

## MARIA'S STORY



Many alcoholics or addicts need a “wake-up call” – a time when they realize their life must change, or they will die. For Maria, that wake-up call came in the form of a devastating fire at her home.

On December 27, 2021, Maria was woken by one of her pet dogs, discovering that the apartment she shared with her teenaged daughter was engulfed in flames. While she and her daughter were able to get out, the dog that warned her – along with three other pets that also belonged to her daughter – sadly perished in the fire, which Maria believes she started while smoking.

Suffering from both carbon monoxide poisoning and smoke inhalation due to the fire, Maria was in a coma for eight days. When she woke up, she knew she had to make a change – and quickly. She moved from her home in Massachusetts to California for a fresh start, entering a 90 day recovery program in January, 2022. After completing the program, she moved into an Action Alliance residence on April 1, 2022.

The foundation of Maria’s addiction – her drugs of choice were heroin and crack cocaine – began when she had her wisdom teeth removed at the age of 17. The opiate she was prescribed for pain intrigued her, and with subsequent health challenges, she moved on to other opiates. While she did have periods of sobriety, particularly during her daughter’s younger years, Maria’s addiction took firm hold after the death of her mother 12 years ago. “My mother was my best friend,” explains Maria. “I tried heroin to numb the pain – and was hooked.”

Her life truly spiraled out of control in the months before the fire, when she began driving for several drug dealers to fuel her addiction as well as earn money. “I was headed for jail, an institution or death,” she notes. It was the fire that intervened.

During 2022 and 2023, Maria developed a solid record of sobriety and started rebuilding her life. Her new-found Christian faith, in addition to participation in AA meetings, has been key in her journey.

Maria's Action Alliance community also played an important role. In April, 2023, she had a hip replacement, managing the pain post-surgery with Tylenol in order to avoid opiate-based pain killers. Her Action Alliance housemates were extremely supportive and helpful during her challenging recovery.

In late 2023, Maria was offered a chance to give back, when she accepted an assistant manager position at a recovery home for first responders who are suffering from substance abuse and mental health challenges, including PTSD. She fills in for the manager in his absence, drives residents to their day program and appointments, and provides general help and support. She is particularly grateful to Action Alliance for recommending her for the position.

During the next five years, Maria's goals include gaining more independence, building community through her church and AA, and seeing her daughter (who lives and attends college on the East Coast) on a regular basis. "I've learned to love myself and now know my worth," she says. "My daughter and I also did a lot of work to repair our relationship – there was a lot of therapy and forgiveness involved – but we now have an amazing bond. This new chapter of my life is truly beautiful."