

“My Name Is Steve” “Hi Steve”

By Pete Malicki

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Steve – a lifelong addict.

Note: Steve stands with a notebook, scribbling in it often.

Scene

My name is Steve. (*pause*) Goddamn newbies. Alright, so I'm here because I'm an addict. Always was, always will be. I've submitted to a higher power over and over but I'm still here. Doing better these days but I'll never get away.

Discovered what I was in early high school when I took my first drag of a cigarette. "Oy Steve," my friend Bootleg said. "Got us some fags from my brother." "Your brother sure does have a surplus of fags," I replied. I'd just been to maths. I thought that was pretty funny. "I don't care what you say," he shot back. "I'm putting this fag in my mouth."

Bootleg took a drag and handed it to me. I wiped his spit off and took a drag myself. Then another. Then I took the pack off him. Smoking did something my teenage body found itself compelled to repeat. I coughed and choked. It stank and tasted like the ashes from an outdoor barbeque. But I craved it even more than I hated it and I reckon I was addicted before the first exhalation.

After a month or two of smoking as much as I could get my hands on I challenged myself to smoke non-stop for a whole hour. All my mates brought their ciggies along and I didn't take a single breath without my lips around a cigarette for forty-five minutes. I sat in meditation, eyes closed, slow deep breaths in and slow deep breaths out, over and over again until I woke up in hospital.

No one wants to see their kid smoke so my folks put me through every treatment they could find, from hypnotherapy to patches to lots of yelling. One day dad says to me, "Steve, next time you want to smoke, eat a piece of chocolate. Caffeine's better for you than nicotine and it tastes a lot less nasty." He opened the pantry and there was a twenty litre tub of Mars Bars.

I quit smoking and put on eighty three kilos, which made me almost three times my weight. It took a good few months before I no longer craved fags but I was deep in the Mars by then. I'd eat one in almost every class at school and I was actually going to Maccas to get nutrition. Most of the weight came on over the summer holidays and I came back with a body like a spinning top. People my age wouldn't mess with me but I was a slow-moving target for the older kids.

I have a thick skin. Two older brothers, so I'd been copping their crap since I was a toddler getting pushed into the rose bush out front. These older kids started calling me names and I mostly ignored them, but one guy was particularly in-my-face about it on a regular basis. Told him where to go one afternoon and he says to me, "What you gonna do about it, boom batty?" and he shoves me into a fence. Laughs when one of the palings cracks under my fat arse. Doesn't laugh so hard when I pick it up and slam it sideways into his knee and watch the joint go about ninety degrees in the wrong direction.

This was a bad move for more than one reason and it was suddenly in my best interests to get in better shape. I hit the gym. Walked for twenty minutes on the treadmill and made it two point two kilometres. Next day I did the same distance in less than nineteen minutes. Did five push ups, which wasn't too hard on account of the minimal distance between the floor and my gut when I was propped up on my arms. Did ten the next day. Started working out ten to twelve times a week

and ate nothing much more than steak and protein powder. Got my micronutrients from McSalads.

My day came and a group of that guy's friends surrounded me after school. I was still pretty chubby then. No chance I'd do anything useful there so I let them kick the crap out of me. It was a blur of movement on top of me as punch after kick after knee hammered into my blubber. After a few minutes I realise I'm loving it. "Harder," I hear myself saying. "Come on you pussies. Hit me harder. You want Limpy McDickface to think a pack of girls beat me up? Show him what you got." They hit me harder still and I'm washed full of blissful agony.

So by the time I hit twenty I'm addicted to adrenaline and I've fallen in love with a paramedic. Susie says to me, "Steve, I'm getting sick of seeing you in this ambulance. I know you're not a stupid person. Stop getting into fights."

"Have you ever picked up the other guy?" I say. I'm just a magnet for violent bozos."

She doesn't buy it, and she's suspicious that I only ever get beat up when she's on duty. I ask her on a date. She says no. I tell her I'll ask again the next time I see her and eventually she realises the only way I'll stop getting in trouble is if she says yes. We date and it goes well, so we do it a few more times. We sleep together. I'm embarrassingly bad at it. Thankfully she's nice enough to offer me a second shot so I try again and it's still fairly woeful.

The next day I pass a girl on the street and give her an appraisal. Sure. Why not? Say hi and she runs away. Say hi to six more girls until Rashika from Subway responds with a coy smile. I'm way better with Rashika than I was with Susie. It spurs me on to try for more. Turns out my hit rate is about one in twelve so I just have to speak to a dozen girls in a day to get laid. It's cheating but I tell myself they're just practice girls. I think I love Susie and wouldn't want to hurt her. But... I know this isn't going to turn out well.

My prediction is more than accurate. She dumps me and I'm gutted. I go from girl to girl to console myself but I start crying after every orgasm. I go home and take up smoking and binge eating again, then I open my first ever bottle of spirits and fall into such a deep, dark hole I think I've never been in a hole prior.

It dawns on me as I ricochet from addiction to addiction that the one constant in my life is loneliness. Whatever I take up to fight it, it only helps in the present. Kids never liked me, my parents gave me money but booted me out of home, I have no interests which aren't self-destructive and I've never held a job or done anything meaningful. I'm the epitome of pathetic. I drink and I'm happy while I'm swallowing, then I remember how awful everything is and I need another mouthful.

I have such a reputation by now that I actually get headhunted into AA. I open up to all the old crocodiles and their wordless empathy is nicer than anything I've come across in all my years. I try a different group for my sex addiction and next thing I know I'm going to eleven meetings a week and wondering why they let me stay in the ovarian cancer one.

There's this huge bald guy in NA who sits there knitting while we talk. After a few weeks he's given everyone in the room two scarves and a beanie. "Hey man," I say to him. "What's with the needlework?" He eyeballs me for a full ten seconds then says, "Keeps the needles out of my arms, kid. You got a problem with that, you ain't getting the winter socks."

I don't have a problem and the socks are super warm and comfy but the point is his theory inspires me. I am and always will be an addict so maybe the trick is to get addicted to harmless activities instead of substances and masochism. It's tough for my attention span but I end up getting into mathematics and finding casual work checking some accountants' sums. I go home at the end of the day and do Sudoku to keep out of trouble. It becomes the thing I do when I'm otherwise idle. See?

Steve shows his notebook to the audience, which is covered in Sudoku puzzles.

I call Susie and she hangs up on me. She doesn't reply to texts or emails. I make a plan to run into her and start hanging around drunks. Hit the jackpot one night when a guy I met walks through a glass door. Susie's on duty and I pull her aside when she arrives. I tell her I've changed and I'll do anything to get her back. "You're not good enough for me," Susie tells me. "I never was and I never will be," I say, "but I *will* win you back."

She fixes the drunk guy's head and storms off into the ambulance.

Months later and she still hasn't spoken to me. I'm doing my support groups and I'm actually happy these days, because I know I'll win Susie back eventually. Want to know how I know? It's fairly simple really: I'm not going to stop trying. I *can't* stop trying.

My name is Steve and I'm an addict. Thanks for listening. Checking out.

Steve walks offstage.