



Living with Addiction

By Kaci Willson

MY experience with a family member addicted to drugs and alcohol is not a singular experience, it has been ongoing for the last twelve years.

My Aunt Bobbie Jo is my mother's little sister but we were closer in age. When I was little she treated me like I was special, she was always kind, sweet and funny.

Aunt Bob started drinking and experimenting with some drugs in high school. My family thought it was natural teenage behavior and that she would grow out of it. We never imagined the chain of events to come.

When Aunt Bob graduated from high school we found out that she was pregnant. We were all excited to have a new member of the family and for a short time things seemed normal. She was a good mother to her baby girl and she was working a full time job. She was still living at home with my grandparents. She had the full support of my family and everyone helped with watching and raising the baby.

Then she started drinking again. Aunt Bob would be gone for days, she wasn't

caring for her baby and she lost her job. This would be the last job she held for any significant amount of time. During this time my family was trying to be supportive, trying to get her in treatment, trying get her on the right path, and the excuse kept coming up that "she's young, she will grow out of this stage". Little did any of us know that it would never end.

Aunt Bob went on to have three more kids, two boys and another girl by the time she was 26 years old. We all hoped she was sober when she was pregnant but we all knew the chances were slim. She only cared for each them briefly, her oldest daughter has lived with my grandparents since she was born and the three youngest children are being raised by their father and his family.

As the years went on things continued to spiral out of control, the drinking and drugs continued and she was in and out of treatment programs and jail. Her criminal offenses were getting more serious and the stays in jail longer. I actually looked forward to seeing Aunt Bob in jail, it was the only time her head was clear. This is

the only time she was back to herself, the sweet and loving person I once knew.

Then it got so much worse. There was a new demon, prescription pain killers. When Aunt Bob was on these drugs she was a different person and she didn't care about anyone or anything. She took advantage of everyone who loved her and started stealing from everyone. No one trusted her, she was moody and at times extremely violent. We couldn't reason with her, we couldn't force her to be sober, we were helpless. My grandparents were at the end of their rope and the decision was made that we all had to stop trying to help her until she was willing to help herself. It felt like the only option we had was to stop supporting her financially and emotionally. She had used us all up and there was no more to give. This was probably one of the hardest times for everyone because we all worried so much and for good reason.

The phone call came in the middle of the night, the call that no one wants to answer, the words I didn't want to hear. My Aunt Bob overdosed and she was gone, she was only 28 years old when she died. She left behind so many people that loved her, especially her children.

Addiction has taken a huge toll on my whole family. I wouldn't wish this pain, anger, stress and heartache on anyone else. I witnessed firsthand how addiction destroys your mind and body. It eliminates all ambition and takes away any hope of a normal life. I want people to know how hard it is to live with someone that has an addiction. I want people to know while some "partying" is normal for teens there are limits and they need to be aware of how easy it is to lose control. The harmless partying of youth was just the beginning of my Aunt Bob's endless struggle. Even though Aunt Bob is gone I still live with her addiction. I still wonder every day what else I could have done to help her. I wonder if someone had intervened when she was young if it would have made a difference. I will never know the answers to these questions. I hope this story makes people think about how addiction has everlasting effects on an entire family. 🙏

ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Kaci Willson is a recent high school graduate from Montana. *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.