

Darrin Malone grew up in Long Island, the oldest of three children. Tragedy struck the family when Darrin was 11—his father passed away, leaving the children's mother to care for the family. Darrin loved his mother deeply—she was *"my whole world,"* he said—but she was addicted to opioids and in and out of psychiatric institutions. There was rarely any food in the house, and the lights were often out because utility bills went unpaid.

Darrin, who always had a strong sense of responsibility, got a job at a deli when he was only 11 years old. He became caretaker for his younger brother and sister, and would bring groceries to his mother on his weekly visits. One day in 2013, when he arrived with groceries at the residential institution where she lived, he learned that she had died of a drug overdose.

Darrin began using drugs and alcohol to numb his pain. He moved in with his fiancé on the Upper East Side after his siblings went to live with godparents. With an unlimited supply of Xanax and Adderall, which were prescribed by doctors, Darrin was constantly numb, and would stay awake for days at a time. He worked as a web designer but was constantly letting things slide, disappointing his clients.

"My mom was my whole world, but I replaced that world with scotch and Xanax. I became numb. That was my life until a little over two years ago."

After seven years together Darrin's fiancé, frightened by his drug use, left, casting Darrin adrift for the next five years. He had lost everything. With no money and nowhere to go, Darrin stayed in cheap motels, on the street, or found people to crash with. He felt suicidal but just kept pushing the envelope. He met a woman who wanted to take care of him. They lived together for two years, but it fell apart.

"I built a whole identity around a lie. I would say that I was working, but that would be a lie. I stole prescription drugs from her. She saw me in the worst possible state, and the last time she saw me I was in a psych ward in Hackensack, New Jersey."

Darrin ended up homeless, sometimes spending nights in the NYC shelter system, and sometimes sleeping in trains or out in the snow. One evening, on the way from one shelter to another, Darrin was mugged. He had been awake for four days, and as he stumbled towards Bellevue Hospital and saw the sun rising in the east, a terrible thought struck him—he would never be happy again. No longer wanting to live, Darrin stepped directly into oncoming traffic--miraculously, the car stopped just before he was hit.

Darrin had been out of touch with his family for years, but the first thing he did after his brush with suicide was call his little sister. He told her what happened, and she told him to check himself into the psychiatric ward at NY Presbyterian Hospital. Darrin did, and stayed there for the next 90 days, a time that proved to be transformational.

"Once I started talking to my sister again, something happened in me. I had to admit to her that I had a problem. I totally lost it, broke down crying, and she was so happy for me."

After leaving the hospital Darrin checked into a 28-day in-patient rehabilitation program at Phoenix House and began attending AA sessions, which he fell in love with—especially the concept of a higher power—a loving and caring power that is greater than ourselves. He was given a sponsor, and checked out of Phoenix House as an outpatient.

In June, 2020, Darrin, still sober but struggling with depression, was referred to Fedcap through NYC HRA. He had held a number of jobs, including at COSCO, Amazon, and with the U.S. Census Bureau, but was struggling to pay bills and wanted something more stable.

Ariela Dejesus, a Case Manager for Fedcap Inc.'s Case Management Services Program, worked with Darrin after his original case manager left the agency. She could only meet him remotely during the pandemic, but what struck her was that Darrin didn't need any hand-holding. He always did what he was supposed to do, and never missed an appointment. He successfully completed an outpatient program, meeting his 90-day milestone in October, 2020.

"My main impression of Darrin was that he really wanted to set an example," Ariela said. "He would take any training or do anything else to get a better job. He showed a real hunger to move forward and always be better. It seemed to me that he was done with being on the streets and knew he didn't belong there."

In December Robert Reiter, Fedcap Inc. Senior Director of Workforce Development, called Darrin with some great news—Spectrum was hiring. Darrin went in for an interview the next day, and after two follow-up interviews, he was hired. He began work on January 19th.

For someone like Darrin, who always had a strong work ethic—at the age of 11, he took a job to help his struggling family—this was exactly what he had been waiting for. The job has great pay and benefits. Darrin considers it a career move, as it will help pay for him to return to school, and eventually meet his goal of working in data science.

These days, good news is a common occurrence. On February 1st Darrin marked two years sober, and in March, Spectrum recognized his great work with the MVP award for his class of job entrants. At AA, he sponsors others and works as a volunteer.

"I have a life, and I have something to be grateful for. I look at the world in a new and different way. It's hard when so many bad things are happening and it feels like the sky is falling. It makes me sick when I look back at what I did between ages of 27 and 32, not doing anything, taking money from clients to pay for pills. I just lost myself for a while."