

My Recovery Story ~ by Dave Kliss

My name is Dave, I am 65 years old, I am married with two grown children and 4 grandchildren, and I am a retired teacher. I developed Paruresis when I was 5 years old as the result of severe bullying in the bathrooms in elementary school, and like most guys with this condition, I lived the majority of my life thinking that I was the only one in the world who couldn't do something as natural as pee in a urinal or a stall like the other guys. I did learn coping techniques, but I kept it a secret from everyone, and gradually it got worse rather than better despite all of my efforts to "man-up" and get over it. Somehow I was able to form a protective psychological wall around this condition and move on with much of my life, but I can easily recall the friendships that I avoided or ended in order to hide my condition, the social events that I avoided because of the anxiety about how and where I might be able to relieve myself, and the activities that I spoiled by obsessively keeping an eye on traffic in and out of the bathrooms. More than anything else, I regret how this condition caused me to feel about that particular portion of myself for all of those years: alone, ashamed, emasculated.

I did tell a urologist about the condition when I was around 30, but at that time there was little knowledge or understanding of the condition, even in the medical community, and so while he was very nice in reassuring me that my plumbing was fine and that this condition was not really all that abnormal, he couldn't give me any guidance on how to overcome it. About fifteen years ago I found the IPA site during an internet search and I began to read postings on the talk forum. It was an eye-opener to realize that so many people shared this awful condition with me. I subsequently ordered Steve Soifer's self-help book and then I began to slowly tell selected family members and close friends about my condition and my intent to recover from it. In 2010 I attended an IPA weekend workshop in Chicago which taught me about the Cognitive Behavior Therapy skills of desensitization, cognitive restructuring and graduated-exposure, and in doing so I changed my life. In the years since that workshop I have made steady progress toward recovery (with occasional bumps in the road), and I can honestly say that I am now able to use public restrooms whenever and wherever the need arises without fear or anxiety. Let's be clear, I am not cured and so once in a while I will still have to make some minor accommodations. While that will be a little disappointing when it happens, it won't change all of the progress that I have made and therefore it truly won't bother me. I can honestly say that recovery has helped me put Paruresis into a realistic perspective and I have finally become fully comfortable with myself as a man.

In 2011 I contacted Steve to let him know what a difference the IPA had made in my life and I asked him what I could do to give something of myself back to the organization. He asked me to consider becoming the support group leader for Wisconsin and I was honored to say yes. I now facilitate a support group with around twenty-five members in Wisconsin, surrounding states and Canada, I work with individuals throughout the country to provide one-to-one online support, and I serve on the IPA Board of Directors. In the process of providing support to a variety of individuals I have discovered that Paruresis is not selective by gender, ethnic background, religion, sexual orientation, economic status, or any personal characteristic, the only thing that all of these people have in common is the shared experience of struggling with Paruresis and a driving determination to recover from it. There is some irony here. This condition which has caused me so much anxiety and stress over the years has also brought amazing people into my life, people I would never have otherwise met. I have much to be grateful for.