

# The Other Side



## Addiction is kryptonite to this superhero big brother. *by Matt Alderton*

hair needed to be cut, and his arms—scarred up and down from needles, razor blades and fingernails—already had been. Both his hair and his skin were clean, however, and I was glad for that because after two years on the streets, during which time he'd lived with fellow alcoholics and drug addicts in meth labs, homeless shelters and halfway houses, he'd finally come home.

Max had been sober for a few months, was occasionally going to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and was seeing a psychologist, who'd diagnosed him as bi-

Not long after that, Mom found a mattress in the corner of her basement where Max had presumably broken in and been sleeping. He'd defecated on the floor and cleaned himself afterwards with an old Halloween costume from storage. It was disgusting and devastating.

I don't know where Max went after that, but I know where he is now. He's in jail. He's there because he stole my mother's credit cards then violated his probation, after which he was put in a minimum-security facility that allowed him out for

“When I was a boy, I liked drawing elaborate jail cells that superheroes could use for caging super villains. I never imagined that my little brother would be inside one.”

**I've always had a thing for men in leggings.** Superheroes, that is. Superheroes are superhuman. They're different—better somehow—than the rest of us. They're exceptional, and I have always wanted to be exceptional.

The first time I felt like a hero was when my brother, Max, was born. I was 8 years old and wanted a brother as badly as I'd ever wanted anything. Being a big brother meant being a mentor, ally and role model. It meant being a hero.

Max's second word was banana; his first was my name. When he was a baby, my bedroom was in the basement. Max would bang his little fists, the size of large strawberries, against the basement door, shouting my name until I appeared from below. And I always did.

Today, Max is 21 years old. The last time I saw him free and sober, he was 19. His

polar. A high school dropout, he wanted to get his GED and go to college. It was Christmastime, and I was home for the holidays. Before I left, I told him how proud I was.

“Promise me you'll keep up the good work, alright?”

“Don't worry,” he said. “I'm working on it.”

Later that week, Max started drinking again. Later that month, he downed an entire bottle of vodka. His twin sister, Molly, found him vomiting blood and called the police, who took him to the hospital.

A few days later, Mom let Max come home on the condition that he couldn't drink. When he inevitably did, he left without being asked.

“I can't help him anymore,” Mom finally admitted when she told me. “He's got to help himself.”

hours at a time to work at a coffee shop downtown. When he ran away one night after work—and was picked up at a motel doing drugs—he was sent to state prison. He's been there for more than a year.

When I was a boy, I liked drawing elaborate jail cells that superheroes could use for caging super villains. I never imagined that my little brother would be inside one. Still, I'm glad he is because the alternative is probably a grave.

I miss my brother like I miss my dad, who died when Max was 7. One will never be back, and the other will never be the same. Like Dad was supposed to be my hero, I was supposed to be Max's. When I think of him, I wonder if I've let him down and hope that I haven't. ■

*Speak your mind as a member of an addict's inner circle. Send your thoughts to [editor@reneweveryday.com](mailto:editor@reneweveryday.com).*