

The Yard Sale Puzzle

When I first arrived in the program, I felt like one of those puzzles you buy at a yard sale. You know the kind — the box is worn, the picture on the front is faded, and you're *hoping* all the pieces are inside, but for a dollar you know they probably aren't. That was me. I was a yard sale puzzle. Used up, beat up, and convinced I wasn't worth more than a buck.

For years I tried to put myself together. I'd spread out the pieces I *did* have, trying to make sense of them, trying to force them into a picture that looked whole. But no matter how hard I worked, I always came up short. I didn't have all the pieces. I didn't even know what pieces I was missing — or that they mattered. I didn't know about boundaries, or coping skills, or self-worth. I didn't know how to ask for help. I didn't know how to sit still long enough to understand myself. And because I didn't know, I didn't look. I didn't try very hard to find what I didn't believe existed.

It was exhausting. I didn't even know I was that tired. Every attempt to assemble myself felt like starting over. I'd get a few pieces to fit — maybe a job, maybe a relationship, maybe a moment of clarity — but eventually everything would fall apart again. And each time it did, I'd blame myself for not being able to finish the puzzle. I didn't realize that no one can complete a picture with missing pieces.

Alcohol took a lot from me. It wore down the edges of the pieces I did have. It blurred the image of who I was supposed to be. It convinced me that the puzzle wasn't worth finishing anyway. But walking into recovery, shy and scared, was the first time someone handed me a missing piece instead of taking one away.

In the rooms, I learned that the pieces I thought were lost weren't gone forever. Some were buried under shame. Some were hidden behind denial. Some were sitting in other people's hands, waiting for me to reach out. And some, the most important ones, had to be built from scratch: honesty, willingness, humility, connection.

Recovery didn't magically complete the puzzle overnight. But it gave me the tools, the guidance, and the patience to start again. Piece by piece, I began to see a picture forming — not perfect, not finished, but finally *mine*. And for the first time, I realized I was never a \$1 yard sale puzzle. I was a work in progress with so much value to offer the world.

Due to an honest recovery program I didn't have to remain a worn-out yard sale puzzle forever. Over time and through meetings, honesty, connection, and a whole lot of uncomfortable growth.....something shifted. Piece by piece, I started to rebuild. I started to replace what was missing. I started to understand what mattered. And slowly, the picture of who I really was began to come into focus.

Today, I'm not that battered dollar yard sale puzzle anymore.

I'm the puzzle you buy brand new from Walmart or Amazon — shiny, unopened, bright colors, the kind where you know every single piece is in the box. That's what recovery gave me: the confidence to pay full price for myself because I finally understood my worth. I finally believed I deserved to be whole.

The light came back into my eyes. My edges sharpened. My picture brightened. And I didn't put myself together alone — I had friends, mentors, a program, and a Higher Power handing me pieces I didn't even know I needed. They didn't assemble the puzzle for me, but they sat beside me, encouraging me to keep going, even when I wanted to quit.

And now, when I look at the shiny product, at the person I've become, I see something worth being proud of. Not perfect. Not flawless. But whole. Complete. And finally, finally mine.