

Sam Grittner, standup comedian and comedy writer.

Sam lives in Brooklyn, New York, but he's originally from St. Paul, Minnesota. He was diagnosed with depression as an adolescent and was put on Prozac. He was a middle child and found that getting laughs was a good way to get attention. So in high school he joined a comedy group.

"I've done so many drugs in my life and there is nothing better to me, no greater high than having a good set or getting an applause break. There's just nothing like it."

Sam went off Prozac at age 17 and then started taking other kinds of drugs beginning with marijuana.

He got out of high school, skipped college, got a day job and became a standup around Minneapolis. Around this time he developed a lingering stomach pain. He still had depression to deal with as well. He found relief outside the medical establishment.

"Somebody at work turned me on to Percocet and Vicodin. I was taking 10 day, 20 a day. Then they said you can do that with this one pill called Oxcy."

Before long, Sam Grittner goes from being a comic who uses drugs to a drug addict who used to be a comedian. And though this may not shock you, street drugs don't cure depression.

"I did heroin for a year and a half straight. I highly recommend not doing it. I lost friends, I lost family, I lost a job. But the absolute worst part of the entire experience was I didn't even learn how to play jazz."

Sam says he kicked heroin and crack cold turkey, moving in with his parents for two months. He decided he needed a change of scenery, so he moved to New York to recommit to comedy. It's not a particular drug that makes you an addict. Having a predisposition to depend on substances makes you an addict.

"There were 30 bars within a six block radius from where I was staying. I moved here and said I was going to stay sober. After two days, I was a regular at some bar and I was smoking pot within four or five months."

For the next several years, Sam worked on his comedy and carries around the weight of his addiction. One day he says he woke up after a blackout binge having lost \$350 in cash from his job waiting tables. So he quit drinking.

He was left with comedy and a steady stream of marijuana and depression which hadn't really been fully addressed.

Which brought him to a day in May 2016. "I woke up, showered. I was getting ready to go to work and the negative voices inside my head just took over and told me that today was the day that I was finally going to kill myself."

“I sat down on my bed for about 20 minutes debating whether or not I should do it. I was trying not to think about my family. That’s something that always held me back. I hoped that they would forgive me. I closed my eyes and I tried to be at peace with myself.”

“I fell asleep and then six hours later I woke up. My first thought was ‘I managed to screw up my suicide attempt.’ The second thought was ‘I’ve been talking about my suicide note on stage and getting a great response, so the second thought was ‘Well, at least you got more material. The third thought was ‘I need help.’”

“I called my job and I said ‘Sorry I didn’t come in to work today, I had suicidal thoughts and I’m fine now.’”

His boss told him to get a note from his therapist saying he was ok to come back to work.

“I called my therapist and I said “I don’t need you to ask any questions. I just need a note from you that says my faculties are o.k. I’m good to work.”

“Oddly enough, that raised some red flags with her. About 15 minutes passed and I hear a knock on my door and it’s two of New York’s finest checking out a suicide attempt. I open up the door and I say ‘Gentlemen, wonderful to see you! I’m the only one here. I have no idea what you are talking about.’” They believe me.”

The reason I lied to them was because I had to pay out of pocket for an ambulance and I know it was \$1,000. So I thought, ‘I will somehow make it to a hospital.’ Mount Sinai was the closest one. I checked myself in there.”

“They put me in the psych ward. I had to wait six to eight hours in a holding unit with people that were screaming. It was really cold and not a fun experience. They took away my shoe laces, my regular clothes. They took away everything I had. I got a green jumpsuit and a bed. I was in the psych ward for 12 days. I don’t know why I lived, but there has to be some reason. The doctors told me unequivocally that I should have died.”

Sam has written about this in two essays entitled *Dying to Live* and *A Funny Thing Happened as I Was Typing My Suicide Note*. When he published his essays, he was overwhelmed with messages from people who have depression and substance abuse or have lost a family member to it. He says being able to help some of them might be the reason he survived.

“After I published an essay on the suicide note, the very next morning I got an email from a gentleman who is 17 years old in Arizona who told me he was going to kill himself that night. He had read my essay and that essay had moved him enough that he told his parents what he was suffering from. He ended up getting help. He’s healthy today and he’s sober and he has a therapist that he sees on a regular basis. And I’ve received four more emails like that. I don’t care what I do with the rest of my life. That’s more than I could ever have hoped to do with my life.”

“My favorite thing to do now is to talk about suicide on stage in a way that doesn’t romanticize it, but de-stigmatizes it. There are very few subjects left that are taboo in our culture. Mental health and being addicted to drugs and alcohol are the two biggest ones. Being able to talk about that onstage and make people laugh while thinking about it is an amazing thing to do. I feel I am doing service.”