

# THE ENQUIRER

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## Flying Pig runner fought through drugs

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Flying Pig runner overcomes past: Clint Lewis, 27, has been sober for five months. He was just 7-years-old the last time he was completely off drugs and alcohol. Now he's running a half-marathon. Hear his amazing tale of recovery and faith. Producer: Carrie Cochran.

He downed his first alcoholic drink at age 7, lit up his first joint at 9. By 13, he was smoking pot daily, and buying, selling and using cocaine and LSD.

Clint Lewis says he has been "a garbage disposal for drugs ever since I was a child." Besides ravaging his body, drugs broke his spirit and left him homeless.

"I'm 27 years old," he says, "and I've got a 21-year-old addiction."

Sunday, he's running in the Flying Pig half-marathon - 13.1 miles - with other members of City Gospel Mission's Step Forward Team.

"I know I can do it," Lewis says.

The race is a metaphor for his ongoing recovery. It's about making a commitment and persevering and reaping the rewards that come with crossing the finish line.

He's not there yet. But look how far he's come.

He was born in Dearborn County (Ind.), and lived much of his life there and in Harrison. Drugs were openly abused in his family, he says. What's more, "My dad used to beat my mother a lot."

True, says his mother, Kaye Lewis, 62, who lives in West Harrison, Ind.

"Clint had to watch a lot of that," she says. At first, she didn't realize the impact on him and her two older boys.

For years, she says, he hid his drug use by escaping to his attic bedroom. Eventually, she realized that drugs were his way to "zone out" from the violence.

As a teen, Lewis says he broke into cars and houses to get money to feed his drug habit; he was never convicted of a crime. In 10th grade, he dropped out of high school and ramped up his drug use. By age 17 he was hooked on heroin.

In the years that followed, he drifted in and out of homelessness, sometimes living under bridges. He says he hustled people to get drugs. If dealers wouldn't spot him something, he'd rob them.

He sometimes went to methadone clinics to try - unsuccessfully - to get clean. Methadone is used to curb the cravings of people addicted to heroin and other drugs.

"I wanted to live right. I just didn't know what it looked like," he says.

He was angry, he says, that his father, who died two years ago of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, could never see him as a clean, sober son.

Last November, Lewis was broke, alienated from family and living in an unheated barn. His body craved heroin more than food.

"He looked like death walking," his mother says. "I waited every day for the phone call that told me they found Clint, dead."

"My body was completely ruined," he says. He carried 148 pounds on his 5-foot-11 frame.

Friends put him in a hospital detox unit, then directed him to City Gospel Mission, a social-service agency in Over-the-Rhine. Its services include Exodus, a residential addiction-recovery program for men that is heavy on Bible study.

"I don't know if I can handle them shoving God down my throat," Lewis told his mother.

Her reply: "It's better than shoving dope up your arm."

He arrived at City Gospel in early December with a bad attitude and a needle hidden in his backpack. Men typically remain in Exodus for 10 to 12 months; Lewis figured he would leave as soon as he got some money.

"We understand that just because a person comes through the door doesn't mean he's committed," says Scott Jackson, Exodus program manager. "Day by day, you could tell (Lewis) was struggling with whether he was going to continue the process."

Lewis was overwhelmed at first. His body was still in withdrawal. His mind reeled from the religious teachings.

About the time he arrived at the agency, Janean Parsons, who is on City Gospel's administrative services team, began leading exercise classes for men in the Exodus program, including Lewis.

"His first week in the program, after a class he looked completely beaten down, face red. You could just tell it was daunting to him," Parsons says.

The first time he ran, he was winded after a quarter mile. When an announcement was made about the Flying Pig Marathon, still months away, Lewis thought to himself: " 'I'm not even going to be here then.' "

But he continued running, exercising and attending Bible study. He also took note of the people around him, and the positive changes they'd made as they lived drug-free. One such person was Jackson. An alcoholic and cocaine user when he entered City Gospel's rehab program in 2004, he has been clean for about five years.

Within two months, people began to see a different Clint Lewis.

"Something grabbed a hold of him," says Jackson, who likes to think it was the Holy Spirit.

"He was in my (exercise) class," Parsons says, "and I was like, wow, Clint's not just showing up, he's giving it 100 percent. I could see in his face how he started to believe in himself."

He started to believe in more than just himself. One day in early February, he was baptized. Afterward, he retrieved the needle he'd hidden and threw it away. Then he told the Exodus staff and fellow clients - he calls them his brothers - that he was committed to the residential program.

Shortly thereafter, training began in earnest for the Flying Pig. He ran two to three times a week, and his mileage steadily increased.

A month ago, he attempted his longest run to date, 10 miles. About 8 miles in, Lewis told training partner and Exodus brother Zach Wilson that he had to stop.

"You're not stopping," said Wilson, 19, from Aurora, Ind. He stepped behind Lewis and literally began pushing him.

They completed the run.

Says Lewis: "This is a tight, tight group here. It's a real brotherhood."

He says he has not used drugs since arriving at City Gospel, but he acknowledges there are times when he still feels that urge. "I'm getting strong enough to control it," he says.

Strong in both body and mind.

He now weighs 200 pounds. He sports close-cropped hair and a reddish goatee.

"He looks so healthy," his mother says. What's more, "he is quoting the Bible to me."

Lewis says the confidence he's gained the last few months "makes me feel like I can do anything, really."

He'll be runner No. 15138 in Sunday's half marathon. He expects his body will ache after those 13.1 miles, but he'll also be mindful of what Jackson tells those who are battling addiction: The pain to change has to exceed the pain to stay the same.