

My Recovery Story

Written March 10, 2013 by David

The whole process started for me about 19 years ago. I was 32 years old and I decided that I wanted to get over this shy bladder problem. I had always wanted to get over it, but I had never really gone all out to try and conquer it, mainly because I didn't know how to do it. I still had no idea how to do it, but I decided to give it a try. This was all on my own. I had shy bladder since I was a very young kid, probably around 6-7 years old. There was no event that caused this problem; I just realized that I was unable to urinate in public restrooms or in homes when other people were too close. After two years of my quest to get over this problem I had made zero progress. That was right around the time that the Internet came into existence.

Over the years I had looked for information about shy bladder and I had found a paragraph in a book here or there that said there was such a condition. I also had a psychology teacher mention it in a class one time when I was 20 years old. I talked to him after class and he said that he was a psychologist and he treated people with this condition. From the brief time that we talked I got the feeling that there were people who had this condition much worse than I did even though my condition was bad. I never followed up with the psychologist for any kind of treatment. He said something about this condition being caused by thinking that peeing was bad and that turned me off from talking to him anymore about it.

I did an Internet search on shy bladder in 1996 and I found a chat forum where guys from all over the world were talking about having this condition exactly like me! I couldn't believe it. This was a truly life changing event. The chat forum was the precursor to the official IPA organization being created. I had found it about a year before the formation of the IPA. I quickly met some other people on the forum who lived close to me. One person in particular had the biggest influence on me. His name is Chris and he lives in Portland. It turned out that he came up to Seattle for his work, so I met with him and we became friends. He said that his method for recovery was to go to every single public restroom that he could get to during the day. I adopted this strategy also. Every day on my way home from work I would stop at the public library across the street from my apartment and go into the restroom for practice. I would also go into every restroom possible when I was out in public.

Chris, Phil (another person from the chat forum) and I started the first ever support groups in the Seattle and Portland areas. For me the key to progress was to meet and work with other people who had this condition. I never got anywhere on my own but progress started the day I found the chat forum. Back then the groups were very active and we met once per week.

Over the years that has faded to about once per month or even less. The combination of talking to and working with other paruretics has been my key to recovery. I have also made about a half dozen lifelong friends through this process.

I also came up with another strategy at work to get over this problem. Once I found the chat forum and the IPA I gained the confidence to tell all of my close friends and family about this condition. That way whenever I was out in public with my friends I didn't have to spend any extra energy hiding this problem from them. I could concentrate 100% on desensitization work. If I went into a bathroom and couldn't go I would go right back in and since my friends knew about the condition, it was no big deal. Since I was so comfortable telling people about the condition, I told about 3-4 co-workers who were good friends and who definitely did not have shy bladder. I worked at a Boeing plant that had many different bathrooms throughout the building. My co-workers quickly became great pee buddies and would work with me every day on this problem.

So in a nut shell my strategy was to tell everyone that I hung out with about this condition and to relentlessly work on it every single day. I have continued to work on it every single day for the past 17 years and today I still sometimes can't believe how far I've come. When I started I absolutely could not use a public urinal if anyone was in the bathroom or if I thought anyone was about to come into the bathroom. I also had trouble using a stall if there were people in the bathroom.

Today I function about 90% of the time as if I never had this condition. For example I purposely use the most crowded bathroom at work that has the most of my immediate co-workers in it. I routinely use the urinals, with no dividers, while talking to my co-workers as they come and go. I've told a couple of them about my condition but most of them have no idea. I've moved on from the Boeing plant where I originally told my co-workers who became my work support group buddies. I've been in a new plant for the past six years and haven't told many people because it's not an issue like it used to be. About 10% of the time I use a stall, if it's half time at a football game, intermission at the opera and other super crowded conditions. I am always able to use the stall, no matter how crowded. To me that is the key to success, the fact that I am able to relieve myself when I need to, whether it's at the urinal or a stall. Like a lot of us I have horror stories of not being able to pee for hours and hours until I could get to a private situation. This was especially a problem growing up before I realized how serious this condition can be.

One thing I have learned from my own recovery and meeting 50-100 other people with shy bladder over the years, is that progress is slow and it takes hard work to recover. I don't understand why this problem takes such an ingrained hold on people whether they got the problem when they were five years old or 25 years old. I have never met anyone who was able to quickly and easily put this behind them.

The good news is that with persistent hard work a person can recover. The people I've known, including myself, who have worked the hardest have made the most progress.

For the first couple of years that I worked in support groups I felt that I wasn't making much progress. This changed one day when I went on a date. We arrived at a movie theater and took our seats with a few minutes to go before the picture started. I had to pee so I headed up to the restroom with a certain amount of anxiety. I didn't know the theater so I didn't know the bathroom set up and it was also pretty crowded in the theater. I didn't want to fail in the bathroom and sit through the movie with a full bladder. I also didn't want to take too long and miss part of the movie. We had just met so I hadn't told her about my paruresis yet. I walked into the restroom and it was a tiny bathroom with one stall, one urinal and one sink. Basically a nightmare set up for someone with shy bladder. My instinct was to go into the stall to get the job done quickly, but the stall was occupied. I was forced to use the urinal with no divider that was between the stall and the sink with about a foot of clearance on either side. I will never forget how happy I was that I was able to void my bladder quickly and fully in these conditions! It was at that moment that I realized that I really was making progress.

I would say after about five years I had made significant progress that I could see on a day to day basis. Using a urinal was becoming normal for me and using the stall was the exception. I am still making progress even though it is slower these days, since I have recovered most of the way. I no longer feel any guilt or shame about this condition and I am always able to relieve myself whenever I need to. I continue to push myself because it's my way of erasing all of the painful memories mainly from childhood, but also as an adult, due to suffering with this condition.