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NEW PODCAST USES HUMOR TO ADDRESS ADDICTION AND WAR ON 'DRUGS'

By Matt Laslo

What are drugs? Must they be bought on a poorly lit street? What about a country club? Are they over-the-counter pain relievers? Caffeine? Cigarettes? How about, all of the above. And a new podcast by comedian Murf Meyer, who you may have seen in Comedy Central's "Broad City," aims to pull the veil back on the sanitized world of *substances* and addiction.

"I'm a former heroin addict and current alcoholic. I'm also a comedian," Meyer says in the trailer for his podcast, "Self-Medicating."

Former addict but current alchy? This is new — at least to be saying publicly.

“We all know abstinence ain’t the only way to treat drug addiction, so it sure as hell ain’t the only way to talk about it. “Self-Medicating” is a podcast created by drug users for drug users,” Meyer tells the audience.

The 39-year-old doesn’t pull any punches on the show, because this is deadly serious stuff. Meyer knows this better than most of us. He was once a heroin addict. Even though he’s now off smack, he still drinks, smokes some marijuana and occasionally uses psychedelics.

To Meyer, sobriety is a myth for most of us. As in: Whether your vice is Diet Coke, coffee, sugar, pizza, cocaine or chocolate, we all have vices.

The comedian uses humor to confront these heavy topics on his new show. He wants us all to know the roller coaster that is addiction – and it’s not just something “they” or “the other” struggles with: Addiction and struggles with substances cut across class, racial and party lines.

He isn’t preachy. He merely wants us all to learn to talk honestly about our personal struggles or those of our family members, friends and coworkers. That’s why he brings experts on addiction and substance abuse, along with those who lost loved ones to the nation’s raging and misunderstood opioid epidemic, on his show: There’s nothing sanitized about it. Rather, it’s raw, if funny at times (then deep to dark at other moments).

Meyer unashamedly leads by example, especially when recounting his first stint in a Pennsylvania rehab center. It didn’t go so well, especially when they passed him a single Valium pill to help wean him off heroin.

“For a four-year, daily habit of shooting up, that was not going to cut it,” Meyer told The News Station.

It didn’t. After a couple hours, he found himself scurrying down the rehab center’s fire escape, and then he was free – well, the hellish freedom any addict knows well: You’re in the real world, with no money, no drugs and no future.

Eventually, his parents let him detox in their basement, along with their old VHS player and a bucket.

“I needed something that was like comfort, they still lived in the same place where I grew up,” Meyer says. “It was pretty brutal. You know, whatever the first 72 hours, but then even after that, it’s like you’re just in a funky place.”

If you want to fit Meyer into a box, you’re on a fool’s errand, though his method has gained popularity recently. It’s called harm reduction. This isn’t the all-or-nothing approach of, say, Alcoholics Anonymous. Rather, Meyer and many others are now using substances, like psilocybin (aka shrooms) and other psychedelics to help them find their own unique path.

Forget anonymity. Meyer isn’t afraid to bare it all.

“So I’m more just trying to find my place to, like, lift a little stigma and get people laughing and kind of normalizing stuff,” Meyer says, before laughing off what many lawmakers, public health officials and members of law enforcement have tried unsuccessfully to impose on the nation for decades now. “Are we on the same page with what we’re even, like, having discourse about right now? We know the ‘war on drugs’ had nothing to do with drug use or helping anyone using drugs.”

For Meyer, there aren’t many drugs he hasn’t made sweet, passionate or dirty love to in his nearly four decades on this planet. In one promo for the podcast, he even spits out a list of some 40 substances he’s ingested, eaten, shot up or smoked over the years. [*Listen to it here.*](#)

It’s a lot, and he knows it.

“I want to be clear here, I’m not glorifying any of those drugs,” Meyer says after rifling through the laundry list of mostly taboo things he’s taken over the years.

I'm also not stigmatizing them. They're just chemical substances, and people who use them are human beings. So there's really no need for outside judgment in any direction

Murf Meyer

Meyer even dragged his mom, Jane, on the first episode. She grew up in Pennsylvania coal country, and she seems like a real blue collar sweetheart.

“From day one, you were a real pain in the arse,” she tells her boy to open the episode. “Your kindergarten teacher said, ‘Matthew is bright, alert and gets along with others in class. However, he questions any directions given to him and shows more interested in being the center of attention than he does in his schoolwork.’”

At around the five-minute mark of that first episode, Meyer tells a painful story of when he was sexually abused as an 11-year-old. Before he goes into it, he takes a big swig of his favorite brown elixir — “whiskey eases my mind or numbs it. Either way, it’s always been a reliable comfort drug for me. It ain’t curing nothing, but it helps keep the train on the tracks.”

As he tells the audience the story – while shielding his mom from most of the graphic stuff – about a 47-year-old former blackjack player, Renee, who bought him and his mate cigarettes and then plowing them (as she had other boys in town) with warm Rolling Rocks before she got some of what she wanted — along with more than she bargained for from a kid who was still in puberty.

While his mom wasn’t allowed to hear most of the story, she gets enough to make her turn into the Mama Bear she is.

“I wish I could find her. I’d slit her goddamn throat,” his mother says matter of factly and dripping with love.

“You think that’s the reason you’ve done all these drugs?” his mom curiously asks.

Meyer honestly questions the incident’s role in forming who he is as an adult. While he admits it played a part, like all things, it’s more complicated. But in the nuance comes the humanity — the humanity we all share with him and other addicts, or just substance abusers of one kind or another.

That’s the thing: There’s only one kind of honesty. And for most of us, or our family and/or friend circles, we’re used to sanitizing our realities, even as an opioid epidemic continues to put hundreds of thousands of our neighbors in early graves. Maybe instead of just talking about the ‘good,’ sanitized and socially acceptable parts of our lives, we should all learn from Meyer and tell the full truth, nuanced and complicated as it always is.

The war on ‘drugs’ failed by every metric the federal government even laid out for itself. But something our nation hasn’t tried yet is talking openly about our struggles and ditching the stigma passed on to us from “Tricky Dicky” Nixon, our parents, worship leaders, law enforcement, etc.

But even in the new world of harm reduction Meyer explores on “Self-Medicating,” Momma Bear always gets the last word.

“Please don’t smoke,” his mother begs him at the end of the first podcast after he says he’s cut back.

“Okay, love you momma,” Murf, or Matthew, Meyer dismissively says.

“I’m serious,” Jane says, as her sweet voice transforms into an adamant, motherly command. “Promise me.”
