



Drugs and Alcohol Can Destroy a Person

By Sylvia Straight

The sound of a beer bottle cracking open was what I heard multiple times every night when I was growing up. It was bad enough that I had lost my mother to a drug addiction, but I was also losing my grandfather to alcohol. I was used to there always being beer in the fridge; it was almost an essential in my house. Before living with an alcoholic Grandpa, my sister and I lived with a drug-addicted mom. I never thought of drugs or alcohol as such bad things until I became old enough to realize that drug abuse and alcoholism could destroy a person.

My association with a drug-addicted parent and an alcoholic grandparent began when I was very young. My sister and I started living with my grandparents when I was three years old because my mother was an awful parent. She was not ready for the responsibility of raising children. With her not being ready for the responsibility, I started to raise my own sister when I was two years old. I became malnourished and extremely underweight, only weighing two pounds more than my sister who was two years younger than I was.

It was not until I was hospitalized for croup that my grandparents saw how awful life was with my mother. My grandma paid thousands of dollars for an attorney so she could have full custody of my sister and me. Instead of getting full custody like my grandma wanted, however, she was only awarded shared custody with my father and mother. My sister and I stayed with my father and my drug-addicted step-mother every other weekend and summers.

We continued to stay with my mother every now and then until I entered middle school. While we stayed with my mother, she left us with other adults, usually men, while she went different places to use drugs. My mother started using drugs after she gave birth to me. Because my mother used drugs and drank heavily, my sister was born with

ADHD and Bipolar disorder and still suffers from it.


After staying with my mother and seeing her behaviors, I learned that drug abuse is indeed, a disease. Not only did my mom use drugs heavily, but she is Bipolar and has split personality disorder. Staying with her was miserable. My mother was out of control, and there was no way to handle her. She let a lot of bad things happen to me that a little girl should never have to go through. If I had not been there to protect my sister, she would have gone through the same unimaginable things that I did. Because we went from home to home and I basically raising my little sister, we have an unbreakable bond and extreme trust in each other. In addition to having a rough time when we stayed with my mother, it wasn't easy when we went to live with my grandparents either.

Growing up with an alcoholic grandpa, I learned that alcoholism is indeed, a disease. My grandpa spent the money he made on booze and his vehicle payment. Each and every month my grandma paid the bills while never getting support from Grandpa. My grandma worked three jobs as a sixty-year-old woman just to keep a roof over our heads. My grandpa always consumed beer to help with the back pain he experienced from boxing when he was in his twenties and having hard labor jobs his entire life. Then my grandpa had an accident at his job. He was fixing a 110-pound semi tire when it blew up in his face. His jaw and the entire right side of his face were shattered to pieces. He had to give up alcohol for a few weeks so he could take the pain medication that was prescribed to him. After the first week he started to have alcohol withdrawals. My sister and I began to hide upstairs in our rooms and only came downstairs for meals and when we were told to come downstairs. After grandpa was off the pain medication, he started to drink more than he ever did before.

His drinking had gotten to the point where my grandma gave him two choices. He either had to stop drinking, or he had to move-out. He chose to give up drinking so he could continue to live with us since he had nowhere else to stay. He started to hide and sneak alcohol into the house, but he was not very good at it. He came home later from his job each day so he could drive around and drink a six pack before he got home. At that point my grandpa's motor skills were declining, and he lost his job because he could no longer remember how to do something that he'd done for many years.

My grandma decided that it was time for him to go to the doctor to have an evaluation done. That was when he was diagnosed with dementia. Dementia is the loss of cognitive functioning such as thinking, remembering, daily activities, and behavioral abilities. His brain had been shrinking more and more every day, and it would never stop. That was when he gave up the alcohol. It was a wakeup call for him. Even though he stopped drinking, the dementia got worse and worse. It almost felt as if he was slipping through our fingers, and we could not stop him. Not only were we dealing with the dementia, but we also dealt with the alcohol withdrawals. Many times a month we had to take care of him. He laid in his bed shaking, sweating, and in pain. His body was undergoing a dramatic change that we all suffered through together.

While watching my grandpa go through all of this from the time I was very young, I believe that alcoholism and drug abuse are indeed, diseases. Growing up with these two individuals in my life, my mom and my grandpa, I learned that they should have reached out for help. If they would have reached out, a lot of things would not have happened. I also learned that I cannot turn back the clock and get my grandpa or my mother back. My grandpa is still living and receives care from my grandma and me. On the other hand, my mother is in and out of prison.

I want others to know that if they have a family member or friend addicted to alcohol or drugs, others can help them as much as the addict will allow. I also want others to know that there are things that are out of our hands, and those who want to help do not need to take responsibility for the actions of those addicted to alcohol or drugs. 

ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Sylvia Straight is a recent high school graduate from North Dakota. *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.