

My Story:

Dear Debra. I was touched by your story in yesterday's Guardian. I have walked every step of your story myself & felt with gusto what you describe. I have 2 sons aged 21 & 20. My youngest is a quiet lad now just feeling his feet at university away from home. His teenage years were ripped apart by his brothers addiction to cannabis and then other drugs and alcohol. At a time when I thought I might be able to settle into a quiet life after a frantic and upsetting divorce I was presented with more than the teenage 'post parent divorce' problems I ever anticipated.

My eldest son started to smoke cannabis I believe at about 15 but also started to drink. He blew our life apart. His behaviour was very much as you describe & his thoughts and feelings for others were completely stunted even to the point that when my sister moved in with us as her husband was dying he continued to monopolise our every move & thought (thought to be fair my sister never noticed thank goodness). He too was asked to liven up or leave & chose to leave (& yes I too thought this would make him think about his behaviour) & again his kindly loving elderly paternal grandmother took him in. My ex husbands family have since treated me as something between a neglectful mother and an abusive ex daughter in law, though my mother in law has never been anything but wonderful.

He stayed for about a year before taking a very serious overdose. The psychiatrist who assessed him wanted to admit him to a psychiatric inpatient ward. I however persuaded her to let me take him home for two reasons, I wanted to be his mom again, I longed to 'look after him' & secondly I am a mental health nurse & did not want him to go into an area that is primarily unsympathetic to substance misusers. I may well have missed a chance there.

It took my son about 4 months to go back to his old ways & beyond. His scrapes are innumerable, the fear I felt for me & my other son immeasurable. He became homeless again but because he had a sympathetic community psychiatric nurse we worked together to get him a housing association flat about 10 minutes walk from where I lived. I kitted him out & he was happy for about a fortnight after which I had to take our house keys off him (he is about 5'10 & I 4'10) & ban him from our house. We moved within 7 months not able to cope with the strain of him banging on the door, demanding, being abusive etc etc.

The last two years have been a nightmare. I understand from my work that being an 'on site carer' is as difficult as being one at a distance. The move helped a little but it was not out of sight out of mind & coupled with the guilt I felt at leaving him behind (he told me I should feel guilty) I felt no better & could see him struggling. However he never wanted me to be his mom, just support his habits. Things spiralled & my health deteriorated. I am usually the life & soul of any social gathering & an ear for my chums to talk to. I became a wreck, clinically depressed & tried to take my own life a year ago tomorrow. I failed (& to add insult to injury the care at the hospital was enough to make me try & do it again only more successfully).

There are never any ends to these stories but (crossing my own fingers) I will finish on a note of hope. I have innumerable tales to tell about how we managed this together & may do this another time but will leave on this. Last September my youngest son rang to tell me that his brother had turned up asking to stay. My stomach churned. The last time he stayed my younger son had to persuade him off a fourth floor balcony where he was threatening to jump & I did not want to put any of us in a similar position again. I went home to find a lad who was in a state of utter despair; I found a chink in a wall. It appeared he had hit that rock bottom point my friends had reassured me that he would & asked me to help. Between all of us in our flat (including my partner) we established a contract & worked toward it. The hell we went through

to get to my son's desired goal is a story I plan to tell but in short against all of the odds & crap that you have to work toward to get public funding for detox & rehab we achieved it. It was not easy & nearly drove me mad but in December 2006 my lovely son was admitted to a residential rehab unit & is now in second stage treatment. He comes home on weekend leave for the first time next week & I am already experiencing a mixture of pride, joy but overriding fear. He is doing well but this does not stop me waking up in the middle of the night hoping this leave might be 'postponed'. He would be terribly upset if he knew that particularly as he is doing so very well, I feel ashamed. But this morning I opened the hand made Mothers Day card he sent-my first for years. Inside he writes 'To my beautiful mother, I owe you everything for all your help & support & promise soon I will give back'.

There is as I say more to tell but please take hope. I now know that my son, even in his worst times knew I loved him but was driven by addiction, an addiction that is strong & I have learnt complicated beyond my comprehension. I hope this help somebody.