

I would like to introduce myself, my name is Wayne Cortez. I am a 54 year old Native American in recovery; my drug of choice was heroin. I started using heroin at the age of 13. I started getting high once or twice a week then it turned into an everyday thing. Before I knew it I was strung out with no hope in life. I had no knowledge of what the drug was doing to me, so when I wanted to take a break I couldn't. I would get sick: cold sweats, chills, and I would be vomiting. I felt like my skin was crawling with ants. I couldn't sleep or eat, I had no idea what was going on with me. I thought I had the flu but, I was actually in withdrawals and the only way to make it go away was to get high again. There I was, up and running again; a 13 year old kid with a habit that could kill a grown a man. To tell you the truth I wanted to die. I felt it was better than living with parents that didn't care about what was happening to their kids. My home life took a toll on me. I have been through a lot mentally, physically, and emotionally.

A lot of people are dealing with trauma, and it starts at an early age. We are all seeking escape from abuse. That was my life. The older I got the worse things became. Now a lot of adults and youths are getting creative with drugs. The one that is the biggest issue today is Fentanyl. This drug alone has ten different names. These dealers will do anything to make the drug look appealing.

Many people think drugs are something that they can take without having any consequences. I don't want to sit here and talking about how it's only affecting Indian people, because drugs do not discriminate. Drugs destroy lives. I thank the creator that I was one of those who survived this sickness. Everyone I grew up with has passed away from an overdose or blood diseases related to heroin use.

The other day I saw two of my native brother that I use to get high with still fighting with their addiction. I stopped to ask two questions, "aren't you tired of waking up and having to hustle for a morning fix?" and "aren't you tired of abusing your body living day by day like a zombie?" I said these things to them because I care. This is probably something they haven't heard in a long time, I CARE! I let them know if they want help I will help them. I am very grateful to be alive, and now I can make a difference.

Today I get out in the community educating as many people as I can about the current opiate addiction affecting the tribal communities. I talk about how I got my life back, by going to Indian Health counseling, Wellbriety Meetings, Ceremonials, Sweat Lodge, Traditional songs, and surrounding myself with positive people. As long as the creator gives me the strength to live another day, I will continue to help those in need. Please forgive me if this is not the normal testimony of a heroin addict. I believe we can get our point across without having to go into detail about our lives and the ones who suffered the most. My wife, my kids, and grandkids are my biggest supporters, and I love them with all my heart.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to express a little bit of my life as a heroin addict in recovery.