February 2019

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Addiction: Am I Just Another Statistic

By Jennifer Hayes

From domestic violence to kidnapping or murder, every aspect of addiction emanates violence. Have you ever heard the saying, “A country song played backward returns everything; you get your dog back, your house back, your car back, your kids back, your wife back, basically your life back”? In my opinion some of the most common causes and effects of addiction are violence, loss, trauma and statistics. Living with an addict, being an addict, working in a treatment center, I have witnessed and experienced the causes and effects of addiction and only one of them is good.

I remember a time when I just wished I would disappear. I was dreaming of course. The father of my three sons was a vicious alcoholic, and I was always on the receiving end of his abuse. He drank nearly every day, and “good” days were few and far between, “good” meaning sober and conflict free, of course. Two occurrences stand out most in my mind and were part of the deciding factor to leave him. He had me trapped in the bathroom choking the life out of me, and my oldest son walked in and said, “Daddy why are you hurting Mommy?” and later when I was pregnant with my youngest son, I literally received the beating of my life. It lasted over four straight hours. I had a broken nose, broken wrist, broken collar bone and broken home. People say “break the cycle” and it sounds simple, but it’s not. I lived with his cruelty for nine years afraid to even look another human in the eye. The effect of his addiction to alcohol nearly killed me, and I became just another statistic, a young mother of three with no job, no home, and no one to turn to. I first called Project Safe, a battered women’s shelter. They rented a hotel room for me and my kids to stay in until I could get transportation to get out of town. I decided on Ponca City, where my aunt and uncle offered us a place to stay until I could get on my feet again. Even though I was constantly in pain and suffering, I continued to pick up and drink. I would take the kids to a sitter and go to the bar with my best friend nearly every night and get drunk. I began losing a lot of time and feeling a lot of shame and guilt. I would wake up in odd places with no memory of the night before. I once woke up in bed with a stranger. I had no memory of how I got there or who this person beside me was. Occasionally I would wake up in parking lots because I was too drunk to drive home. I even woke up in my car in front of a convenience store with a dead battery over two hundred miles from home. Drinking took its toll on me, and I finally had to stop. I felt so guilty. I was completely ashamed of my behavior and all the time I was missing out with my kids. It was then that I found drugs and discovered that I could be high and still function in every way. Thus began my addiction to drugs.

Becoming an addict was a slow process for me. I managed to raise my kids into adulthood for the most part. I did so usually under the influence of drugs or alcohol because I was a functioning user, and no one knew. I had bouts of sobriety never lasting very long, and for all appearances my life was pretty perfect. I became a professional in my community, got married and had another child, a daughter this time. Yet my addiction was slowly spiraling out of control, and after eleven years of maintaining, I lost everything again, but this time it was my fault. The one thing that caused me to completely give in to addiction was the death of my best friend. After being out “partying” one night, we were on our way home, and she was driving. She took something in the bathroom before we left the party that caused her to overdose, and she crashed the car. I finally got her out of the vehicle, called 911 and started CPR only to have her die in my arms once the paramedics arrived and took over. I felt so guilty because I couldn’t save her. I began using heavily, and not just to function anymore. I left my husband through text on our wedding anniversary and didn’t realize it for eight days because I was that high. Leaving him also left me nowhere to go except with other addicts on the streets. Once again a statistic, I was strung out, living on the streets, dealing drugs to survive. This is where the violence returned to my life with a vengeance. I went on a drug deal all alone trusting the wrong person and was kidnapped! I was held against my will, drugged, tied up, raped, beaten, and robbed in a seedy hotel room for an entire week. I have almost no memory of that week and absolutely no memory of how I got away. I learned real fast not to trust anyone, and I began carrying a gun. Thankfuly carrying a firearm didn’t end as bad as it could have, although it was pretty bad to me at the time. I got busted for dealing drugs with a gun in my possession, but I was in jail less than twenty-four hours, so I didn’t learn a thing. That was the beginning of the end for me. Several drug busts and felonies later I decided enough was enough and went to treatment. I completed it successfully and began working at the treatment center.

Being and working in recovery, I don’t personally experience the nasty effects of addiction anymore, but I sure witness others who do. I work with traumatized young men who are the same age as my children. Many have already been to prison, many have witnessed or been part of death by being part of horrific crimes like murder, attempted suicide both accidental and intentional. All have experienced major loss in some way or another. Most like me have lost if all if they ever had it to begin with. They are all alone with no support, and very one of them is a statistic.

There is no end to the causes of addiction, and the effects are everlasting. The only happy effect of all of the violence, loss, trauma and statistics to be found is in recovery. I am less than three weeks away from having three years completely clean and sober.