

A compelling book about drugs and addiction.

Slaying the Addiction Monster -An All-Inclusive Look at Drug
Addiction in America Today

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Reviewers' Comments

This book covers absolutely every possible aspect of addiction. Indeed, this book is a veritable wealth of helpful and invaluable information on the subject, but more importantly, you will also read some incredibly sad, moving and honest stories, about everyday people, parents just like you and I, who have lived with and, in many instances, lost their children to the Addiction Monster – for them, there will never be a happy ending – as the author plainly puts it at the beginning of the book ‘a parent should never outlive their child’.

—Tina Avon for Front Street Reviews

Remarkably intimate. This book takes you to the deepest depths of parents’ souls who are dealing with their children being consumed by addictions. These parents know first hand the severity of addictions and how families can be ripped from the core because they lost the most precious thing in the world to drugs...their kids. The stories these parents offer are gut-wrenchingly honest and will make every parent blink back a tear while pondering the fact that drug addiction is real and can happen to anyone, anywhere at any-time.

—Amy “AJ” Crowell, MBA, Author of *Loved Back to Life*
Association of Persons Affected by Addictions

Slaying

The Addiction Monster

*An All-Inclusive Look at
Drug Addiction in America Today*

by Sheryl Letzgus McGinnis

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I Am Your Disease (The Many Faces of Addiction)

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And iamyourdisease.com***

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Preface

Dear Reader,

This book is written from the heart. It is not intended to be a scholarly piece nor is its focus on the cold, hard statistics. We've included many statistics sprinkled throughout the book but primarily the book is about real people and real feelings.

We've touched on some of the most commonly abused drugs. For complete information on all drugs please check with your local library or government websites.

This book is filled with love and hope and sincere, heartfelt advice from parents who have experienced the worst imaginable loss; the loss of their precious child. Compounding the loss is that our children died of an "unacceptable" disease, that of drug addiction. There is no greater loss than that of a child. As profoundly heartbreaking as it is to lose a parent, it is still the natural order of things. Our parents are supposed to die before us. No parent wants to outlive their child. It is the cruelest of the cruel.

Some of the book will be hard to read, perhaps compelling you to put the book down, step back, take a deep breath and regroup before you venture on. But we urge you to see it through, and take from it what you need.

It's important to understand that Good Kids Do Drugs Too; Kids from the right side of the tracks who get derailed by drugs. Kids make mistakes. We don't believe that any of them purposely indulge in drugs with the idea that they will one day become addicted. If they knew the horrors that awaited them and their families, surely they would not choose this path.

But as stated in my first book, children don't look at the long term. They truly believe they're invincible, that they are in control of their lives and if things get too bad, they'll just stop. Would that it were

that easy!

If only they knew, if only they truly knew what lay in store for them when they cross the line into the world of drugs, they might think twice. This is why it's important to sit down with your child and read this book together.

This is the perfect time to begin an ongoing discussion about drugs including everything from nicotine to heroin and crack cocaine, Oxy-Contin to crystal meth, to steroids, to “huffing” and everything in between. It is the perfect time to Listen To Your Child. Listen for the true meaning of what he/she is saying under the innocent sounding words and questions. Let the dialogue begin!

On the following pages you'll find advice, opinions, and suggestions from people who are opening their hearts to you, whose driving force in life now is to do what they can to prevent others from walking in their footsteps. I must amend this to “our” footsteps because sadly my husband and I are one of these parents too.

In these pages you will find information from NIDA (the National Institute On Drug Abuse) and also information from the DEA. You'll find websites where you can find the cold, hard statistics of drug abuse so we won't list all of them here.

There are also special interviews included – Representative Aaron Bean from the state of Florida, Eric Nestler, MD, Ph.D, leading cocaine researcher, Amelia M. Arria, Ph.D., Deputy Director of Research Center For Substance Abuse Research (CESAR) University of Maryland College Park, Larry Golbum, R.Ph., MBA, host of the Prescription Addiction Radio Show, Claudia Black, MSW, Ph.D., and Heiko Ganzer, LCSW-R, CASAC, CH. Our sincere thanks to them for so graciously sharing their expertise and opinions on the disease of addiction.

You'll read the words of our deceased children as recalled by loving parents; children who are speaking out from the grave about how drugs ruined, and then ended their lives.

We've discovered that one of the main hindrances to recovery is denial, and not just denial by the addicted person; but denial by the parents who find it hard to believe that their child could possibly be in-

volved with drugs, and denial by the parents that they themselves are addicted.

The “not in my family” parents and the “had they been raised better, they would not have turned to drugs” parents would be well served to read what other parents have to say about addiction. Many of us were also in denial. Who wants to believe that their beloved child has turned the corner and walked down that dark street that leads to a living hell...or worse, to death?

At the end of the book is a very important chapter. It’s a place for both you and your child to sign a pledge. It’s amazing how much more forceful the anti-drug message is when it’s right there in front of you in black and white. Remember – Parents are the Anti-Drug!

Children can learn from this that their word is their bond. It can teach them integrity and principles and reinforce their commitment to sobriety.

We’re not saying we have all the answers. Nobody does. What we, the parents in this book have, is experience and newfound knowledge of drugs and addiction. We want to share this with you, hoping against hope that you never join our ranks; that you never join this club that nobody wants to belong to, that of a bereaved parent. It’s important to point out that not only do parents suffer, but grandparents, siblings, and other relatives and friends suffer as well.

If you have not lost a child to addiction but your child is addicted, please understand that we know what you’re going through. Our hearts go out to you. We hope that our advice and that of the experts in their field, and our experiences will be of some comfort and help.

If you have suffered the unspeakable loss, however, we hope you will find words of comfort here, knowing that you’re not alone in your grief. We all stand with our hands to your shoulders.

Lastly, we strongly urge you to keep the dialogue about drugs an ongoing part of your daily routine. Nothing is more important than talking to, listening to, and sharing information with your child about drug abuse. Children who feel comfortable talking to their parents about drugs are much less likely to do drugs.

Reinforce your child's self-esteem. Teach them to believe in themselves and to stand up for what they know is right. Teach by example!

A word about the home situation when living with an addicted person: Your lives have changed now and everything seems to center around addiction, whether it is alcohol, drugs or gambling. Parents go through the motions, trying to get through each day without falling apart, scared to death they will lose their child. The child goes through the day wondering where they will get the money for their next score and at the same time experiencing feelings of remorse and guilt.

This is no way to live! Our advice is to try to maintain a sense of normalcy in the home, try to make the environment loving, and a place where your child will feel comfortable. Try not to walk around the house wearing sack cloth and ashes, spreading doom and gloom. Try to bring the joy back into the home even if only for a short time. Try to help your child remember the good times.

Finally, if your best efforts fail to prevent your child from trying drugs, then don't delay, get help immediately! The sooner a professional anti-drug program is implemented, (rehab, AA, NA, GA, etc.) the better the chances for recovery. Try whatever approach works for your family, anything from the above groups to a holistic approach. There is no one way to deal with addiction.

Relapses are not failures. They show you the need to redouble your efforts. Addiction is a family disease. With all of you pulling together and giving it your all, the chances of beating the Monster improve greatly.

THE ADDICTION MONSTER

He came creeping into our lives, slowly, stealthily, insidiously, with no advance warning. No triumphal heraldry alerting us to his imminent arrival. No fanfare. No clues. Okay, well maybe there were some subtle clues but we were too busy with our perfect little lives to pay much notice to them.

He counted on that! He thrives on secrecy and subterfuge. He knew that if he alerted us to his presence we would call on all our resources and strengths to defeat him, to slay him, to banish him from our lives and yes, from the very earth where he lives and thrives, and grows more menacing and powerful with each passing day. He counts on society's lackadaisical attitude toward him, believing that he cannot sneak into their homes. He depends on us ignoring his presence or believing that he lives on the other side of the tracks, surely not in our ideal communities.

He knew we would divest ourselves of every penny we had to expose him, to cripple him and kill him, that we would do anything within our power to stop his onslaught. He attacks the most vulnerable of our society: our children. He preys on them, luring them into his grasp with promises of ecstasy and escape from their humdrum lives, while parents go blithely about their daily routine, unaware of the chaos, heartbreak and destruction of the family unit that awaits them.

He is the most hideous of all monsters, yet he exhibits no external evidence of his cruelty, no demonic horns on his head, no red flashing eyes, no mien any different from anyone else's in the communities where he plies his vicious trade. He shows us nothing to forewarn us of the monumental destruction of which he is so capable of inflicting upon us, and in which he takes such absolute delight.

No, he is far too clever to expose himself, to let us see him for what he truly is until it is too late, until he has consumed us all and engulfed us in his wickedness and destroyed our once peaceful lives.

He takes our children's and the parents' present and future. He destroys our communities. He robs us of our money and jobs. He steals our self-esteem and dignity. He keeps us on a rollercoaster of emotions, of hope and fear.

Don't think for a second that he can't or won't invade your home. Don't think that you've locked all the doors and fastened all the windows and done everything you're supposed to do to prevent his unwelcome entrance into your lives. Oh no, he's already there, waiting to pounce. He stalks unrelentingly. He strikes when we're not looking, when we've let our guard down.

He is the Addiction Monster! And he comes in many forms. He befriends our children slowly and carefully, enticing them with empty promises of exciting highs. He depends on children's sense of invincibility and belief in their own immortality that they can trifle with him and remain untouched by his poison.

The Addiction Monster is an equal opportunity destroyer of lives, and not just the addicted people's lives. But the lives of everyone with whom he is intertwined, be it parents, spouse, children, siblings, friends, relatives or co-workers. Nobody is immune.

Nobody can escape the tentacles of the Addiction Monster. Like an octopus it wraps its deadly arms around us and consumes us all, either wittingly or unwittingly. Children from the right side of the tracks can be derailed by drugs. It happens all the time. The stereotypical image of the dysfunctional drug addict cloaked in the darkness of despair on the streets, quickly gives way to the boy and girl next door, the athlete, the musician, the smart kids, the good kids. These are your kids. These are my kids. These are everybody's kids. And they're dying in unprecedented numbers leaving sorrow and mass destruction in its wake.

Parents are not supposed to survive their children. It is not the natural order of things, but life takes strange and twisting turns along its path like a maze that we enter and have no idea where the end is or how to get there unscathed.

Many children succumb to the charms of the Addiction Monster because there is something lacking within them. Some have very low

levels of dopamine, the "feel good" property of our brain. Some shake hands with the Addiction Monster because they think it's cool or because their friends entice them into doing so. Many children do so because they're trying to self-medicate their inner pain. Mental illness and drug addiction quite often go hand in hand.

But nobody welcomes the Addiction Monster into their life knowing how cruel and deadly this master is. Nobody thinks they will become addicted. Nobody wakes up one day and decides to be an addict. Who in their right mind would do that? The Addiction Monster just smiles and adds another name to his list of victims, nay, for each addicted person, he also adds the names of those other unwilling victims.

Nancy Reagan almost had it right with her "Just Say No" campaign during her husband, Ronald Reagan's presidency. A better mantra would have been "Just Say Know." Know what the Addiction Monster is really like. Know the havoc that he wreaks in everybody's lives. Know how he will enslave you, daring you to escape his death grip on you and laughing at each feeble attempt you make to free yourself from his choke hold.

The outlook for addicted people is very bleak. Nobody wants to hear that. It's too disheartening. But the recidivism rate for addicted people is an astounding 80 to 98%!! The Addiction Monster just revels in these statistics.

So what can you do to destroy this monster - this monster who is more vicious and cruel than any of the Chuckys or Fredmys or Michael Myers' or Hannibal Lecters? How can you make sure he never seizes you in his grip and holds your head under water until your eyes start to bulge and you can't hold your breath any longer and then he releases you momentarily, only to plunge you into absolute fear and hopelessness again?

There is only one way, one sure, proven way to escape this horror and that is, of course, to never take that first step down that slippery slope! The Addiction Monster doesn't want you to know this. He wants you to think he's your friend, someone who will make you feel good and take you away from whatever miseries you think you have.

But you won't know true misery, true hell, or true hopelessness, until

you have become a slave to the Addiction Monster. Once you've joined his legions, your life as you knew it will have evaporated into a dark, swirling mass of regrets and despair.

The choice is ours! Our future is in our hands. Don't let our present and our future be held captive by the Addiction Monster, for once he gains control over us, our chances of slaying him are bleak. Think about it.

Be smart - Don't start!

*“The sorrow which has no vent in tears
may make other organs weep.”*

Henry Maudsley

OBERVATIONS OF A BEREAVED MOM

We Are One Voice

Upon re-reading *I Am Your Disease (The Many Faces of Addiction)* I found out that we parents who lost their kids are of ONE voice. The pictures and dates are different and the states and the names, but that's all.

In a nutshell, this sums it up:

All the parents feel they had to justify the idyllic upbringings of their children.

Each carries guilt thinking every life setback for their kids triggered use.

All naively believing their kids and that rehab was a cure-all.

Registered shock and horror that their kids died.

Disappointment with the system.

Acknowledging shame and stigma of others.

Missing their children and wanting them back for a second chance.

It could have been written by one person and I share *all* those feelings.

It's amazing: we all have ONE voice with the same story repeatedly—the secrecy of usage by their kids—and death when they least expected it.

*Linda – Mother of *Jake

*names changed to protect their privacy

*“Just because you got the monkey off your back
doesn’t mean the circus has left town.”*

George Carlin, comedian

SCOTT'S STORY

Losing a child is one of the worst experiences that any human being can have. We all know that our life has to come to an end eventually and we mourn the passing of our parents and elderly aunts and uncles. As heartbreaking as this is, that is the life cycle. That is how it is supposed to be. We are not supposed to survive our child.

To lose a child is beyond cruel. It goes against all of our expectations of what life is supposed to be, how our lives are supposed to play out. It shatters our vision of the fairy tale existence that has been spoon-fed us since early childhood.

So when a beloved child dies, the fairy tale turns into a macabre nightmare, only this nightmare pervades our minds around the clock. There is no release from the tortured visions. Sleep only brings us more torment, where our mind plays horrific games and we have no control over what floats in and out of our heads.

Finally we awake with sudden relief that the nightmare is over, only to realize instantaneously that the nightmare was nothing more than a really bad dream and that the real nightmare, the real torture, the realization that this is really real, will rear its ugly head and keep us company all day and back into the night. We can't yearn for sweet sleep to escape our heartache because there is no surcease from this sorrow. Nighttime brings nightmares and daytime brings something much worse. It brings reality; a reality so horrible as to be almost incomprehensible.

My husband and I went through a living nightmare for 14 years as we helplessly watched our beloved youngest son fight, and eventually die from, an oftentimes fatal disease, quite often marked by vomiting, shaking, hallucinations, sunken in cheeks, and marathon sleeping sessions, alternating with days of sleeplessness. He contracted the disease when he was 17, when he had the world by the tail and so much life in front of him waiting to be enjoyed and grabbed with youthful gusto.

Our son had his own band. He played guitar. Actually he could play any musical instrument thrust into his hands, from the flute, to the drums, even a dulcimer, to the guitar. He had natural talent.

Scott lived life in the fast lane, enjoying all that life had to offer from bungee jumping, sky diving, to surfing in Australia and anything else that would afford him the adrenaline rush that he so craved. Is it any wonder he became a paramedic?

He also was one of the kindest, most compassionate people we've ever known. Animals were not possessions to him; they were creatures who needed love and care and kindness. Once you adopted one, you kept it. You did not "get rid of it" as many people do.

Our son had the all-American good looks, the buff physique honed from many years of surfing and working out with weights and running. His smile would knock your socks off. He was a Leo, exhibiting most of the traits of that Zodiac sign including the charm and charisma that left the girls spellbound. He had a brilliant mind with an IQ of 150 and even wrote professionally for a brief time.

During our son's illness, with its many remissions, he managed to become an EMT, graduating first in his class, and then on to become a Paramedic and then an RN. His ultimate goal was to be a physician. He would have made an excellent one too, not only for his sharp mind but also because of his kindness and compassion.

There were so many times during the years that our son could not attend various family functions due to his illness. He couldn't get out of bed. He didn't even graduate from high school, having missed so many days and because of the problems that his illness caused.

From the time he was 17 until he passed away on the night of December 1, 2002, at the age of 31, we didn't get much sleep. We were always waiting for the phone call that would tell us that our son had been taken to the hospital. We knew the disease was exacerbating and there was nothing that we could do. Still, you never really think it will happen. You are never prepared!

We had him in and out of institutions that specialized in his particular disease. We did everything humanly possible to save him. He also

tried desperately to cure himself but all along he knew that it was a futile battle.

We spent untold thousands and thousands of dollars on treatments because no insurance company would pay for treatment for his type of disease. Had he been a leper he would have been treated better.

There was a time, not too terribly long ago, when cancer was spoken of in hushed tones. People who got cancer were sometimes ashamed, as were their relatives. Society placed a stigma on cancer victims and their families. I am old enough to remember this.

Then along came AIDS; another disease spoken of, in even more hushed tones than cancer.

People who smoked all their lives and contracted cancer were at first remonstrated for their vice which caused their condition. And we all know how AIDS victims were reviled in the '80s when first we heard of this devastating disease. Eventually, however, a collective common sense took over and we realized that these people were victims and deserved compassion and understanding.

I look forward to the day when the people who suffer from the disease that killed our son, will be accorded the same understanding and compassion as those other victims. As I stated earlier, our son developed his disease at the tender age of 17, when he was on the very brink of manhood, yet still a child, exploring, experimenting, and trying to find his way.

The institutions, of which I write, are in reality, rehab facilities. Our son died of the disease of addiction! Yes, addiction is a proven brain disease. The drugs change your brain's chemistry. What starts out as a lark, or a dare, or a curiosity or a way to self-medicate some inner turmoil, emotional pain or some form of mental illness, giving the person a deceptive sense of euphoria, soon gives way to despair, and if they're the unluckiest of the unlucky, to full-blown addiction.

For the majority of the addicted people there is no turning back. The Addiction Monster now has them in its clutches and it is a formidable foe, stronger than any parental admonitions, or books or TV shows or TV public service announcements, and much stronger than the hapless victim.

Most of us, well, let's face it, all of us make mistakes. Every single one of us makes many mistakes during our lifetime. Fortunately for us, most of our mistakes will be short-lived, cause no long-term consequences, and we can learn and profit from them and go on about our lives.

Our son was not perfect, not by any means. We do not look back at him through rose-colored glasses. We have chosen, however, to focus on the goodness that was him, his strengths and generosity and loving ways, and not to dwell on what the Addiction Monster did to him. We want him to be remembered for the kind person he was, not what the disease did to him.

Addiction usually does not afford us a second chance. It completely takes over the victim's mind and body. When you look into the face of your addicted child, you're not really seeing him or her. You are merely seeing a shell that resembles your child, because hidden inside is the Monster who is calling all the shots. As much as your child tries to fight this monster, most of the time he doesn't have a chance. The Monster is strong, tenacious, unrelenting, and lulls the child into the false hope that just one more hit will make him feel better and then he can start fighting the Monster again. But it doesn't always work this way. The Monster will win almost every time. Its strength is Herculean.

It's easy to cast aspersions on the addicted person, to look down our noses at them, and to say that they made their bed, let them lie in it. Would we say this about the cancer victims? Although AIDS patients still experience a certain amount of hostility and lack of understanding by the general public, their plight is gradually becoming more understood. Progress is finally being made in this regard.

Now it's time, actually way past time, for all of us to understand addiction. Addiction is not a conscious choice. The experimentation which usually begins in childhood indeed is a conscious choice, but addiction is not.

Children take drugs before their brains are fully developed. We don't have the tools to make smart decisions...but we think we do. And that is our downfall. Children make mistakes. That's a part of growing up.

The lucky ones will be able to overcome these childhood mistakes and grow up and go on to lead happy, productive lives.

As my son used to tell me, "Mom, nobody wakes up one day and decides to be an addict." I'd like to add that nobody wakes up one day and decides to be a bereaved parent, yet it is thrust upon us with all the weight of the world. We are victims too of our drug-entrenched society. Addiction is a family disease!

As much as we bereaved parents suffer, and believe me we suffer inconsolably, our children suffered 10 fold. They never expected it to happen to them. They didn't know what they were up against. They didn't realize the searing pain they would cause us, the pain that would live with us every second of every day.

We miss our son more than mere words can ever express, as any parent who has survived their child can attest to. Every sunrise that breaks, every sunset, every spring when all the flowers bloom and trees break into leaf, every Christmas, his birthday, every discovery of a former friend of his who has married or has had a child, every life event that others take for granted, all of these weigh heavily upon our hearts knowing that these experiences are lost to him forever; and to us.

We are not angry with our son for his choices. Many parents hold on to a strong anger about what their child did and how their behavior robbed the family of its future. We wouldn't be angry with our child if he had developed cancer because he smoked cigarettes or he became a paraplegic because of excessive risk-taking behavior. So we feel no anger, just incredible sadness for him, for all he lost.

Our only consolation is that he is no longer suffering. His pain has ended. Ours endures.

"We each are faced with choices every day. Every day is a new beginning. We cannot alter our past, nor can we assure our future. All we have is today. But how we act today can impact our future positively or negatively."

Sheryl Letzgus McGinnis

*“There is no pain so great as the memory
of joy in present grief.”*

Aeschylus, Greek Playwright

A compelling book about drugs and addiction.

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