



2018 December Newsletter

The Holidays...A Time to Let Go...

The holiday season. Every year we gather with friends and family to celebrate and be close. Thanksgiving, Christmas, and the promise of a fresh new year are enough to put a smile on your face at the mere thought. Some of us travel, some have family coming in town to stay, some even go the extra mile and find ways to give back to those in need. When life is coming along swimmingly and everyone is happy and healthy, the holidays are a lovely time indeed. But with the looming crisis of the opioid epidemic that has decimated the country, with the rampant abuse of alcohol and other drugs touching the lives of at least one person we know and love, these times can leave us feeling lonesome and lost. When we have someone close to us who's afflicted, all the joy and happiness and good cheer we may have felt in years past can be dashed, diminished or altogether gone when our thoughts turn to their struggle, or their absence at the dinner table. Where do we go from here? Where do we resolutely turn our thoughts to when we're crushed by the behavior and absence of the sick people we love? How do we help in a meaningful fulfilling way?

Our first inclination is usually to throw out the figurative life preserver and reel them back in. To try and rescue them from themselves, if you will. Anyone who has made this type of futile attempt can honestly speak to the fact that it will leave you even more brokenhearted than you were before. We addicts and alcoholics in our disease often recoil at the efforts of friends and family members attempting to pull us out of the depths of our disease. Setting healthy boundaries and leaving the person in question to their own devices seems counter-intuitive, heartless even, but it could be the very action on our part that sets someone upon the path to a happy destiny. An ounce of intrinsic motivation is worth a 100 tons of someone else's effort. Regardless of your good intentions, you will never be able to give that to someone. And, the sooner we can let that idea go, that somehow we can "change" someone, or make them "see the light" if only to be a part of the family at the holiday table this year, the sooner they have the opportunity to face their consequences and be an adult.

I often recount a story toward the end of my active addiction wherein I found myself hospitalized on Christmas Eve. I've told it time and time again, in 12-step meetings, in PAL meetings, as well as on a personal level when I have had the pleasure of working with patients. I tell this story because it was the beginning of the end for me. When I was left alone, penniless, broken, and sick, during the most family-oriented time of the year, something changed in me. I had long since burned the bridge with my parents, and at the last second they had decided to take a vacation. As I sat there, with no cajoling, no pleading, nothing from the people around me as to what I should or shouldn't be doing, I was with myself, and only myself. And in that dark place my Higher Power, God, instilled in me a resolution, a resolution borne out of loneliness, pain and heartache. I felt my life was no longer my own, that I had so long been a slave to heroin and meth that I couldn't even see how far off the path I'd gotten until I was at the bottom of the deepest ocean imaginable. Out of this abysmal black hole came freedom. It

may sound like insanity but it's the honest truth – sometimes the best and worst day of your life occur on the same day! I recognized how blinded I'd been, how much I was hurting everyone around me and society as a whole and I felt an intense desire to change. To try something different. To think about something other than myself for once in my drug-addled life. This episode of my disease held the weight of a life changing promise that I could live free. That I could be a decent guy, son, friend, and eventually father. After I left that hospital it was only a short time until I found recovery. Here's the kicker – my parents, my family, ALLOWED me to have that experience! They ALLOWED me to feel the sharp sting of real life consequences to my actions! For so many years they'd attempted to pull me out of the wreckage of my own making to the detriment of their own mental and emotional health. My father, who can literally fix anything, from a car, to a refrigerator, to the AC unit sitting on top of your house and the plumbing underneath, he could not fix me. Alcoholism/Addiction was bigger than both of us. And, I can honestly say, it beat me to a bloody pulp. Which is the best thing that ever happened to me. Because I had the experiences I did, because I felt the darkness seep into my veins and being, taking me all the way to the gutter, I was able to finally give up the demons that held me hostage for so long, with God's help.

By taking a step back, by removing the life preserver, the training wheels, that safety net that they always threw out at the last moment of my fall, my parents' mental status greatly improved, and I was able to hit the bottom sooner than I ever thought I would. And that bottom saved my life. Slowly but surely I took suggestions, got treatment, became a part of AA, and picked the pieces of my life back up and put them together. As I write this I am in awe of God's grace: I can look around me and see not broken hypodermic needles and glass pipes, trash, refuse, and all manner of madness, but a beautiful home. My three-year-old daughter is taking a nap in her room. There's dinner in the oven. The water works, the electricity is on. We have two cars that (mostly) work parked out back. I have a job that I actually am able to show up to. All in 5 short years!

My point is to illustrate what can happen when you let go. When you feel the twang of sadness this year, as your loved one is in the clutches of a crippling disease and not able to be present, as hard as this may seem, as counterintuitive to every fiber of your being, just let it be. Don't beg them to come home. Don't buy them a Christmas gift. Don't put money in their gas tank. Don't pay their rent or cell phone bill. Just don't.

Live your life for you today. Make the best of the blessings God has given you and be there for yourself and your family members who are there with you. Even in their absence, the addict can easily make it all about them. Pray for them. Give back to your community. Hold yourself and everyone around you in loving kindness. But do not, under any circumstance, enable them to keep killing themselves and destroying the emotional health of the people who love them the most. Set firm boundaries and be explicit in what you are, and are not willing to do for them and stick with it! Allow them to have their own experience! Someday they may thank you, but what I can guarantee is that you will feel better about yourself. You will be empowered. And my hope and prayer this holiday season is that they will be too, through your actions and positive example of strong mental/emotional health. Here's to you. God bless.

Godspeed,
Sean
In Recovery

*You can read, comment and ask questions for Sean to
address in his blog on the PAL website, Home page – www.Palgroup.org*