

REINVENTED

Sample Chapter

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REINVENTED

My Journey of Addiction
and
Redemption

MIKE CINELLI



DEDICATION

Mom

I have been blessed by your prayers, your wisdom,
and your dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

Aunt Kathy

Thank you for the countless hours you spent
helping me polish this book.

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FOREWORD

Helplessness is your constant companion. Fear hovers like a cloud and follows you all day, intent on devouring you. Hope sparks and is then dashed to the depths of your heart—over and over again.

Michael Cinelli is my son. The cycle in and out of hope and helplessness is his story—and the story of all of us who love him.

In the following pages, you will read the bad, the ugly, and the good. I've been a pastor for many years, but it's my own son's story that has taken me on a journey into a world of addiction and recovery I never imagined I would experience.

Along the way, I've met wonderful people traveling the same path. They helped me to start a recovery outreach where hundreds have found help and hope.

I am so proud of my son for sharing his story of suffering and mayhem. His desire, and mine, is that these chapters will offer hope and encouragement for the hurting addict and their loved ones. This story is a testament to the fact that recovery *is* possible.

God is faithful, and I am thankful to Him that my son is recovering, enjoying a loving marriage, and leading a successful business. He continues to be a support in the recovery world, the church, and the community.

Michael and Ivette, thank you for your testimony. May it widely proclaim the hope and help you have found in the God Who never gives up on anyone.

Pastor Mario Cinelli

PROLOGUE

It wasn't a noise that woke me. It was a silence so consuming it felt like a weight was pressing on my back.

Where am I?

I struggled to regain consciousness through the dense fog in my head. The putrid odors of gas, oil, and asphalt lingered in my nostrils. Gradually, a splinter of light began to seep in as I fought to open my swollen eyes. I groaned with pain when I tried to move—my body immediately notified me that I hadn't slept on a soft mattress last night. I could barely lift my head from the concrete curb pillow where my cheek was still a little stuck. I rubbed my face and bits of gravel rolled off.

Gotta be some imprint. Okay, so I managed one lucid thought.

The fact was, I hadn't slept on a soft mattress for a long time. For several weeks, my home was in the alley behind a strip mall. My only furnishings were a smelly, over-full dumpster and a disintegrating remnant of a mattress. Sheets of cardboard proved insufficient protection from the rusted metal springs. Slabs of Styrofoam almost kept the rain off. But last night, one of the restaurant owners had doused my home with gallons of vinegar. I knew I wouldn't be sleeping there anymore. *So what? Not my first eviction.*

Memories of last night crept back in sporadic bursts.

No more back-alley home. No place to go. Wandering the streets. Grabbing a backpack from a random parked car some clown had left unlocked. Sprinklers showering me with bone-chilling spray. Drugs. Xanax.

How many did I take? Two? Three? More? A powdery after-taste lingered in the back of my throat. I needed water.

“Probably three.” The muffled voice startled me until I realized that it had come from my own mouth. I didn’t remember passing out on the curb. Gasping and groaning, I tried to get up. The agonizing pain in my back and side was nearly unbearable. Maneuvering into an almost-sitting position took several minutes.

I tried to check out my surroundings. My eyes refused to focus. They finally settled on a streetlight some yards away. I could hear traffic noises in the distance. I needed to go before I was discovered. Standing upright was another long battle. Carefully, I tested my weight on each shaky leg. As I struggled to straighten my back, a flash of purple caught my eye. I looked down and saw my entire body was covered in a too-small clown costume, complete with frilly ruffled sleeves and fluffy purple button balls.

“Wha . . . ?” More memories arose through the haze. The sprinklers! I had passed out on the grass. I had crawled to the curb to escape the icy sprinkler spray and grabbed the first item of clothing I could find to ward off the biting cold. What a joke. The owner of the parked car really was a clown.

This had been my life for several weeks. Embracing any emotion was a sensation from somewhere in the past. That was the purpose of the drugs, right? Yet, in that moment, I felt a soul-crushing stirring of shame in the depths of my being. I guessed I was lucky to be drug-numbed. Outside of my present state, I would have been wholly incapacitated by the humiliation.

Huh. Multi-colored humiliation.

Unsteadily, I tipped back my head and gazed up into the sky. I only heard the sound of my ragged breathing. The streetlight blinked off, as if snuffed out by the early morning light.

“What am I even doing here?” The words came out in a moan, a result of my utter misery. They landed on no one’s ears. Unless . . .

God?

I was pretty sure I had burned all the bridges between us. Still, I grasped for a fragment of promised hope. If all those Sunday School Bible stories were true, if all those prayers were actually heard by a God Who loves—Who cares—then maybe those bridges weren’t burned after all. I was a pastor’s kid, for crying out loud. How did that good little boy even get *here*? A ruined, dejected, broken man who slept on a curb on an abandoned street and woke up in a drugged stupor all alone, dressed in a ridiculous clown costume.

This is not the beginning of the story. And the ending is still being written. It’s a hard story. Some of the questions may never be answered on this side of heaven.

But it’s a story that needs to be told.

CHAPTER 1

CANCER!



"Mom? Mommy?"

Alone in the dark, I couldn't determine where I was. My pajamas stuck to my hot, sweaty skin. Struggling to untangle from the damp sheets and the terror gripping my heart, I felt soft hands touch my shoulders. *Auntie*. I was in my cousins' bedroom.

"You're okay, honey. You're safe. You were having a nightmare." The face looming above me was caring and looked concerned. It wasn't Mommy. Loving arms held me tight as I sobbed inconsolably. I really needed my mother.

Being separated from her for a whole month was more than my four-year-old heart could bear. It seemed like an eternity. It felt like abandonment. I cried until fatigue claimed me and I relaxed into my aunt's embrace.

My mom had cancer. She had been diagnosed with lung cancer some weeks ago. Dad had taken her to a clinic in New York City for her treatments. My ears heard the information, but truly understanding it wasn't possible. Doctors fix people.

What was taking so long?

My mom and dad were always described as good people and super parents. They had met at one of those Tupperware home parties. Dad wasn't really in need of plastic bowls with snap-lock lids. He was actually focused on the petite blonde examining the autumn gold canister set. He had first noticed her at church, and

he attended the party because he heard that she would be there. After enduring the twenty-minute product demonstration, he resisted the temptation to purchase the sandwich storage set just to be polite. Instead, he asked the blonde if she would be interested in seeing him again. She agreed.

Some months later, my dad—a handsome, hard-working Italian from a New York City borough—and my mom—a sweet, pretty farmer’s daughter from a small town in Vermont—stood before God, their family, and their friends and pledged to love one another until death should part them.

It was a bright summer day in June.



According to my parents, I was a miracle. No matter how many times Dad repeated the story, I never got tired of hearing it:

As soon as we were married, we wanted to start a family. It just wasn't happening. It was a bit depressing that we had tried for a few years with no success. We questioned God. One evening at a church service, the pastor stopped talking in the middle of his sermon. He said he felt that there were two couples in the audience who wanted to have children, but hadn't been able to. We, along with the other couple, hesitantly went to the front. The pastor prayed and the presence of the Lord was so strong that we could not stand up. We were on the floor, embarrassed, but could not move for several minutes. We left there not quite sure what to think. A few months later, we were expecting. You are our miracle!

I was to be Mom and Dad's only child.

During her first doctor's visit after my birth, they discovered that Mom had cervical cancer, so they quickly performed surgery to remove the tumor. I spent several of my earliest weeks in the care of my mom's best friend. The hysterectomy determined we would remain a family of three.

My parents were devoted to me. They were kind and patient, and they enveloped me in love beyond measure. My childhood world had felt good and normal.

When my parents returned from the New York clinic, the news was not encouraging. The treatments hadn't produced positive results. The prognosis was less than promising.

Finally back together with my parents, I was excited to get dressed up on Sunday and go to church with them. But on that Sunday, Dad came out of the bedroom alone.

"Isn't Mom coming?"

"Not today. She isn't feeling well."

He and I got into the car, just the two of us, and headed off to church. And so began a lonely pattern that would continue over the next two-plus years.

One of those Sundays, as I headed for my class, I ran into a lady who must have known my mom. She knelt to my eye level. The news that Mom was not doing well was a widespread story by now. The woman grasped my shoulders. Her serious face was too close to mine. Her breath was pure peppermint. I thought about the bowl of candy on the desk in the lobby. I wanted to turn away from her pungent perfume, but I felt duty-bound not to move.

"Michael, I had a dream about your mom. If we pray hard and have enough faith, she will be healed!" Her fingers tightened on my little shoulders as she spoke with determination.

The words pierced my fragile soul. I wanted to believe them so much that it hurt. It was a sizable and weighty task assigned to such a small, innocent boy, but my heart clung to this morsel of hope. For as long as I could remember, I had been singing songs about God's mighty power. My dad was a pastor. He must have a special connection with God, right? I knew I mustn't fail to pray every night.

"Dear Jesus, please heal my mommy."

CHAPTER 2

SAD GOODBYES



My eyes opened to rays of sunlight beaming through the bedroom window. Last night, I had fallen asleep alone in my parents' bed. I was still alone. Dad must have spent the night in the hospital with Mom. Once, this bed had been my refuge—a safe place to cuddle between Mom and Dad after a bad dream. Dad and I had knelt beside this bed many times, praying for Mom again and again while she was in the hospital. It had never been a lonely place, but it was today. I thought about spending the whole day just lying right there.

Sitting up, I tried to untwist my favorite red T-shirt from around my back. I must have had a restless night. The shirt still held Mom's scent from the last time we snuggled over a week ago. So far, I had been able to keep it from my grandmother. She seemed to love doing laundry.

Eventually, I decided to move into the living room. I settled on the couch. The inviting sounds and smells of breakfast drifted from the kitchen, though I was pretty sure I couldn't eat. Grammy came in from her cooking with a spatula in her hand. She turned on the television for me and asked if I was hungry.

"Not really. Where's Daddy?"

"He spent the night at the hospital." She turned away.

GOODBYE

*Goodbye, my love; my only friend
Comfort in wondrous chaos to the end
To cuddle in misery, thirsting for more
A passion for death, regret to live for
Happiness once tangible, dissipating to memories
Finding solace in the most burden, the cycle for centuries
The needle set how my life was lived the easy way out
A shameful legacy to leave, no doubt
To overcome greatly overwhelms, to bury is pain
Life a fierce battle, with little or no gain
Drugs cause uncontrollable tears
Grabbing my soul and ruining the years
No use in pursuing a purpose or meaning
Security found in hands of eternal grieving
Heroin is those hands, held on so tight
Begging for release, not putting up a fight
Searching for truth, summons the past
Face all those burdens, release them at last
God has control of my pain and my hurt
I'm sorry dear friend, I can't even flirt
God has taken the desire; His love He'll send
Goodbye, to you; no longer my friend.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Mike Cinelli loves the thrill of pulling all the pieces together to make a good deal. For him, a good deal is the one where the buyer and the seller both come out as winners.

Mike is a stouthearted entrepreneur and businessman, but it hasn't always been that way. Having spent twenty years of his life struggling with a heroin and crack cocaine addiction, he has suffered the consequences of repeatedly making wrong choices.

One day, a transformational encounter with Jesus Christ made all the broken pieces of his life fall into place. He agreed to the one covenant that gave his life new meaning and purpose. Mike is firmly convinced that surrendering your life to Jesus is the only way to escape the pain and oppression of drug addiction for good.

Driven by a passion for helping others find hope and healing, his deepest desire is to connect people with the God Who loves them and wants them all to be winners in life. Mike has been a friend, a speaker, and a mentor within the recovery community for several years, and has shared his powerful testimony at churches and recovery meetings.

Alongside his other roles, Mike is also a financial coach. Together with other landlords and local businessmen, he speaks, leads workshops, and teaches classes to help others become financially healthy.

Through his book *Reinvented*, Mike hopes to reach people who have been, or are being, affected by addiction with the message that recovery and permanent healing are possible. You can be redeemed and live a better life.

You can find out more about Mike at his website: mikecinelli.com.

Sample Chapter