



Hindsight is 20/20...

*What I Learned From My
Enabling Grandparents*

By Reagan Cook

I have come to the conclusion that many well-meaning, good hearted, parents make a huge and all too common mistake with their addicted kids. This common mistake is that of mistaking love with enabling the addictive behavior. Here is what I mean.

My aunt Lucy was addicted to alcohol. She got worse and worse, until it destroyed her marriage, her next two boyfriend relationships, and destroyed her employment as high level financial manager with a large hospital in Las Vegas, NV. My grandparents, her parents, funneled money to her on a constant basis to try and help her with her unpaid bills and living expenses. They even wanted to pay her monthly house payments and living expenses so she could continue to live in Vegas. As a matter of fact, it was only because Lucy's addiction worsened my grandparents decided it was time for Lucy to move home (small town in Idaho). They sent her brothers to go pack her up and bring her home. My grandparents set up her things in their basement, and Lucy started living in her parent's basement. Her parents continued to pay for

her bills, take her on shopping sprees, and helped her dodge bill collectors and police when she got into trouble. Her drinking got worse, and she started mixing pills with her alcohol. She over-dosed twice, and was taken to the hospital both times. Both times, the doctors told my grandparents to stop enabling her, and asked that all of them get involved in counseling and AA. My grandparents didn't do the counseling, and went once to AA. They came back and said that Lucy didn't need that kind of counseling, and didn't make her go. Lucy died soon afterwards, in her mid-40's, alone in her parent's basement. She died of another over-dose of a mixture of pills, complicated by her heart problems from alcoholism.

This is still a sensitive topic in my family, but I now feel safe enough to talk about it and explain what I learned through these last, very hard, years. I now know that it is a natural response for loving parents to want to do all they can to take hurt and consequences away from their children when those same children make mistakes. I have also learned that this is not the best

course. I can see that it would be much better to love your kids, but not enable them to keep living comfortably in their addiction. It would have been better for my grandparents to not give Lucy money, not pay for her bills, and not give her a living expense (which would have made her find another job and start being productive again). Lucy used her parent's money to continue to drink, party, and keep her addiction alive.

Other people, outside of the emotion of this situation, have also learned the same lessons that I have learned. They saw the enabling, and how that misplaced help/love allowed Lucy to continue happily in her addiction. Without knowing it, my grandparents consistently gave a drunk another drink. Unfortunately, my grandparents still don't see the obvious. They still call her death an accident, and think she died of having "too big of a heart". I believe that if they were required to go through the situation again, they would most likely make the same type of mistakes all over again.

I write all of this down so that other families might hopefully learn from our family's tragedy. Obviously we didn't handle this situation correctly. I see now that it is far better to lovingly and FIRMLY hold your kids to high standards, and to not do anything that would help that child continue in their addiction. Parents should do everything in their power to help their kids. However, real help is not allowing, or inadvertently helping, them to get another fix. Real help would be making the addicted child to get counseling, going to parent's counseling offered through AA, requiring the addict to work, to contribute to the family, to behave well, and to do everything possible to get and stay clean. 🙏

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Reagan Cook is a recent high school graduate from Idaho. *Alert Magazine* congratulates her for winning the Alert Scholarship and we encourage her in the pursuit of her academic goals. We would also like to encourage future seniors to participate in our scholarship program.