

A Letter to Men; A Plea for Men in Recovery

I spent most of my teens and twenties in an altered state of mind...we all did. Life was fun. Stress was minimal, life was easy going, I had manageable responsibilities, and the world didn't expect too much of me. I coasted. On the surface everything was fine. I had a girlfriend that was smarter and more mature than me, I had a job that paid for things, we had a home with stuff in it, we had cars. Life was pretty good. She always kept me in line...sort of like a mother. She would make sure I knew how to talk, when to talk, where to be, and when. She seemed to have a plan and I trusted it. I could see some places where I fit into her plan...mostly in the provider department. I'd graduated from college, and we always talked about her staying home with the kids while they were young, so I knew I had to find a way to provide. I worked extremely hard, and I made it happen. As time went on, responsibilities and expectations slowly mounted. "This must be that growing up thing I'd heard about" I thought to myself. I never appreciated the world asking more of me than I was willing to give. It stressed me out, I felt helpless at times, I felt inadequate, and I struggled badly but I never mentioned it out loud. Those feelings lived inside my head. The more expectations and demands that landed on my plate, the more I'd drink to feel warm and fuzzy...it all melted away. It worked for a while, until it didn't. It was fun for a while, and then it wasn't.

I always thought having a drink was a right. After a long day I had the right to release and relax...after dealing with a million problems at the office, doing for others all day, managing more than I could handle, it was the least the world could do for me. I'd come home, drink, talk about my day, go to bed. It was Groundhog Day for years. My wife continued her responsible path, leading the way. I was like a drunken cowboy riding on a faithful horse that never asked for anything so long as it had food and water. I look back on that time in our lives and she was little more than a vehicle that carried me through life. I would sometimes have moments of clarity late at night and wonder if I was living my purpose or if I was doing what I was supposed to, but those moments were fleeting and infrequent. We began to fight. She had grown tired of pulling the weight of this thankless Cowboy and asked for more. She asked that I participate in life with her, comfort her, ask how her day was, and act like I cared. I did care...I most definitely did. I just thought I was showing it, and I wasn't willing to hear about how I wasn't. I would argue with her about how hard my life was at work, about how much the world asked of me already, about how I didn't need to hear it at home too. I wanted to be left alone.

She withdrew. It's hard now to go back and empathize with how she must have felt. It kills me. At one point in our lives, we were in love. We would laugh at nothing all day and night, share our dreams, comfort each other, and she was my person. She always saw things in me I couldn't even see in myself...I don't know where she got the idea that I could be an amazing man, but those words were music to my ears, and I loved that she believed in me. The funny thing about life's greatest moments that you look forward to is that it never feels how you would think in the moment. I thought that once I started a career, I would be filled with pride. I thought that once we got married, I would begin to feel like this man she believed I could be. I thought that once she told me she was pregnant, I'd suddenly do everything I promised I would do...I would stop the partying, hanging with friends, drugs, and alcohol, and I would grow up. I missed out on every single milestone because I never felt different. Life just felt dull, and I was simply surviving. Looking back, I wish I would have stopped for one moment to appreciate things and

take in the feelings around those beautiful times...instead I have fuzzy memories of fighting, fear, and regret. *I* withdrew.

In a world that asked us for generations to be stoic providers, we stepped up to the plate. We sacrificed time we would rather have spent with family, friends, or on our own accord at offices, factories, and warehouses to make sure the lights stayed on and there was food on the table. That same world told women they were to stay home, keep quiet, stay pretty, and raise kids. The agreement "Worked" for quite some time...but then something changed. Women grew. In addition to taking care of children, they started careers. They took care of the home, they took care of bills, they took care of the emotional security of the household, and they even got something they didn't ask for...They got an extra kid to raise in us. We were suddenly lost. They went to school, they got jobs, they filled provider roles, and we were left wondering what good we were to anyone. *We* withdrew. A world that never required emotion or discussion around feelings or emotional support within a relationship suddenly required all the above. Many of us were not taught how to handle any of this. It's not your fault, but that doesn't mean it's not your responsibility to rise to the challenge. I often hear from spouses of addicted men that want nothing more than a partner in life. Someone to love, someone to challenge them, someone to admire, someone to enjoy the ups and downs of life with. Boys...we're failing them. I've heard every excuse and I reject them all. If you had my life, if you had my wife, if you had my childhood, if you lived where I do, if you had my parents, and the excuses go on infinitum. Again, I'm not saying it's your fault, I'm saying it's your responsibility. I'm also saying there are spouses and other men all around you more than willing to help if you are also willing.

Then we have this drink problem, or this drug problem, or this problem of distraction in the way of games, porn, gambling, or any other vice we use to fill a need deep inside of us. I'm not judging anybody...I had a problem with just about every one of them. But these things can be problems and the chances are if your spouse has addressed this more than a few times, it's a problem. For those unwilling to admit there is a problem, I implore you to look within yourself and ask if you could be happy without your vice. For those willing to admit there is a problem, but don't know what to do about it, I implore you to reach out for help. For those that have addressed the problem, but cannot find happiness, I implore you to find your purpose.

I have had the privilege of spending the last year surrounded by incredible women that have had every dream they ever dreamed crushed by substance abuse. It has been an honor to know them, to hear their struggles, to feel their pain alongside them. Behind each broken dream is a spouse or partner oblivious to the damage they have unknowingly (in some cases knowingly) caused. My heart has never been more solemn, and I have never quite understood the depth of the damage that my own numbing out in life truly caused as I do now. I'm challenging every man with the balls to read this far to rise to the occasion, to challenge themselves, and to live. Your wife isn't trying to control your life, she's trying to save it. She may have said some incredibly hurtful things, but you would lash out too if you were backed into a corner without any options. If you're as manly as you say you are, I challenge you to recover. I challenge you to look life in the face and feel everything without a pain killer. I challenge you to validate your partner's experience, take accountability for your actions, and grow together. She sees something in you that you can't even see in yourself, and that's a gift. Accept it with gratitude and cherish it. I am a better man for it, and I hope to see you on the path someday.

- Till the Wheels Fall Off