

The Messenger

An Addict for a Mother or No Mother at All: Which is Worse?

-Adrie T.

I grew up being lied to. About God. About sex. About what things were important, what things mattered, why *I* mattered. About what was going on in my home. Even though I didn't know it at the time, while it was happening, there are consequences that come from not being told the truth.

I learned not to listen to what my body was telling me. I learned that if something seemed wrong, the wrong thing was me and I must try harder. I learned to ignore and suppress my own feelings in favor of those deemed more acceptable for the situation and for other people. But never too much, just the right amount. Not too much excitement, just a touch of sadness, and never any anger. I learned to ignore myself so well I couldn't find myself later.

I tried to run. To the boyfriend, who accepted me as I was, and then back and forth, and back and forth again. He loved me BUT, he had a learning disability, his family didn't have money. He wasn't right for me, my parents said. So, I ran again. Into a uniform, into another country, into someone else's problems that were acceptable to be upset over. And then it was easier. Things were consistent and predictable and reliable. Until they weren't. Until I saw that I had been lied to. The scene didn't fit the story. When one brick of the foundation crumbles, the rest come crumbling after. But all that crumbling can be ignored too, for a while at least. Until, following the path my socialization laid out, I had a child.

I existed for two of us then, and it was too much. I feared every pain he would feel. This world I didn't understand wasn't safe for anyone. Everything, every one, every path, felt dangerous. When that happened, I found a prescription bottle, or eight, helped with the ignoring. And I needed to IGNORE so I could stand upright, put one foot in front of the other. To put the baby in his car seat without a panic attack flashback of what children's bodies look like in a war. I lost him after that. His dad was better, his dad could keep him safe. And I tried to get back.

I tried to get right; to stop getting high just to live. Losing a boy, a husband, a career and home couldn't stop me. The Church that raised me couldn't hold me. The fear that lived inside was too paralyzing and powerful. My 'wrong' was too much. I was too much. In jail they found me to be too much too, and solitary is where the 'too-much' go. There I read and read, trying to find myself in a book, any book to tell me what I was. And then I gave up.

I gave in, admitted I was an addict, embraced my demise, and endeavored to mitigate the destruction left in my wake. I now had an ethical dilemma: Cause my child harm repeatedly the way addicts do OR take my own life in order that he might have a better one? Spread the misery out over a lifetime, or get it over with all at once? If all I bring to the table is pain, which option brings the least? While I was trying to decide, a third option emerged.

I wound up in the rooms of a 12-step program, not by choice. I knew these people were all about God and the God-thing had never worked for me. Really though, my heart was just too broken from being too much for everyone else before. It hurt too much to hope. But I tried what they said anyway, if only to prove it wouldn't work; after I could go on being an addict in integrity. And then something happened. I found myself staying clean. I found myself not having to get high in order to function. And the longer I experienced myself doing those things, the more I believed I might be able to keep doing those things.

I realized I couldn't outrun myself. The only way out was through me. As Weston states, "the self doesn't vanish- it just awakens to oneself as yes, one among others." Nothing of the past could be changed; the circumstances of my upbringing, that a child I created now existed in the world, the fact that I was an addict. But now I had access to a set of spiritual principles, or as A Framework for Ethical Decision Making calls it, "a lens of Virtue" through which I began to navigate my everyday thinking and life choices. Honesty, open-mindedness, willingness, integrity, humility, acceptance, and unity, with the principle of anonymity underpinning them all. The Virtue lens "argues that ethical actions ought to be consistent with certain ideal virtues that provide for the full development of our humanity." These ideal virtues are how I bring the least amount of pain to the table of a shared human experience.

I choose to be honest so as not to hurt the people around me the way I was hurt. I choose to be open-minded so I can continue to grow by taking in new information without prejudice. I choose to be willing to do whatever it takes to keep growing, especially when I don't understand and when it's uncomfortable. Integrity calls me to keep my actions in accordance with all these values. Humility allows me a clear view of my weaknesses and strengths, and to see accurately how I contribute to the communities I'm part of. Acceptance involves choosing reality and people as they are; not approving or condoning but taking full responsibility for what is within my control and being able to navigate a situation or experience as it is. Unity means I don't exist in a vacuum; I need the people around me, and I need the people around me to have a sense of agency and to be seeking fulfillment through a unified higher purpose. This concept coincides nicely in the very definition of Ethics: "We think or act ethically when we take care for the basic needs and legitimate expectations of others as well as ourselves." Anonymity means to be nameless, or to lack unique character or distinction. When we put aside our egotistic and material distinctions, the spaces between us can be traversed. In practicing the spiritual principle of anonymity we have the opportunity to connect with the salient aspects of what makes us the same; pain, fear, joy, and excitement; what it is to be human. And in that way, there is nothing separating me from others.

I live differently now. I value the new life I have created, and I work to keep it a life of value. In a text written collectively by the members of a 12-step fellowship it says, "We ease the pain of living through spiritual principles." (Living Clean 57) I've found this to be true, and it is the only thing that has worked for me. To ease the pain, to ease the fear, to ease the unpredictability and uncertainty of this life, I choose to live by these principles.

Motherhood is a Journey -Emily D.

I have begun to write this in my head so many times and each time it begins differently....Motherhood is such a journey for me and a complicated internal monologue constantly in my head. I don't have a relationship with my mother. I know where she is and she is a wonderful mother to my siblings but for me she is absent and an unwilling. And that is my example of how not to be. I myself am a mother to three AMAZING children and I used to say that they are wonderful in spite of me but today due to working a program and the women of this program I know that to be untrue. I came into the program with guilt about the fact that my kids were practically grown when I got clean. Working steps has taught me forgiveness and helped me to understand that in my active addiction I was powerless over my actions and that today I can only move forward. My youngest daughter has tourette's syndrome and a very severe case of it. I got clean right as she was having the worst part of her symptoms and had to be pulled out of school. She often tells me how she couldn't have made it through it without me. Marci (my youngest) spends every Sunday with me, without fail.

Being of service to the program has taught me how to be of service to my family and show up when I say I will. We love to go thrifting and watch bad movies together or work on small projects around the house. She really is my little best friend. She tells me all the time how proud she is of me and can be seen at NA functions on a fairly consistent basis to support me. Marci is the keeper of my coins. Every year on my clean day when I get my coin presented to me I then present it to her to keep for me. It is always an emotional moment but she is my biggest fan and little best friend. When I got into the program I was empty and thought my kids were better off without me. Because of NA and the love of the other women the program I have learned that my kids do need and deserve me and my kids are amazing because of me not in spite of me. I have forgiven myself for the mistakes I have made in the past and live in today being the best mom and glammom I can be!

The Power of Hope and Love - Aubrie G.

Love is such a powerful emotion...but maternal love for our children is almost unexplainable. Its like this deep rooted bond and connection of the spirit that can never be broken and can never be taken from you even if children are no longer allowed to be in our life. For me the disease of addiction was stronger than the love I had for my son but luckily I finally found the last house on the block, Narcotics Anonymous.. I was able to stop using and lose the desire to use long enough to start the healing and fight for a relationship with my son.

I knew deep down I was fighting a losing battle but I started suiting up and showing up just like I was learning in the rooms. I was doing the work on myself from the inside and I was applying spiritual principles as I walked through the painful process! In the end I lost my rights but through that journey I built a solid foundation in my recovery. I leaned on the women to help carry me through on the days when I couldn't carry myself. I am still his Mom and always will be. I get to love him from afar. I get to email him and get picture of his choosing at the end of the year. I also get a letter about how he has been and what he has been up to.

Today being his Mom is respecting what he needs and wants in his life and being grateful that my addiction didn't deter him from being happy, healthy and thriving. NA has taught me that hope is just as powerful as love. I have hope and faith that my son and I will have a relationship again one day. I have stayed open minded for other blessings and opportunities that my HP is putting in my path. Immediately after losing my rights to my son, I met an amazing man that was just starting the fight to get his son back. That little boy was the same age my son was the first time I tried to get clean and get him back. I got to walk through that process with this man and got to see the joy when he got time with his son again. I got to start building a relationship with this amazing boy and I get to be a healthy mother figure in his life. I get to do all the things for him that I was never able to do for my son in active addiction.

I want to thank Narcotics Anonymous for giving me a solution to stay clean through losing my son. Being a mom in recovery is a lot different than the picture I painted for myself but I get to be a Mom today. I get to share my maternal love with a little boy that I would do anything for. Being Bradley's Step Mom is one of the greatest joys of my recovery. Loving him heals the piece of my heart that longs for my boy. Being here for him and being a safe place for him is making a living amends to my son. Opening my heart to him allows me to be the Mom I always wanted to be. Being a Mom in recovery is teaching me to love unconditionally and accept love.

I Am a Mother, I Am in Recovery -Chloe L.

Motherhood in recovery isn't for the faint of heart. You'd think it would be all sunshine and rainbows because we have found "the easier, softer way" but I can promise you, it brings its own set of challenges. And by challenges, I don't just mean some of the difficult things we face as mothers in recovery like walking through reunification and the host of things that entails (I will touch on that some more later on) but also challenges such as accepting how much we are growing as mothers; accepting love and support from the other women in the program; realizing we are worthy women who are not only recovering from a seemingly hopeless state of mind but we are raising tiny (and not so tiny) humans in the process.

If you are an addict like me, then you know the horrors and trauma I subjected my children and myself to and the emotional damage I did to all of us. If you are an addict like me, you know the feelings of your family slipping away and watching your children being taken or driven away due to your disease and wondering if that little face staring out the back of the window would be the last memory you have of them. I lived with that visceral image of my children's crying faces staring out the back window of the vehicle that was driving them away because I said I couldn't be a mother and an addict anymore. The two could not live in the same body and my power of choice was taken away a long time ago; I was just finally willing to admit it.

For many years, I missed out on birthdays, holidays, phone calls, first days of school, field trips, and the tears, the confusion, the anger, feelings of worthlessness, and eventually the despondent acceptance that mom was probably never coming home unless she was in a casket. That sort of weight changes a mother and a child.

I almost ended up in a casket, in front of my children, more than once. Based on that, I made the only decision I thought I could make which was to make sure my children didn't wind up with a dead mother in their home so I left them. Thank whatever higher power is out there that they have a higher power and I am not it (that's a favorite line of my sponsor's) because they never had to find a dead mother. My children were split up and I didn't get to see the other two for almost 4 years, and by the time they were reunited, she was faced with her own set of addictions that took her away on her own journey for almost another year. We saw each other as often as we could but that was just another joyful challenge we faced together.

Let me backup. In those 4 years, I tried to reunite with my children many times but all these pieces of my heart being spread out from one another made it difficult for me to choose where and how to settle down into my recovery. I relapsed and I ran, a lot. From them, from myself, from everything. I wasn't ready. When I finally got ready, my higher power knew that the time was now and that same higher power placed me in a position where all 3 of my children came home. It was messy. I felt like I was not only clawing my way through early EARLY recovery but I was dragging my children along with me. I used to think, this isn't how it's supposed to be! My perspective has shifted as I have done my steps and now I see that my children had to witness how hard I was fighting for not only them, but for myself, as well. How could I teach them self-love if I didn't choose my own life daily? How could they know I was choosing them every day if they didn't see it? I loathed that they saw me in emotional shambles at first but it gave them the space to be mini-emotional shambles and that space was not safe before. It is now because of Narcotics Anonymous. Getting clean is the easy part, doing your work and staying clean is where it gets gritty. Doable, but gritty.

Fast forward, I get and stay clean; we move out of the domestic violence shelter and into our own apartment; my daughter comes home from her stint in treatment and all is seemingly well. Except I am raging. My children are raging. We are a total dumpster fire and the coping skills that I had learned are no longer working for me, thus creating chaos and confusion all over again, and in active recovery, no less. I felt so much guilt and shame over not being "the perfect mother" or "a present mother." I was still seeking external validation and had expectations on myself, my children, and others that placed me in a position to be hurt. Because of my choices. Thank my higher power for the women in the program for loving me and my children through our chaos. I truly thought I would get and stay clean, my kids would come home, and we would all live happily ever after. Boy was I in for a rude awakening and an awakening it was! My children didn't come home simply happy because I chose to come home; they were angry and wanted answers! Answers I wasn't prepared to give to questions arising out of traumas inflicted upon them and truly just wondering why I left them in the first place. Was I going to leave again? Was this real? Could they trust me?

Because I was taught to work the steps of Narcotics Anonymous from 1 through 12, I admitted my powerlessness and complete unmanageability. I was able to rely on my faith and belief in something bigger than me to show me how to seek help and restore some sanity to my home. I took honest stock and inventory of what was actually happening (surprise, surprise, I was at the root of the problem) and I talked to people about it. I shared as openly as I could about the real devastation of reunification and how it takes excavating this deep rooted trauma to truly find space to heal. I was ready and willing to have my defects removed and invited my higher power into my homelife on a deeper level, along with some professionals, and we went about creating a plan to grow through these pains. Growing pains are real and valid, my friends.

I was able, and am still able, to make a living amends to my children and to my self on a daily basis by choosing first to stay clean, relying on my higher power (again, to the best of my ability), and taking action. I continue to take action while thoroughly taking accountability when I am in the wrong, and it is often, and it has taught my children that it is okay for them to be vulnerable and accountable. They see everything! They are watching their mother grow up, mature, nurture, and appreciate the life we live today in recovery. More importantly, because my higher power saw fit to give them front row access to what it looks like to be vulnerable, emotional, accountable, and then to give it away to others.

Our life is far from perfect but it is ours, as long as I am willing to continue to do the work daily. It is but a daily reprieve from our disease. I have Narcotics Anonymous, my higher power, and beautiful mothers walking side by side with me and my children in my recovery to thank for my recovery. I appreciate each one of you and I hope you read something that gives you a little bit of hope.

How many times as addicts have we apologized to our mothers? How many times in active addiction have we caused pain, sorrow and stress in the lives of the women who cared for us and love us unconditionally? Even when that love hurt. Maybe this is not a part of everyone's story, but for many it is. There were years and years where our actions and our words hurt our mothers. However, if you ask most mothers what hurt most was watching their children hurt themselves while they could do nothing to stop it.

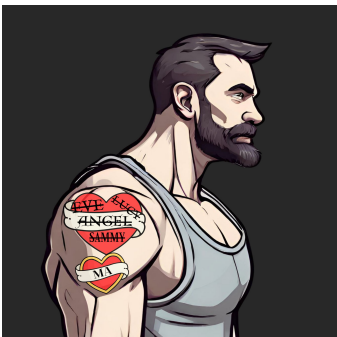
Our mothers may have been part of our fourth step, our eighth step and then our ninth step. Recovery can be an active living amends to our mothers. For some our mothers are the first person to see the changes that working a program has wrought in our lives. For some our mothers are the last to trust we've changed. For some our mothers cannot be in our lives as part of our recovery. And for some their recovery happened after their mother had passed, making a living amends that much more important.

Amends is described in *It Works How and Why* as a two-stage process. It's not just saying I'm sorry, it's a serious change in our behavior. The most significant amends we can make is changing the way we live, and this is a lifetime process (*It Works How and Why: Step Nine*). The 'direct' amends is very important and encompasses the spiritual principles of courage, honesty and humility. The 'indirect' amends can be a daily, ongoing process that causes an addict in recovery to practice the same principles compounding them with the spiritual principle of consistency and self respect.

Almost all mothers want their children to love themselves as much as they love them. So just for today make amends to your mother by living in the moment, enjoying your recovery. "We are free to go in directions we never considered before. We are free to dream and to pursue the fulfillment of our dreams. Our lives stretch out before us like a limitless horizon" (*It Works How and Why: Step Nine*). For this addict that is far better than saying "Mamma, I'm sorry, please forget about yesterday" because today my mother sees me loving me as she has always loved me. Thank you Narcotics Anonymous.

Mother's Day Luncheon

Please come join the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous as we celebrate Mother's Day Luncheon of pinwheels, salads, sliders and other dishes. There will be a Raffle!!



1115 N. Garden Street on May 11th
11am-3pm

12\$ Entry Fee
Kids under 12 are free!



Molly W. & Suzanne W. will both be sharing their experience, strength and hope as mothers in recovery.

Hope to see you there!

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