

AFTER **THE 100 DAYS**

WHAT IT BECAME

ROAK

THE FOLLOW-UP

So this is the follow-up to the 100 Days In Withdrawal document. I wanted to expand on what happened afterward and how that has shaped what I'm doing today.

AFTER THE FIRST 100 DAYS

After I cleared the first 100 days it wasn't like things got immediately better. In all actuality that was only the beginning of realizing just how fucked I actually was. While I was going through that process it was so difficult and demanding that I was not able to even think about tomorrow or make any kind of plans for the future. All there was, was right now. Surviving moment to moment and basically just holding on.

TIME SLOWED DOWN

I learned something during that time. Time is relative to our minds. If you want to make a period of time seem much longer than it is, there is a way to do that: extreme suffering. Just like how time seems to fly by when we're doing something that we enjoy, when we are mentally and physically suffering immensely it slows to a crawl. Seconds seem like hours and counting the days is, in its own way, a form of psychological torture.

THE MOUNTAIN BACK TO ZERO

So after I cleared the first 100 days I was finally able to look around at the wreckage that was my life and realize the fucking gigantic mountain I was going to have to climb to even just get back to zero. I was in over \$300,000 worth of debt, I had no source of active income, and my body and mind were debilitated to such a degree that holding a regular job was out of the question at that moment. I was at a point where even getting out of the bed and walking to the kitchen was a Herculean task, so how in the fuck I was going to pull off getting out of debt and pulling my life together just seemed like some form of science fiction or something.

POST-ACUTE WRECKAGE

The post-acute withdrawals that I was still facing were no joke. I was out of the worst of it, but every day was still a struggle. My motor coordination was still basically gone in my hands and feet, I was having small seizures almost daily still (these were not like

grand mal seizures; they were localized muscle seizures), I would have periods of time where I couldn't sleep for days even though I was more tired than I had ever been, then I would have periods of time where all I could do was sleep and I could not stay awake for anything. The list of symptoms I was having seemed endless. Daily migraine headaches, my nerves were so raw that even the sun on my skin seemed like too much to handle, my eyesight kept going blurry constantly, my pupils basically stayed dilated for months and it was pretty weird to look at myself in the mirror and look completely fucking wasted, but I was 100% sober.

ONE PRODUCTIVE THING

At some point maybe a month or two after clearing the first 100 days I realized something had to be done. I could not just continue to lay in bed when what was left of my life was crumbling around me. I had some passive income still and that's how I was managing to survive through this. I was getting about \$3,000 a month from one of the businesses that I owned and that's how I was paying my mortgage. The other debts I had were all either in default or on COVID hold. During that period the banks let you postpone paying a lot of your debts because of COVID and I had no choice but to use those programs. So I decided I would try to just do one single productive thing every day and if I could just do that it would be enough to get me going again.

LEARNING TO WALK AGAIN

I started by just going for a walk around the neighborhood. With my motor coordination being in such a bad state I figured that just getting good at walking again might be a good place to start. I can say that going for walks daily is probably one of the single most helpful things that got me through this whole period of my life. Even today I still go for a walk every morning. I probably walk about 2 miles or so each day now, but that's not where I started. The neighborhood that I lived in was tiny. The street was probably about a quarter mile around the neighborhood and in those first weeks it took everything I had just to get through it. I would come back from that tiny walk completely exhausted and spend the rest of my day laying in bed. As time went on though the walks started to rebuild the motor coordination in my feet. It probably took a month or so before I was walking steady again from the time I started, but that was progress.

PROGRESS

I decided that progress had to be my goal because looking at all the problems I had in my life at the time was just too much. I had to break it down into things that I could manage one at a time. My mental state was still very fragile and the high levels of stress I was dealing with kept me feeling overwhelmed. I really had nothing going for me and anything that was working before I got sober had collapsed.

THE BAND AFTER COVID

About a year before I got sober I was in a touring band and that was where most of my active income came from. When COVID hit in early 2020 it shut us down like it shut down the rest of the world. The tour we had been on right before that was actually going well. We had played to a sold-out club in New Orleans and our next gig was in Austin. At that time I was so loaded on drugs and alcohol that I had literally zero idea what was going on outside of our tour bus. When we got to Austin for SXSW, we walked off the bus and there was no one on 6th Street. I was shocked because we had played SXSW before and it was usually an all-day event. So I called the president of our record label to see if the festival had been canceled or something. He told me the pandemic had started and lockdowns were happening. We were already there, and the bar was still open, so we played the gig anyway. We played to one 45-year-old stripper and the bartender for free drinks. Then we packed up and headed home. At the time we had no idea how long lockdowns were going to last or how long touring would be shut down. The label had already spent money on the tour and we had not hit break-even yet, so the whole thing ended up costing them money through no fault of ours.

MISTAKES

But circling back to where my life was after I got sober, the band had lost momentum. Our buzz had died. We had no new material ready. Other smarter bands used 2020 to make new records and prepare to get back on the road. We sat around and got high. With the money I was spending on drugs alone, we could have funded another album many times over. So there I was. Broke, worse than broke, hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt, living on about \$3,000 a month, and my body did not work anymore. Even if we had made another album, touring would not have been possible for me. I could barely stand up.

LEARNING TO PRODUCE

With no money and things with the label looking bleak, I decided I would try to learn how to record and produce music myself because we did not really have another option. Luckily I had Pro Tools, some basic mics, and a nice rackmount UAD Apollo interface laying around the house, so I decided I would learn to use it properly. I told the band I wanted to produce the record because it was basically our only option if we wanted to continue. So they agreed and we started writing.

NO IDEA WHAT I WAS DOING

Honestly, I had no idea what the fuck I was doing. I experimented endlessly with recording, trying to get things to sound good. Eventually I got to a place where the recordings were workable. They still had major problems, but at least we could get the ideas down. It gave me something to play around with and learn to mix.

SOMETHING TO HOLD ONTO

I did not realize it at the time because it came out of necessity, but music production would end up becoming one of my great passions in life. Making that record with my band gave me something to hold onto while I worked my way through the worst years of my life. It gave me a goal. It allowed me to feel good about myself in some small way because week by week I could see myself getting better and learning more. It became almost an obsession to grow my skills in the studio. I wanted to get back out there. I did not want to give up on music.

WHAT THAT RECORD GAVE ME

Now you might think the album I'm referring to is something I want to promote, but the truth is that record built my foundation in the studio. I thought it was a pretty good record, but it was my first attempt at producing myself. It did not come out as good as some of our previous work sonically, but it was true and real and I'm proud of that. Making that record kept me sane in a time when everything was too heavy to carry. It propped me up and gave me a reason to get up in the morning. I will always appreciate it for that. It also gave my band one more shot at the road. We played some of our biggest shows off that record, but at the end of that run I had to come to terms with the reality of that time period. The money on the road had changed. Things had become WAY more expensive and the tour payouts had dropped

massively. When I looked at what I got for a 30-day run, it was peanuts compared to before. So I had to put the band on the back burner and find another way to earn a living, because I was never going to climb out of the debt I was in by touring. Touring is hard on the body too, and I was barely making it through those shows. I was doing well in my performance, but the rest of the evening and the following day was me laying in bed basically being completely useless.

THE STUDIO

So when we came off the road I had to shift gears. I had to get serious about how I was going to tackle this debt problem and I needed to find a solution to it. I called up a buddy of mine who had a music studio and asked him if he needed any help.

Fortunately he said yes and that he was so busy he couldn't complete all the projects he had. He was booked out months in advance and he could use some help. He had a few platinum records under his belt as a producer and my grinding in the studio making my band's record had brought me to a level where I was basically able to walk in and start helping on day one. I probably spent a few thousand hours making my band's record so it gave me the skills I needed to be competent enough to shadow him. I have since learned SO MUCH more by working with him and I will always appreciate him for giving me that opportunity. I also started earning a significant amount of money working with him at his studio. He had label budgets coming in for the artists he was working with and with my help we were completing projects extremely efficiently. I spent the next few years just soaking up everything I could and trying to get better at the craft of making music.

THE NEW RECORD

Eventually I got to a point where I was getting confident in my skills and there was just this nagging feeling in the back of my head. I wanted to make another record, but I wanted it to be something different than what I had with my band. My band was still around, but things were moving at a snail's pace with that project. Some of the guys had kids, some seemed disinterested in continuing. Life happened. So while there was another record in the pipeline in that project it just didn't have the fire that it once did. And something that I am all too aware of in music is that: If you aren't giving it everything you got at all times you don't have a chance in hell of going anywhere with it. This new record that I had in mind was kind of a fusion. I wanted the heaviness, the thick distorted guitar riffs, and heavy-hitting drums that I had in

that band, but I wanted the vocal melodies to be really catchy. Melodies that would get stuck in your head. Previously I had been more lyrically and emotionally focused. My previous vocals were all about aggression and almost percussive.

LIFE IN ULTRAVIOLET

For this new record I envisioned I wanted it to maintain some of that, but have memorable hooks. As this was percolating in my head I started trying to discover how I could get this done because I don't play an instrument. I am just a vocalist. Luckily in my time in the studio I had become very acquainted with MIDI and virtual instruments. So I started trying to work out some stuff that way. Eventually I made the first song for what would become my new album, Life In Ultraviolet. The song was called "The Abyss." I was pretty blown away by what I had accomplished because it was really the first song I had written entirely myself. I had become friends with some GREAT session musicians while working at the studio and I asked them if they could help me record it and they were happy to do it. The Abyss showed me that I was capable and that I could put this record together. Also the lyrics were very true to me. They felt almost too personal, but they gave me a direction for the record. It put a point on the graph. A point I could work backwards and forwards from. So I started writing more songs. I realized that I had an opportunity to tell my story in the lyrics of the album. There were specific moments that really stood out to me over the past few years and each of those moments became a song. Eventually as the album started to take shape I realized that it was actually one continuous story. I didn't really set out to make a concept album, but that's what ended up happening.

DESIRE

I am sitting here today with a finished album and I think it's the best work I've ever produced. I am out of debt 100% and I'm about five weeks away from releasing the first song. The first song is called "Desire" and I'll be releasing it July 10th. It's really a full circle moment for me because July 11th is my birthday. I will be 35 this year and the day my first song will come out is exactly four and a half years since my true sober date — January 10th, 2022 — (a story for another time). I'm not putting this album out because I think I have everything figured out. I'm putting it out because this is what those years turned into. I'll send you the context before it drops.

-Roak