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“A HEART WRENCHING ANTHOLOGY OF TRAGIC ENDINGS TO BEAUTIFUL CHILDREN. A MUST READ FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN, SCHOOL OFFICIALS, AND MEMBERS OF OUR CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM. THE STORIES, BY VIRTUE OF THE LIVES DESCRIBED, HOPEFULLY WILL BEGIN TO DISPEL SOCIETY’S PREJUDICE OF ADDICTION AS A CHOICE, BUT RATHER ADDICTION AS A DISEASE. THESE TRAGEDIES CAN BEFALL ANYONE OF US. IF BUT ONE LIFE CAN BE SAVED BY THIS WORK, THE SECOND WILL SURELY FOLLOW”.

- NEIL YESTON, MD, FACS, FCCP, VICE PRESIDENT ACADEMIC AFFAIRS, HARTFORD HOSPITAL, ASSISTANT DEAN, GRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION, PROFESSOR OF SURGERY, UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT SCHOOL OF MEDICINE.

“I FOUND THE BOOK TO BE POIGNANT, HEARTFELT AND SURPRISINGLY ENCOURAGING. THE COURAGE, HONESTY, SADNESS AND STRENGTH OF THESE PARENTS OVERWHELMED ME.”

- DR. WANDA BETHEA, PSYCHOLOGIST AND LIFE COACH, ADJUNCT PROFESSOR FLORIDA TECH AND WEBSTER UNIVERSITY, MELBOURNE, FLORIDA

“*I AM YOUR DISEASE (THE MANY FACES OF ADDICTION)* IS A MOVING BOOK AND PASSIONATELY WRITTEN. IT IS TOLD BY THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED IT---THOSE AFFECTED BY ADDICTION---THE ADDICTS AND THEIR FAMILIES. IT IS WROUGHT WITH PAIN AND TEMPERED WITH HOPE. IT IS WELL WORTH THE READ.”

- ALYCE LAVIOLETTE, AUTHOR OF *IT COULD HAPPEN TO ANYONE; WHY BATTERED WOMEN STAY.*

“THIS IS A BOOK THAT I RECOMMEND FOR PARENTS, GRANDPARENTS, YOUTH, COLLEGE STUDENTS, EDUCATORS AND BUSINESS LEADERS. THERE IS A MESSAGE FOR ALL OF US ON ITS PAGES. IF WE TAKE HEED, ADDICTION WILL NO LONGER BE "SILENT," WE WILL HAVE TAKEN ACTION! IT IS MY HOPE THAT ALL WHO READ THE BOOK WILL INVOLVE OTHERS SO THAT THE TOPIC MAY BE RAISED AND DISCUSSED OVER AND OVER AGAIN - AND MOVE US CLOSER TO REDUCING THE NUMBER OF LIVES LOST AND LESSENE DUE TO DRUG ADDICTION. THE AUTHORS HAVE SUCCEDED IN CREATING A VOLUME THAT IS ALARMING, REALISTIC, INFORMATIVE AND, HOPEFULLY, AN IMPETUS FOR CHANGE!”

- DR. DAVID G. CARTER, SR., CHANCELLOR OF THE CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM. FORMER PRESIDENT OF EASTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY AND PAST CHAIR OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

“A MOST HEARTWRENCHING AND HEARTWARMING BOOK OF LIFE STORIES FILLED WITH COMFORT AND DISCOMFORT. THE COMMON THREAD IS THE PAIN OF THE VICTIMS OF ADDICTION UNTIL DEATH, AND THE CONTINUED LINGERING PAIN OF THE FAMILY AND FRIENDS LEFT BEHIND. A MUST READ BOOK FOR ALL THOSE SHARING THAT PAIN.”

- EILEEN DUNN, M.DIV., D.MIN. RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR & PASTOR

"I AM YOUR DISEASE (THE MANY FACES OF ADDICTION) IS A VERY DIFFICULT BOOK TO READ. THESE ARE TRUE-LIFE HORROR STORIES. ANYONE WHOSE LIFE HAS BEEN TOUCHED BY ADDICTION WOULD PROFIT FROM READING THIS. AND ANYONE WHO SUSPECTS THEIR CHILD IS FLIRTING WITH ADDICTION SHOULD PUT IT ON HIS OR HER NIGHTSTAND TONIGHT."

- CATHY MATHIAS, FREELANCE BOOK REVIEWER FOR FLORIDA TODAY

"I AM YOUR DISEASE IS A BOOK FILLED WITH EMOTION. IT'S ABOUT REAL FAMILIES WHO LOST A CHILD TO THIS DISEASE CALLED ADDICTION. EACH PARENT HAD TO RELIEVE THEIR CHILD'S DEATH, SO THEY COULD TELL THEIR STORY. THE ONLY HOPE THEY HAVE LEFT IS THAT MAYBE THEY CAN SAVE SOMEONE ELSE'S CHILD. THIS BOOK SHOULD BE READ BY EVERY PARENT AND CHILD."

- LYNNE COPELAND (BRISTOL PA )

"WHEN I GOT MY COPY OF THIS BOOK AND BEGAN TO READ, I JUST COULD NOT PUT IT DOWN. I EXPLAINED TO MY 12-YEAR-OLD, 6TH GRADER GRANDSON WHAT THE BOOK WAS ABOUT AND HE STARTED READING IT AND UNDERSTOOD WHAT HE WAS READING. PARENTS AND CHILDREN ALIKE WOULD BENEFIT FROM THIS BOOK. IT TOUCHED ME DEEPLY LIKE NO OTHER BOOK I HAVE EVER READ."

- KATHY MILLER, WEST MELBOURNE, FLORIDA

"THIS BOOK PROVES THAT THE DISEASE STRIKES ANY FAMILY AND DOESN'T DISCRIMINATE. THESE WERE THE KIDS NEXT DOOR. THE FOOTBALL, BASEBALL, BASKETBALL SPORTS JOCKS, CHEERLEADERS, THE HONOR STUDENTS, NURSES, MUSICIANS, ARTISTS, COLLEGE GRADUATES, TEACHERS. YES, IT CAN HAPPEN IN YOUR FAMILY AND THIS BOOK TELLS EACH PARENT'S AND CHILD'S STORY WITH SUCH RAW, TRUE EMOTION THAT IT IS A MUST READ FOR EVERY PARENT AND CHILD."

- SANDRA LACAGNINA, ANGELS OF ADDICTION, MEMPHIS, TN

"THIS BOOK IS A MUST READ FOR PEOPLE STRUGGLING WITH ADDICTION, THE PEOPLE WHO ARE WATCHING THEM HELPLESSLY AND FOR THOSE OF US WHO HAVE LOST A CHILD TO THIS HORRIBLE DISEASE. THIS BOOK WILL OPEN THE EYES OF THE WORLD AND LET THEM KNOW THAT THESE ARE LOVED CHILDREN FROM GOOD HOMES, WHO MADE A WRONG CHOICE FOR WHATEVER REASON, AND GOT CAUGHT IN THE JAWS OF THE MONSTER CALLED ADDICTION."

- CHRISTINE TOZZO, SARASOTA, FLORIDA

"I STRONGLY RECOMMEND THIS BOOK, NOT ONLY FOR PARENTS BUT FOR KIDS LIVING IN OUR SOCIETY WHERE PEER PRESSURE CAN CONTROL AND CONVINCED EVEN THE MOST EDUCATED, LOVED, INDIVIDUAL. DRUGS DO NOT DISCRIMINATE, PLEASE DON'T BE THE NEXT TO WRITE YOUR OWN TRAGIC STORY!"

- CAROL DIGIANTOMMASO, NORTH READING, MA

“THERE ARE A LOT OF BOOKS AVAILABLE THAT EXPLAIN THE CLINICAL EFFECTS OF ADDICTION BUT NONE ARE AS GRIPPING AND TOUCHED ME LIKE THIS BOOK DID. THIS BOOK SHOWS ADDICTION AND ADDICTS IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT. IT SHOWS HOW ADDICTION DOESN'T DISCRIMINATE. IT KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES. THE RICH, THE POOR, THE EDUCATED THE NONEDUCATED ALIKE. ADDICTION TOUCHES ALL OF US AND LEAVES A MARK ON SOCIETY. I HOPE THAT EVERY SCHOOL, LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY AND EVERYONE ELSE READS IT TO UNDERSTAND THAT GOOD PEOPLE BECOME ADDICTED. IT'S EVERYONE'S DISEASE.”

- KAREN VENTIMIGLIA CHESTERFIELD TWP, MI

“I AM YOUR DISEASE (THE MANY FACES OF ADDICTION) IS FULL OF TRUE STORIES BY PARENTS WHO NEVER COULD POSSIBLY IMAGINE IN THEIR WILDEST NIGHTMARES THAT THE CHILDREN WHO THEY ADORED MORE THAN THEIR OWN LIVES, WOULD HAVE TO BURY THEM LONG BEFORE THEY HAD A CHANCE TO LIVE THEIR LIVES TO THE FULLEST, TAKING WITH THEM THE VERY SPIRIT OF THEIR PARENTS' LIVES, AND WHO WILL NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN!!! FROM THE 1ST PAGE TO THE LAST, YOU WILL BE KEPT SPELLBOUND BY THE BOOK'S HONESTY AND IT'S HEART.”

- AGNES SPARNECHT, DEERFIELD BEACH, FLORIDA

“THIS BOOK IS POWERFUL AND EYE-OPENING. TRULY, IT IS A “MUST HAVE” FOR ANYONE WHO MIGHT EVER COME INTO CONTACT WITH A DRUG-ADDICTED INDIVIDUAL OR THEIR DISTRAUGHT FAMILIES. THAT WOULD INCLUDE EVERY PARENT, EVERY DOCTOR, EVERY MINISTER, EVERY COUNSELOR, EVERY TEACHER, EVERY NURSE, EVERY SCHOOL NURSE, AND EVERY POLICE OFFICER, ETC.”

- SUE SHIELDS, BUCKS COUNTY, PA

“THIS BOOK IS A MUST READ FOR EVERY PARENT, GRANDPARENT AND TEENAGER. YOU THINK IT CAN NEVER HAPPEN TO YOU BUT ADDICTION CAN AFFECT EVERYBODY. THESE TRUE STORIES, WRITTEN BY PARENTS AND SIBLINGS OF CHILDREN THAT HAVE DIED FROM ADDICTION, WILL LEAVE YOU BREATHLESS AND EMOTIONAL, BUT IT IS A STORY WHICH MUST BE TOLD. I HAVE NEVER READ A BOOK AND BEEN AFFECTED LIKE I WAS AFTER READING THIS. ”

- PAUL JOSEPH, BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
[WWW.FAMILIESCHANGINGAMERICA.ORG](http://WWW.FAMILIESCHANGINGAMERICA.ORG)

“THIS BOOK IS A MUST HAVE FOR ANYONE WHO HAS CHILDREN, IS CONSIDERING HAVING CHILDREN OR KNOWS ANYONE WHO HAS CHILDREN. “I AM YOUR DISEASE” IS REAL - THE TRULY HEARTBREAKING STORIES TOLD THROUGH TEARS AND ANGUISH BY REAL PEOPLE WHO HAVE SUFFERED THE WORST POSSIBLE LOSS. WITH GREAT HONESTY AND EMPATHY SHERYL LETZGUS MCGINNIS OFFERS HOPE THAT THE STIGMA SOCIETY PLACES ON DRUG ADDICTION WILL CHANGE “

- LISA CAPPIELLO BROOKLYN, NY

I AM  
YOUR  
DISEASE

THE MANY FACES OF ADDICTION

SHERYL LETZGUS MCGINNIS WITH HEIKO GANZER, LCSW, CASAC

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# CONTENTS

## **Dedication and Acknowledgements**

### **Foreword**

### **“I Am Your Disease”**

## **Part One DRUGS**

<b>Scott Graeme McGinnis, RN</b> “Mom Nobody Wakes Up One Day And Decides To Be An Addict.”	1
<b>Keith Tedesco</b> “My Nine Days Of Hell.”	17
<b>Jason Anthony Barganier</b> “Once Upon A Child.”	25
<b>Mike DiGiantommaso</b> “My Son’s Journey Towards Destruction.” “Just For Fun.”	47
<b>Lang Jackson Hitchcock</b> “I Don’t Need Therapy. God Will Get Me Through This.”	55
<b>Michael Murphy</b> “My Son’s Deadly Choice.”	59
<b>Jeffrey Scott G.</b> “I Have Hurt And Shamed Myself On Numerous Occasions Although My Actions Shall Not Dictate My Eternity.”	65
<b>Samantha Sandler</b> “My Beautiful Daughter And Friend.”	69

<b>James Byron Keaton</b>	77
“Relax Mom. It Ain’t That Bad. You Worry Too Much.”	
<b>Katie Kevlock</b>	83
“This Is Bigger Than Me, Mom. It’s A Monster I Can’t Control.”	
“A Girl Named Katie.”	
<b>Josh Joseph</b>	93
“A Life Too Fast.”	
<b>Johnny Paul King</b>	101
“My Precious Johnny Angel.”	
“The Moment My World Crashed.”	
<b>Wade McLeod Grussmeyer</b>	111
“My Greatest Loss.”	
<b>Vernon Creamer, Jr.</b>	135
“In Loving Memory Of Vernon.”	
<b>Eddie Anthony Cappiello</b>	141
“So Little Time.”	
<b>Jennifer Carol Lee</b>	157
“A Bright Star Now.”	
<b>Brett M. Tozzo</b>	161
“Through The Years With My Son, Brett. Heaven Sent, Heaven Bound.	
<b>John Konewal</b>	169
“You’re In The Arms Of An Angel.”	
<b>Dennis Konewal</b>	171
“Gone But Never Forgotten.”	



<b>Robby Nunes</b> “I Hope You Have The Time Of Your Life.”	175
<b>Lenny Orlandello, Jr.</b> “An Angel’s Face.”	183
<b>Bobby Mehlberger</b> “My Bobby.”	187
<b>Kara Edelman</b> “A Mother’s Greatest Fear.”	191
<b>Brandon James Hagner.</b> “Broken Dreams, Lost Promise.”	195
<b>Gino Ventimiglia</b> “Shattered Lives.”	199
<b>Mark Daniel Bauer</b> “Living A Parent’s Worst Nightmare.”	205
<b>Matthew Guastamacchia</b> “In A New York Minute, Everything Can Change.”	211
<b>Donald Charles Parent</b> “My Precious Son.”	215
<b>Justin Luke Scancarello</b> “Forever Justin In My Heart.”	223
<b>David Dill</b> “For The Love Of David – Our Bright And Shining Star.”	225
<b>Cindy’s story</b> “And I Don’t Take Drugs.”	231
<b>Ricky Aaron Phillips</b> “Until You Beat This Thing Called Addiction,	235

It Will Destroy  
All Until It Is Fiction.”

**Joseph Smerker** 249  
“My Beautiful Son.”

**Ricky Weldon, Jr.** 253  
“The Beginning Of A Bad Dream.”

**Jason Eugene Mitchell** 257  
“My Precious Angel Jason.”

**William Elliott Sommer** 261  
“Losing Will.”

**Shauna Patricia Mikula** 265  
“My Daughter, My Best Friend.”

**David Charles Hall** 269  
“My Honey Boy.”

**Keith Montambo** 273  
“Ignorant Of The Truth.”

**Sara Jo Corbett** 283  
“You Are So Beautiful To Me.”

**Random thoughts and poems**

286

A Mom's Thought  
Comet People  
I Never Thought I Could  
Grief Wish List  
Mr. And Mrs. Crystal Meth  
Ms. Heroin  
Nothing Really Ever Dies  
My Mom Lies  
It's OK To Let Me Go Mom  
Another Mom's Thought  
The Missing Page  
Death Be Not Proud  
I Lost My Child Today  
Will You Go Or Will You Stay?  
The 'Everything We Could' Brigade  
The Invisible Cord  
We Remember Them  
Kids' Thoughts on Peer Pressure  
Fentanyl and Heroin: A deadly mix  
Some Gentle Suggestions and Tips on Coping  
In Memoriam

**Part Two Gambling**

340

**Afterword**

353

**Grief Support Sites**

359

# I AM YOUR DISEASE

*I Am Your Disease by the Anonymous Addict*

(Written by Heiko Ganzer, LCSW, CASAC)

Well, hello there! I cannot believe I have really been talked into doing this: Telling you about myself (which obviously you as clients either don't know, or won't accept). I am going to let you know how I operate; what my strategies are, how I win, (and I love to win!).

My initial reaction was—Why should I disclose them to you? After thinking it over, it came to me that as usual, many people will read this and not consider this information anyway, so I have nothing to lose. I mean, what the heck. Why shouldn't I divulge this stuff—who's really gonna pay attention? After all, this information has been available for many years and only a few gave a damn about it. Heck, many people, even after reading this, will still foolishly continue to take me on “their” way (how this makes me chuckle).

AA/NA/GA people try to tell them things; they won't accept it. Professional counselors tell them these things; they won't accept it, but OK, you want to hear the truth directly from the horse's mouth? Read on. They teach you that I am a disease. (I snicker because many people won't even accept that!). People fail to strongly impress upon you what kind of disease you are up against. Words like progressive, and insidious have little impact on you so let me tell you what I'm all about—I AM YOUR DEADLIEST ENEMY!

I make AIDS look minuscule compared with the devastation I have caused and intend to continue to impact on humanity. I conduct my business of mutilation and destruction in a very business-like, highly productive, orderly manner that results in me being extremely successful! I have an insatiable desire to torture, maim and destroy. I

am totally vicious! I am brutal! I have perfected my skills of deception to an art form!

Early on, in the beginning of my attack on you, I can make myself almost invisible. I take you down ever so slowly and skillfully at first because I sure as heck don't want you to become aware of me. That might frighten you away.

I am the Master of Manipulation! As my progression becomes more visible, I most emphatically am not going to let your frustration and anger be directed at me. No, no, no! I tell you it's the job, it's your spouse, and it's the kids. God forbid you should ever wise-up that it's ME. So I have you lash out at the only people who really care about you.

How I revel as I see you thrashing about throwing powder-puff punches at the world. I continually whisper outright lies in your ear and incredibly, you buy right into them. Remember when I told you "THIS TIME IT WILL BE ALRIGHT!" or "SURE YOU WENT OVERBOARD IN THE PAST, BUT THAT WON'T HAPPEN AGAIN" and my all-time classic—"YOU CAN DO IT YOUR WAY. YOU DON'T NEED ANY HELP!" Each time I lie to you, and you listen to me, I betray you. Look at your track record chump! My paramount reason for being on this earth is to make certain you never achieve your full potential or enjoy the things you deserve.

I see you start project after project, but I keep you from completing them so you rarely ever enjoy a feeling of accomplishment. I keep you chasing two rabbits at the same time and grin as I watch your dreams of tomorrow become unfulfilled promises of yesterday.

With the young I damage your potential, destroy your initiative. What pleasure I get from stunting your emotional growth, and converting you into a "never-wuz." With older people I remove the enjoyment of your autumn years, and make you into a "has-been." I adore screwing up parents. Instead of you moving forward with your lives, I suck you dry with worry and concern about the fate of your kids. In the face of all logic, reasoning and just plain common sense, Mr./Mrs. Compulsivity, you keep listening to me, and your reward for foolishly doing this is that I BETRAY YOU AGAIN, AND AGAIN, AND AGAIN!

Beginning to get the picture, Pal? I'm not exactly what you would call Mr. Nice Guy! I am a high-tech conversationalist! I just love to convert beautiful, sensitive, caring productive people into self-centered, omnipotent blood-sucking leeches who day-by-day drain their loved ones emotionally, physically, and financially. I give you selective hearing; so you hear only what I want you to hear! I give you tunnel vision; so you see what I want you to see! I roundly applaud myself as you begin to stumble through life as I prevent you from hearing and growing. How you delight me as you continually permit me to twist your thinking! By the way, pal-o-mine, I not only get a big boot out of messing you up, I am without peer when it comes to wrecking everyone who cares about you and whom you care about.

I convince you, of course, that you are only hurting yourself, no one else! As things begin getting a little tackier (that's called PROGRESSION), and unbelievably you still listen to me, I advance more rapidly within you. I cheer you on as you make emotional yo-yo's out of those who still stand at your side. Of course, you mean all those wonderful promises you make to them like "NO MORE, NEVER AGAIN," etc.

I make damn sure you never carry them out by enticing you to have just one card game, one drink, one joint, one line, or just make one little old bet. You'd better believe I don't want you wising up to the fact that I am breaking the spirit of the other people in your life; that I am causing them TEN TIMES the amount of pain and sorrow that I'm dishing out to you.

Under my influence—I grin when you say things you would not have said, I smile softly as you begin not doing things you should. I chuckle as I witness you doing things you never would have done, and I let out a real belly laugh as you begin doing unthinkable things that inflict horrible pain on those you love which now cause you even higher levels of guilt, remorse, and shame. I become ecstatic every time I witness those tears running down the faces of defenseless individuals and children who you are threatening and terrorizing (your very own spouse and kids).

I must admit I am thrilled to my toes as I rip the very life out of the people around you. Get a load of this—the target that gives me the

greatest satisfaction in destroying are YOUR KIDS! I am delighted by every opportunity to keep getting them so upset and off balance by what is going on that they do not stand a chance of growing up without being severely scarred. Look at the millions, yes millions, of untreated ACOA's ACOG's, I've got romping around this country all screwed up! How I chuckle when you say "YOU'LL DIE" IF YOU DRINK, BET OR USE AGAIN! First of all you know damn well you don't really believe that, (just look at your past track record).

I do not kill people; well, sometimes I do, but when that happens it really ticks me off; obviously I socked it to that person too hard. Heck, when they die, the games are over and I've got to find a new CHUMP to take their place. Hey baby, I'd rather keep playing with them; destroy them a little at a time. No, I do my damndest not to kill you since I want you to live—miserable, wretchedly, horribly!

One way I get my jollies is from being the world's greatest collector. Didn't know that, did you Pal? Got a warehouse the size of Africa! I happily take things away from you that rightfully belong to you. These are things that you have worked hard for, earned, and deserve. I laugh all the time; I rob you of them and store them so I can enjoy my thievery when things get a little dull.

See, there's John's RESPECT over there; and Mary's MORALITY. That's what's left of Frank's HONOR, look at this, what a blast I had ripping away Helen's INTEGRITY, and did I ever have a ball taking away young Bob's ENTHUSIASM.

How I savor fondling these trophies from my past and present robberies. Hey, get a load of all those jobs over there, how sweet it was grabbing them, and how about that pile of previously good marriages? Had a ball destroying them. Down there in that pit is where I keep active people's SELF-ESTEEM. There's Don's FREEDOM (laughed like heck when they put him in the slammer). This pile of rubble makes me just shiver with ecstasy, don't you recognize it? It used to be people's CREDIBILITY. And here sweetheart is my most prized stolen possession. Yep that big steel cage is full of thousands of broken people, what a fantastic sight all of them stumbling around! Know what I stole from them? THEMSELVES. Certainly one of my award-winning traits is to steal

away YOU! I have absolutely perfected my techniques for causing the process of self-abandonment. What I excel most at is taking you away from YOU!

I'm also the unequaled master at converting things; early on I convert you into a procrastinator thus letting you build up unnecessary tension, and stress. I adore converting warm, caring people into self-centered, omnipotent jackasses, and bright, intelligent people into bumbling, fourteen carat idiots. I am the absolute Champion of Deception! I get one heck of a bang doing my Muhammed Ali "ROPA-DOPA" routine on you. I make believe you've got me whipped (that, CHUMP is called complacency) and when you let your guard down (start missing meetings) I beat the heck out of you again! How I applaud you and cheer you on each time you get into the fight ring with me again—Hurry, you fool! Love it when you keep coming at me with your right fist cocked; your big punch that you're going to flatten me with. What a laugh! Of course I make sure you don't get wise to the fact that I'm cutting your face to ribbons with my jabs. I let you ignore the blood running down your face from the cuts I've inflicted over your eyes that blind you even further.

I go from grinning, to smirking, to belly-laughing as you stumble around throwing powder puff punches that achieve nothing except to further tire, frustrate, and anger you. Eventually I get quite bored by it all and deck you, and you, you fool, expect me to go to a neutral corner. Hey stupid, I know no honor; I abide by no rules; I am the dirtiest of the street fighters, and I thoroughly, totally, fully enjoy your suffering. How I relish the sight of you, a person of honor, struggling to get to your feet. I stand right next to you and as you get to your knees, I kick you right in the head before you can get to your feet again; (Maybe now you'll understand why relapses are so devastating). I am extremely proficient at map-making. Didn't know that either did you cupcake? I gleefully talk you into using and following MY map!

Oh, to entice you I write on it destinations such as High, Partying, Excitement, etc., etc., etc. In truth they all lead but to one place: And it's not Heaven! You can be very sure, CHUMP, I will do everything possible to camouflage that from you until you have journeyed quite a long and destructive distance with me. How I thrill when I witness



clinicians providing their clients with “Tools” to overcome me, and then you meet up with me on the front lines threatening me with your garden trowel. Hey hero don’t you see I have a tank and twenty crack ground troops? I will annihilate you, you poor simpleton!

This is a war, not a garden party you are involved in and, something else you apparently don’t realize—I do not engage in this war alone! Only a fool would do that (like you do stupid). I, the super strategist, enlist the aid of my allies. The Dealers, the Casinos, Business Deals, Horses? My hired hit men! Your so-called “friends” are actually my “assassins.” Mess around with them and they will take you out of play, time after time, after time. I convince you that your hoopla pals in the gin mills and OTB parlors are your true-blue buddies. I sure as hell, make sure you don’t listen to the propaganda spoken by the people who care about you—perish the thought! I love to puff you up and feed into that big fat egotistical head of yours, the lie that you are in control—and incredibly you fall for that outright malarkey over, and over, and over again.

Hey gigolo, hey pompous, the moment that you place one bet, CHUMP, one drink, CHUMP, one line CHUMP, one joint, CHUMP, you are a walking time bomb and you’re gonna go boom! Heaven forbid you should ever look at your lousy track record for if you ever did it would become exceedingly clear what a swollen-headed prominent, superb ignoramus I am making out of you! Dear me, that does sound a bit sarcastic now doesn’t it? Well, you can bet your tush I meant it to be!

Hey c’mon, I always give you what you ask me to—numb out your trouble! You don’t really expect me to tell you about the consequences do you? Hey brother, hey sister, what do you expect of me? Surely not to tell you that with each relapse the price is getting a hell of a lot steeper. That the IOU’s are piling up and that each time I numb out what is bothering you, I also automatically numb out your access to your intelligence, your logic, and your upbringing. When you are overcome with remorse, guilt, shame, and anxiety, then you poor fool I tell you my favorite lie. The lie that I can fix all that stuff too so you fall for it and drink or gamble some more and the whirlpool of your addiction now progresses ever faster and deeper.

Beginning to get the picture honeybunch? I'm not exactly Mr. Nice Guy or Ms. Friendly! I'll bet you didn't realize that I sit in on every group therapy session, every one-to-one counseling session every AA/NA/GA or GAMANON meeting. How I love the "counselor-pleaser" type, the "clam-upper." I could just kiss the "I don't give a damner," and the "liar" sends chills up and down my spine as I'll be able to grind their faces into the dirt in short order with very little effort needed on my part.

FINAL TIDBITS: I convince you, you are only hurting yourself—and then relish every tortured moment that you dish out to those who love you. I whisper deliciously destructive lies into your ear in a most convincing manner. Lies like "they'll never fire you," and of course I go into ecstasy when I witness the shame for you and your family. It gives me goose bumps when I convince you you'll never be arrested as your future grinds to a halt when you see the flashing lights of a cop's car at your home, or the Feds at the front door! I howl with delight when your bookie or loan shark calls in his bets and you don't have a dime to your name! Just break an arm or slam that hand! Well, Sweetie Pies, I've told you some of my secrets; told you some of my strategies, shared some of my attack plans. Of course, I'm banking on many of you not listening to what I've told you, or thinking it was hogwash and dribble. I intend to capitalize on that and convert you into a CHUMP again—CHUMP!

So long for now, you gorgeous active person you! Of course we shall meet again—and again! I'm looking forward to that! And for those of you in early recovery, Au revoir---certainly not so long, you're doing real good kids!



# SAMANTHA SANDLER

**JULY 28, 1982 –DECEMBER 16, 2005**

**(AGE 23)**

**HEROIN**

## **“MY BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER AND FRIEND”**

The best day of my life was July 28, 1982, the day my beloved angel child Samantha was born. She was everything any mother would want, a dream baby, beautiful, easy, cuddly. After two brothers and two sons I was thrilled for a daughter. I nursed her for two years, just holding her and looking into her eyes---all the hopes and dreams!

She excelled at everything she did. She would always say “I did it for you mom. I want to make you proud!” A prouder mother I couldn't have been. She attended the Masters school grades 1-8, a small Christian school with good values. She loved horses, and became the Hartford County Jr. horseback riding champion. She graduated with the award for the best all around student in the school. She went on to Miss Porter's School in Farmington, CT. It is probably the most prestigious girls' school in the country. Jackie Kennedy went there.

Samantha graduated at the top of her class, president of the student council and disciplinary committee. We were thrilled when she got into Brown University. Her older brother Josh, was at Bowdoin

College, Zach was at Wesleyan University.

Always being an overachiever, Samantha became stressed at Brown. She wouldn't settle for any grade but an A. She would do papers over and over until she got an A. She started having panic attacks. On Oct. 19, 2002, she called me sobbing that she was having a breakdown and would kill herself if I didn't come and get her. I drove immediately to her dorm, slept and held her sobbing all night, then brought her home. She felt like a failure even though we assured her we were still proud of her and wanted her to be happy.

She became very depressed and finally, not knowing what to do, I brought her to an institute in Hartford, CT, a mental health facility where she stayed for two weeks. They kept her drugged most of the time, and diagnosed her as bipolar. She came home with lots of medication for depression, but it didn't seem to help. They kept changing medications because she kept having bad reactions, especially to Paxil, and terrible mood swings. They told me to keep her as stress-free as I could, so we decided to not send her back that semester.

While she was at the Institute she was housed in a coed adult floor because she was over 18. It was there that she met and befriended a heroin addict dropout, Raz. She was feeling like a failure and in a down moment he convinced her to try heroin. She was addicted immediately. The lying and stealing started. Heroin took my daughter from me.

I brought her to treatment programs but my insurance would only pay for outpatient. The director of the program, begged as well as Sam herself, for Connecticare to pay for inpatient but they kept refusing stating that she hadn't done enough outpatient first. She refused us paying out of pocket. My husband and I joined Families Anonymous so that we could learn how to help her.

I took her car and money. I drove her everywhere, watched her constantly. We were going to lick this together. If she had a craving, she would call me. She promised! She started having accidents and lost her license but Raz delivered drugs to my house.

I lived in Hell worrying about her, watching her sleep. I checked her over and over to make sure she was breathing at night. I even

## I AM YOUR DISEASE

videotaped her high so she could see what it did to her. Her two older brothers and two younger sisters were getting very angry because she took so much of my time and energy. I was terrified to leave her alone. She convinced me that she could lick this and I was there to help her every step of the way. She had never, not been able to conquer anything she tried in her life. She was strong. She loved school and all she wanted was to go back.

She went to Umass for awhile but relapsed and overdosed and had to be taken to the hospital by ambulance. The doctor said she almost died, but she said she had learned her lesson and would never touch it again.

Finally she found Hampshire College in Amherst, Mass., a small \$45,000 liberal arts college in a country setting. She said she could never find drugs there. In May she borrowed another student's car and drove to buy drugs, got arrested, had a hypodermic needle and cocaine in her possession, and ended up on probation. She said she absolutely learned her lesson and would never do it again! She promised over and over! I believed her.

She seemed to be back on course finally. She spent most of the summer of 2005, in China, going to school and working in an orphanage. She loved children and was getting her degree so she could work with troubled teens. She wrote me this email in June, 2005, while she was in China.

*“MOMMY, sorry it's taken awhile. I have so much to tell you. I can't thank you enough for enabling and allowing me to take this trip; it is the single most healthy and life-enriching experience I have ever had. I wake up every day exhilarated, with energy and a natural high that is more sensational than anything that could ever come from a dirty powder.*

*I have been slowly learning to speak the language, going to festivals, exploring the city, meeting and spending time with the locals, and more. I get up early and am active all day. I bought a rescue cat named Shao mao at the market and it follows me everywhere and sleeps in my arms (it already has a home when I leave) and I am buying a Vespa for very cheap (that a friend will buy from me when I*

*leave) today so I can drive through the cities and see as much as I can. Tomorrow I am going with a few students picked to visit an ancient village and temple, and then to a traditional Chinese wedding. I feel no anxiety, cravings, or inhibitions, etc. This place makes me want to make the most of each moment and embrace all this diverse world has to offer me in my lifetime. Hope all is well. Send all my love. Hope you're feeling better. I can't apologize enough for what transpired right before my departure. I hope you will soon see I am no longer the same person. I am looking to see if I can stay a few weeks longer. dzai jen, love always, Sammy.*

The day after she came home she relapsed again. She got herself back in a program at Rushford. I drove her everyday. We talked, I pleaded, I begged. I was terrified. She finally admitted she was an addict. I took her and her boyfriend to NA and AA meetings which she hated. She said it was easy to get drugs there and it didn't help. FA is a 12 step program so I learned that I could not control her life so I had to trust she made the right decisions.

She came home for Thanksgiving and all was wonderful, she seemed better than ever, and determined to lick this problem. She was getting all A's in her classes and even filmed a movie using her sisters for a class. It was brilliant!

She also found a doctor who could prescribe an opiate blocker. We got the blood work on Thanksgiving break and picked up the prescription before I took her back to school.

I was concerned as she told me the day before Thanksgiving that she had had an abortion. When I drove her back to school I talked to her boyfriend, Jimmie, and told him about the drug blocker and that because of the abortion she would be emotionally fragile and to be very careful as I worried about a relapse.

He could call me any time day or night. I felt good because it was only two weeks before she came home for Christmas vacation. I sighed with relief. I talked to her several times and everything seemed to be going well. She assured me over and over that she was doing well.

## I AM YOUR DISEASE

I decided to plan a Christmas party for all my friends as I hadn't done it in years. I had been too stressed. I decorated the house and tree, and my guests were to arrive on Dec. 16, 2005, at 7 pm. It was almost 6:30 p.m., when the doorbell rang. I opened the door and three policemen came in. They asked me if Samantha Sandler was my daughter and did she go to Hampshire College? When I said yes, they proceeded to tell me that her BODY had been found by her roommate at 9 a.m., that morning, deceased in her bed at the dorm of an apparent heroin overdose.

Apparently Jimmie had borrowed his parents' car and drove her the night before to buy drugs in West Hartford. He said she just wanted to do it one last time and to celebrate the end of the semester. She had decided to wait and start the blocker drug during Christmas break. He proceeded to bring her back to the dorm. A passerby student helped him get her to her room on the second floor as she was not able to walk or talk. Tuck said she just moaned. Tuck, the passerby, tried to convince Jimmie to call the EMT on campus or bring her to the hospital. Jimmie was very adamant about knowing how to take care of Sam and finally Tuck, who had never met either one of them before, reluctantly left. Evidently so did Jimmie. He left to return his parents' car.

When he returned the next morning it was too late. He called 911. Paramedics came. They tried CPR but nothing. She was taken to the medical examiner at 9 a.m., and I was never contacted by the school or police until 6:30 that night. My family's nightmare began.

Police treated the case so cold and uncaring. My family, her brothers, Josh 28 years old, Zach 27, and sisters Sloane 19 and Sierra 13, and father were devastated. The funeral, the numbness, disbelief, shock, pain, writing an obituary for your child. Calling her brother, Zach, who was living in France, to come home. No investigation, no blame. She was a drug addict and the police were not going to waste one minute of their time on this case. Nobody cared. Their attitude was she chose the drugs and paid the price. No one was wasting a minute on her case. Case closed!

December 16, 2005, was the worst day of my life, the day I lost my beloved angel, my best friend, Samantha. I will love and miss her

every moment of every day until I die. My beautiful baby, Sammy.

I was a nurse, school and sexual assault counselor, PTO president, Girl Scout leader, and I was there everyday for my children. Being a good mother was my full time job. I drove them to school everyday and picked them up. I was always there for them, to talk and help them with any problems they had. They were our lives.

My husband and I have been together thirty-three years. He is a Princeton, Harvard Law graduate. We were at every swim meet, Lacrosse game, school play, profusely read to them, and patched every scraped knee ourselves. We had family vacations, lots of pets and lived in a beautiful home in a lovely neighborhood. They all did community service. Nothing was more important than being a good parent.

I know there are no guarantees, but in my wildest dreams NEVER, EVER did I think this could happen to us. I would have bet my life. Impossible! Not us! The truth we all now know is it can happen to anyone. Addiction will rip your heart out. No discrimination here. It's an epidemic---in every school, public or private.

It's five dollars for a bag of heroin. It can kill the first time you use it. It's taking our beautiful, brilliant children, our future. It's Satan. It is HELL on earth! IT CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE! It leaves shattered families and breaks hearts. IT KILLS anyone that gets in its way. Every day another parent will endure the excruciating pain of a knock on the door or phone call informing them that their child's body is in the morgue. You will never be the same, raped of innocence and forever wondering "how could this happen to me?" It can happen to anyone!

We loved Samantha more than life itself, as she did us, and we said it constantly. We would have died for her if we could have. Samantha was 23 years old when we lost her. If she only knew when she took that first snort or used that first syringe, the torment and pain she would put her family and friends through, she would NEVER have chosen to use. She, as well as us and countless others, became victims.



## I AM YOUR DISEASE

*Samantha's story as told by her loving mom, Sharon Sandler, Bloomfield, CT*

*"I never knew, when you lost your child, what you were going through. I wasn't there, I stayed away. I just deserted you. I didn't know the words to say. I didn't know the things to do. I think your pain so frightened me, I didn't know how to comfort you. And then one day my child died. You were the first one there. You quietly stayed by my side, listened, and held me as I cried. You didn't leave, you didn't go. The lesson learned is ...Now I know!" Author unknown*

Compelling, provocative stories of addiction and loss. Poignant and heartbreaking.

I Am Your Disease (The Many Faces of Addiction)

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