearance and I didn't like what was happening to me in regards to the relationship I had built up with my parents. I didn't think I was a very worthwhile person. Why? I guess maybe I never heard too many good things about myself or my lifestyle from my parents that I can remember.

"I thought that I could become worthwhile by being "cool" so I started to pop pills and drink. That led to skipping school and eventually led up to getting in trouble with the police. It was minor at first, getting into fights and small things like that. Then it started to get more involved. I was arrested for stealing a car when I was 16, my first arrest. I also quit school at that time.

"I started hanging around up at Midtown Plaza since I had nothing but time on my hands. The group of people that I hung around with were involved with drugs and since I was accepted by them as a member of their group, I did the same thing.

"When I first got arrested for car theft, I received a probation. Since I wasn't doing well while on probation, I was sent to a starting camp down in New York City for about nine months. It didn't help me that much because I still couldn't be honest with myself. When I got out of there, I just continued to get into more trouble and continued to get arrested.

"When I was 18, I got involved with shooting heroin. Again, I found that it helped me feel good about myself. Taking the heroin helped to block out my negative feelings about myself.

"The more I got involved in trouble, the further I fell away from my family. Along with that, I had fears; fears of not being a worthwhile person and not being able to accomplish some of the things that everybody tries to attain: Getting a job, becoming involved in a productive relationship. I didn't seem to fit in with those types of people. Instead, I was becoming more and more the street-type. My relationship with my parents was almost severed. I became more withdrawn and spent less time at home and more in the streets.

"I've been arrested about 20-22 times, been on probation three times and I've been involved in different institutions that are set up in regards to the help you need. I was involved in a lot of group therapy and with a lot of people that I think sincerely wanted to help, but none of it did any good because I still didn't want to help myself.

"So it just continued and I spent time in jail. I have an arrest record that goes back quite a ways and I've done about four and a half years total in jails around the area. I didn't like that and I didn't like what I was becoming more and more. I didn't like the kind of people I was hanging around with because I had enough intelligence to tell me that these were not the kind of people that I could develop a good relationship with.

"But, the older I was getting, the more into stealing things I got. As a result, I was alienating the street people more and was becoming more alone in the process. I didn't care about anybody then and I didn't care too much about myself, either.

"One particular day, I was looking for income tax checks in mailboxes and I couldn't find any. But while I was looking, and I had no drugs in my system, all these feelings that I mentioned, the fears and especially the aloneness, they all hit me that day and I decided that was it. I didn't want anymore. I wasn't sure what to do, but I knew I didn't want to live like that anymore.

"I was 26. I never held on to a job in my life. I had no skills, no education and really no family left. I had to do something so I put myself in the hospital, R-Wing at Strong Memorial Hospital. While I was at R-Wing, I started to develop a relationship with a psychiatrist there who was willing to listen and give me what I needed or actually what I was finally ready to

receive, genuine care and concern.

"It was the psychiatrist that put me in touch with Delphi and East House. Delphi came up to interview me while I was there. When I was released from Strong, I went to East House, had dinner there, and talked with the director of the organization. I decided to live at East House because I felt it would give me a better opportunity to be by myself and at the same time be with other people but keep away from the people that I used to know on the streets. It gave me a chance to give myself a fresh start to get it together without the temptations of being back out there with everybody in the drug scene.

"It was a very good support system. I was able to be around people who cared, staff members that I could talk to. I think at that point in my life, the most important thing was not to be alone, that's why living at the halfway house was good for me. My attendance at Delphi — six days a week — combined with my involvement in AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) pretty much kept my time occupied. I lived at East House for about six months while attending Delphi's day program. Then I got an apartment of my own and have been self-supportive ever since.

"For the last 15 months, I've been working for East House, Inc., at Sterner Hall on the third floor of the YMCA on Gibb Street. It's a halfway house that works for people coming out of state hospitals. As a counselor, I

help the people there develop the skills necessary for them to be able to deal with some of their problems. The people that we deal with are in programs during the day at Strong, Northside or State Hospital and they have therapists or psychiatrists that they see on a regular basis.

"What we do at Sterner Hall is help the people deal with their everyday problems and function living in a halfway house instead of being institutionalized like they were in the hospital. When they were in the hospital, they didn't have to do that many things for themselves so we try to help them develop just basic skills for themselves. Keeping their rooms clean and taking care of themselves is important but the big thing for them is learning to socialize a little bit better with other people because some of the people we deal with have been institutionalized for quite a while. It's very interesting work.

"I also work at an apartment building downtown. We have seven apartments there for people that we think have the potential to become a little bit more independent living over there. I run a group over there once a week on Monday nights. The purpose is to give people an opportunity to be on their own more and to take advantage of that opportunity to gain much more independence so that hopefully they can function completely on their own and eventually get an apartment of their own.



Jim Herman provides counseling to those at Sterner Hall. Here Jim shares a laugh with client Kathy Fox.



Jim helps Sterner client Ernest Sherman with a problem.