

TIES THAT BIND-HOPE THAT HEALS

MAKING A DIFFERENCE - ONE LIFE AT A TIME

AN EMOTIONAL TORNADO

A MOTHER'S STORY OF LOVING HER SON THROUGH HIS ADDICTION



From the Heart of Ann Carver Weeks

Wife of John, Mother of Paul and Carver

My husband, John, and I met in college. We dated through post graduate school and then established our careers. We got married, had 2 sons, enjoyed some great years, endured some really tough years, and have remained married for 38 years.

Both of our boys were smart, reading at early ages and scoring well on national tests. They were good students, participating in sports, Boy Scouts and attending church. Our family lived in a neighborhood where most parents knew each other. We enjoyed block parties, ALTA tennis, school fundraisers and we looked after each other's children. We considered ourselves fortunate. We had no idea what was coming for our family.

THE EARLY YEARS FOR PAUL

Paul was our first born. He tried to be born too soon, but I was a practicing labor and delivery nurse and recognized pre-term labor symptoms. He was born at 37 weeks, a bundle of energy and joy. When he was 18 months, Paul created an obstacle course using big boxes from Christmas gifts. First, he positioned a cute little table and chair set next to an empty box for a Little Tikes slide.

Strategically, he added his playhouse, as well as the box it came in. Lastly, he added the slide. His structure was now complete. He used the chair to climb onto the table, then got on top of the chair which was on top of the table. He then went up the side of the box, onto the roof of the playhouse, over to the next box, and then he joyfully slid down the slide -- on his stomach! I knew then I was the parent of a bright daredevil. I learned much from him.

I learned that Paul was enthusiastic and made everything fun. His kindergarten teacher called me on the third day of school. I asked her what took so long for her to call. Paul could not sit still. He ran everywhere. He completed his classroom work first and was soon the teacher's helper, taking messages to the office, going to pick up the snack - anything and everything to stay busy and keep moving. He was reading at an eleventh grade level in fourth grade, but he had a "D" in reading. Paul was challenging as a child.

I was praying to keep him alive once he started driving. To help with that, we bought a four-cylinder 10-year-old Jeep that started vibrating at 55 mph. Paul later confessed to us that we were smart to do that.

AN EMOTIONAL TORNADO: A Mother's Story by Ann Carver Weeks (Cont'd)

PAUL'S BATTLE WITH ADDICTION

As a teen, Paul started stealing liquor from the house. We put a chain with a combination lock on the cabinet. One evening we came home to find the cabinet door ripped off the hinges. Paul blamed it on a "friend." Cell phones were a great tool to use to lie about where he was. So, I made him call from landlines and asked to speak to the parent in the house. He soon quit answering the phone and just sent a text in response.

Paul also spent a lot of time grounded. I'd have to give back privileges in order to have something to take away. I took away his keys, so he jump-started the Jeep. I had the Jeep towed to a car lot and hidden. So, he just called friends to pick him up. Money would be missing from my wallet which he used to buy beer and weed. His friends called me DEA (Drug Enforcement Agent). They quit coming over because I would ask, "Whose been smoking weed?"

Paul suffered a terrible hand injury that left his hand broken and swollen like a football. He received a cast and was given a prescription for pain medication. I asked about Percocet or Lortab but was informed that this drug was better. I filled that prescription for Oxycontin. Paul was 16 and given a drug that has been proven to be extremely addictive. Keeping him alive and out of jail became a priority.

Our family endured four rehab facilities and at least two complete years behind bars with Paul. It was an emotional roller coaster, dreading the phone call in the middle of the night and not knowing where he was for several years. Loving the child he was and yet hating the drugs that created the enslaved person he became was exhausting.

We were ashamed to tell our friends and family about his addiction. Heroin. Paul, his brother, father, and I all kept the secret. Counseling helped some, but it was on a schedule. For years, we only had each other to lean on for support.


THE SECRET IS OUT

One beautiful day while tailgating for an SEC game, Paul's secret was exposed. We received a call from Paul's brother that he had overdosed and was in the ICU. The message was simply, "Come home."

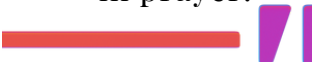
Word spread among our close friends that Paul was critically ill. They gathered around us, joined hands in prayer and sent us home with hope. Paul did survive that overdose and I sent a message by email to all our family and friends asking them for continued support and prayers. During this time, we leaned on them. They held us up.

Our relationship with Paul was better – even more hopeful. He had four years of healthy living. Until the next crisis, trigger, event, black market product purchased on the dark web, and delivered by the United States Postal service. Yes. Sadly, our postal system is the largest distributor of illegal contraband.

During Paul's most recent rehab experience he told me that he was afraid that if he did not conquer his addiction, he would never grow to be an old man. Paul died from a heroin overdose at 33 years of age.



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IN HINDSIGHT: Is there anything we would do differently?

No... well, yes. We'd tell the truth sooner than we did. We'd share our fear and pain and ask for support and prayers from those we love.

THINGS THAT HAVE HELPED US THROUGH OUR HEALING

The things that have been helpful for us over the past year is remembering and talking about the "good times," the fun events, and the crazy daredevil actions that Paul did survive. Also, listening to his Spotify music is VERY comforting. Talking to his friends and receiving messages from them is also healing.

People who have a family member who is struggling have approached us and said, "I have never told anyone but [...] is addicted." Paul's dad and I both encourage them to tell us about their loved one and we simply listen. We offer support and empathy. I have come to learn that MANY families are affected by addiction.

We also recognize that Paul is no longer enslaved by his addiction. He HATED what it did to his relationships. He feared death each time he relapsed. He hated detox. So did I, but I learned how to help him tolerate it and try again. We know that he is happy and healthy with friends and family in his afterlife. We also find peace knowing that we will never get the call we dreaded for so many years.



Shame is very prevalent among families dealing with addiction.

They will NOT volunteer their suffering.

Tell them Paul's story.



APPROPRIATE RESPONSES FROM LOVED ONES

Family and friends can be supportive by being honest. Just be available. We all know someone who has gone stealth, underground, is not on social media like before. They are not texting, not calling, not answering the phone. They are in survival mode. So, call them, text them, or better yet, go to see them!

Shame is very prevalent among families dealing with addiction. They will NOT volunteer their suffering. Tell them Paul's story. Let them know you care by saying something like, "I have a feeling you are going through something that is very difficult. What is happening? I want to do what I can to support you. Please let me help you through this."



CLOSING THOUGHT

Being a parent of an addict is the most challenging thing I have ever done. The emotional tornado is scary. There were times I could not stand Paul, but the next moment I was ashamed I even thought that hate. I learned to tell him that I loved him, but hated the person he becomes when he is using. I would tell him that I will try as long as he is trying. I told him that I would never give up on him as long as he would not give up on himself.

Please try. Try to keep loving the addict. Try to be supportive. Try to encourage their healthy living. Try another rehab. Try another counselor. **Try not to give up.**

Thank you Ann for sharing your story. Words seem empty in the light of such vulnerability. So, we will honor you by simply praying that other families who are struggling will be encouraged by what you shared and know they are not alone. There is hope. Don't give up.

