

Matt's Story: My First Workshop

Hey everybody, I'm the guy who proudly answered "Enormously" on the above survey, and here's a short novel about my amazing experience.

First, I think it's really important to share the pre-workshop State of The Union about my condition so you'll understand where I started before Memphis:

I'm 34 years old and have had this condition for as long as I can remember. I had a particular situation when I was around 13 that really solidified it... I was at a little party, and a large group of girls (who I thought were super hot at the time, obviously) blatantly made fun of a friend of mine while he was loudly peeing in a quiet, nearby bathroom... saying the sound of his pee hitting the water was "disgusting." I was terrified to go to the bathroom myself after that (who wants to be made fun of by a group of beautiful girls, right?), and that was ground zero.

21 years later, I am still terrified of someone hearing my pee hit the water. Perfect silence is my worst enemy... I lock up tighter than a Dolphin's butt (water tight) when it's quiet. On top of that, I can't go in any bathroom with any other person in the room, even if it's noisy. I can't even go in a one-person bathroom alone... if someone is even remotely close by. I'm a textbook case- avoidance at its very worst. You know the feeling... heart races, adrenaline surges, a feeling of hopelessness, etc. etc. Like a lot of you guys, it's absolutely crippled my life at every turn. I've never told a soul about my condition; it's been my greatest secret and greatest shame.

But here's where it started to turn around.

1. Randomly found Steve Soifer's book on Amazon.com & ordered it out of curiosity.
2. Found the IPA Boards & really dug in. (Wow, I'm definitely not alone here. Unreal.)
3. Finally came clean to my fiancé of 2.5 years. She was unbelievably understanding and the reason I got serious about my recovery.
4. Based on techniques learned in Steve's book, began slow gradual exposure therapy with her at home. Within a few hours of intense work (and a whole lot of fluid loading) in the apartment, she was standing in the same bathroom as me, with her back turned, and I could pee. (Best night of my life.)
5. Made a new rule for the apartment: I never close the door to pee (when it's just she and I), and practice that daily. While I got better and better every day at home, I was still no better out in public, obviously.
6. Heard about the Memphis workshop & signed up immediately.

So then I came to Memphis and met Steve & three other guys at the workshop. Talking about the condition out loud was the most surreal experience ever. Hearing their stories and watching them

listen to mine was one of the most important moments of my life. Reading about it on the boards is one thing, but to really see their faces and hear the sincerity in their voices was a different thing altogether. We swapped stories for a while, and then it was time for gradual exposure therapy. I was super anxious, but also super pumped.

Here's my personal step-by-step experience at the workshop:

1. After fluid loading, we broke into pairs. My partner and I posted up at a one-man bathroom in the lobby of the building. (The building was empty that day, so zero traffic.) I had my guy stand in the back of the lobby area while I gave it a try. Super awkward at first & I had a really hard time getting started. My urgency wasn't quite high enough, so it took the best of 45 minutes of baby steps to get him even close to the door. I was a bit frustrated, but still determined.

2. We took a short break to get up to speed on progress. I hadn't had the best morning, but by this time my urgency was getting higher and higher and most likely peaked at 9 or 10.

3. We switched partners and went to different bathrooms. I had my guy stand down the hallway from another one-man bathroom. This time, though, I had a higher urgency and a more comfortable situation with a fan going in the bathroom. He slowly worked his way down the hall... next to the door, the door barely cracked, his foot inside the door, the door opened wider, and finally with his back to me standing in an open door. (I was shocked.)

4. My partner and I decided to up the challenge, so we moved to a larger (quieter) bathroom with multiple stalls. This building used to be an old dormitory, so there were no urinals for some reason, only stalls & bowls. I posted up inside the very back stall. Keeping my urgency super high, he worked his way from outside the door, inside the door, inside the room and slowly near the stall area. I could now go just fine with him in a perfectly quiet echo chamber bathroom, only a few feet away from me while I was in the stall. (SUPER shocked.)

5. We took another break and had lunch at a nearby hotel. I still had a high urgency, so I went into the hotel lobby bathroom to see what would happen. One of the guys from the workshop had posted up at one of the urinals, so I went into one of the back stalls... started my stream instantly with zero anxiety.

6. After lunch we switched partners and I went back to one of the echo chamber quiet bathrooms again. I jacked up my urgency again and had my guy start at the doorway, then inside the room, then small bit by bit all the way back to the stall area. Then I had him move into the stall next to mine... I started with no problem. I had him move outside the stall... directly behind me with his back turned. I went with no problem. I got a little overzealous and had him turn around, but the feeling of his eyes staring at the back of my head kind of freaked me out, so I couldn't cross that threshold just yet. Steve stopped by to check in (he was awesome & popped in and out all day), and I had my partner and Steve stand near the stall and have a conversation while I went, just to simulate a noisy restroom. No problem there.

7. We then decided to move over to the Student Center to take it to the next level: urinals. I posted up

at the first urinal and had my partner stand back at the doorway. It was around a slight corner, so he was still out of sight. No problem there. He moved around the corner and still had his back to me & no problem there. He moved closer behind me and no problem there. Finally, I just had him stand up beside me. It got a little tricky here. My urgency was high and I could definitely get started, but I was still a little too nervous to open up & develop a strong stream. I decided to get 100% comfortable with the stalls again in a totally different environment, then slowly transition to the urinals. I really wanted to set myself up for success. I was 100% in the stall, especially with him standing in the stall right next to mine. Unfortunately, we were running out of time at the end of the day.

8. All the guys came into the same bathroom, and all four of us took a shot at the urinals and stalls in sort of a free-for-all hang out time. At this point, we were just laughing it up, telling jokes and swapping stories in there, and I was 100% in the stall now with zero anxiety, peeing with a group of guys only a few feet away. I was having the time of my life.

9. At the end of the day, we all came together for the final debriefing. We swapped stories and this time learned a little more about the IPA organization and everything it's doing to bring more understanding to the world. I had no idea how important this organization is, and how many things they're doing (and have done) to advance the study and treatment of this problem. Inspiring stuff for sure.

10. We said our goodbyes and I headed back to the hotel room feeling confident, accomplished and forever grateful to my new friends from the workshop.

.....

On the way home the next day, I stopped at my first Rest Stop ever to check it out. Had an urgency of 3, so I didn't even need to go. I just wanted to walk in there and experience standing at the urinal while other guys were coming in and out. They came, they went & nobody even paid attention to me standing there. Zero anxiety and I was laughing to myself the entire time.

I tanked up and got my urgency high for the next Rest Stop. Unfortunately, we took this bypass highway and found ourselves in the middle of nowhere. I was in absolute pain... with no exits of any kind to be found. We finally saw one coming, but it was an empty exit leading to a back road—didn't even see a gas station. I was in serious trouble at an 11, so I just pulled off on the exit, parked on the side of the ramp and pissed like a champ standing beside the car. Cars were driving by on the interstate. I waved at them in full stream. My fiancé was dying from laughter.

After getting home, I immediately started a journal and vowed to go out and practice every single day. The first day I went to the mall. I peed at a urinal right next to a guy who was sitting in a stall. I could see his shoes below me as I peed directly into the urinal, splashing as much as I could.

The next day I went to Wal-Mart and peed at a urinal with a guy at the sink. While peeing, another guy came in and stood right next to me. I didn't even stop... just got it all out and laughed on the way out.

The next day I went to Wal-Mart again and followed a guy in the bathroom. He took a stall to sit down & I peed at the urinal right next to him.

The next day I went to a Bi-Lo. There was a guy at the sink directly behind me (very small bathroom), so it was a little tough to get started. I just stood at the urinal with zero anxiety, waited til he finished up (all of 30 seconds) and peed as he was walking out the door. No more running out the door, fast heartbeat, etc.

A friend came over to hang out at the apartment... in mid conversation, I stood up, walked around the corner to the bathroom (perfectly quiet room) and peed loud & proud while we kept talking with the door wide open.

.....

Every single day I practice, and every single day I get more and more comfortable. I write in my journal daily, and it keeps me motivated. I now see it as some kind of funny game... I actually look forward to the challenge.

The next step is a pee buddy so I can work more intensely at the urinal. Standing right next to somebody (in clear sight) is not something I'm comfortable with yet, but I'm confident I'll get there in time. My fear of making noise is practically non-existent now. And if I have a setback, I'm going to laugh it off and try again.

The workshop gave me confidence & set me on a course that I've only dreamed of being on my entire life.

The path to recovery starts right now, and I'm on a freakin' collision course with freedom.

Thanks so much to Steve and all the guys at the workshop. You guys seriously changed my life, and I'm forever grateful to you all.

If you're reading this and have been considering attending a workshop... if you have the means... do not hesitate. Sign up and go IMMEDIATELY. I was as bad as it gets, and thanks to this workshop, I have all the hope in the world.

Best of luck & much love, fellas.

Follow Up Entries

- Since Memphis, I practice every single day. I mean EVERY single day. By practice, I mean that I fluid load and make quick trips to Wal-Mart, other grocery stores, and the mall during weekdays when it's not so crowded. Really any public place.
- The trips are always different, but I never pee if there's nobody in there. I'll always wait until someone goes in, move to another restroom or come back after some time has passed & re-check. I keep my urgency pretty high & feel 100% confident and have had virtually no trouble at all going in large, handicapped stalls with other people in the bathroom.
- Going on these trips and constantly forcing myself to go inside multiple bathrooms has absolutely, 100% COMPLETELY destroyed any sense of anxiety about walking into a public restroom. Only a month ago, just the thought of walking into a restroom with multiple urinals and stalls would cause my heart to race and I would lock up before I even got inside. As of today, every single time I walk in there, I instead have a feeling of adventure... like I'm pumped to see what happens in there. Completely relaxed.
- I keep a steady journal of every single day's adventures. I write in detail where I go, what I experience, how I feel, etc. I love to write, so I always try to make it as funny as possible. (I've actually considered starting a blog.)
- Just yesterday I finally told one of my good friends about it & shared my story. He was unbelievably understanding, and even told me that he has the same problem from time to time! He's agreed to help me with more gradual exposure therapy, and we're meeting up one week from today to start hitting up the restrooms together. Sharing my story with him helped me tremendously & instilled so much confidence. Can't wait to start!
- Just today, literally four hours ago, I had the biggest breakthrough of my LIFE. I went to the mall, which typically has really low traffic on a weekday afternoon. My urgency was about a 7 going in... but there was nobody inside. Ghost town. I went to a urinal, started my stream & stopped my stream. Just to get pumped up & build up some urgency.

I came out, grabbed a sandwich and drank more water in the food court while keeping an eye on the bathrooms. I was checking email on the phone, etc., and noticed a guy go inside. I put my half-eaten sandwich back in the bag and took off toward the restroom with an urgency around 10 at this point.

When I got inside, it was a horror show for a paruretic. I had been looking down and apparently missed quite a few people going in. There are about four urinals (with dividers) and five or so stalls in a row. Two of the urinals were taken, and three of the stalls... including my home-base handicapped stall. Guys were also at the sink washing hands.

I immediately concentrated on my urgency. I REALLY had to go, so I just threw anxiety out the window and posted up at one of the urinals right next to a guy to see what would happen. Zero expectations for myself. I knew & told myself that if I couldn't go, I'd just hold it out, leave, come back and try again. No panic.

I started peeing.

No hesitation at all. It wasn't a full-on power hydraulic pressure washer, but it was steady and felt so incredibly relieving. The guy beside me just disappeared in my head, and so did the guys at the sink and the stalls. Absolutely amazing. I decided to cut it off, because I wanted to practice this again. I stopped it, left, and went to the second bathroom upstairs.

Walking into the bathroom, once again, two of the three stalls were already taken. One guy was just finishing up at the urinal and had stepped directly behind me to wash his hands. Again... went straight for the urinal and went with no problem whatsoever. This time I voided completely out and walked out of the mall feeling like I just won the freakin' Super bowl.

I'm certainly not so naive to believe that moment "cured me," because that would be insane. I agree with Steve on this, there really isn't a "cure," so to speak... only wonderful, anxiety-free recovery. However, that was indeed a wonderful breakthrough moment and hopefully the start of many more. I'm about to journal that, and concrete that success in my brain. Now that's an amazing moment to build on.

My key has been to have zero expectations for myself. If I have a setback, I have a setback. No worries; I'll get on top of it next time.