



February 2019 Newsletter

## **If nothing changes, nothing changes** A PAL Parent Story

“Oh, thank God I found the next of kin!” exclaimed the voice on my cell phone. My heart dropped - or did it stop? The frightening words I heard were my worst nightmare. We were traveling cross-country in our motorhome when the call came in.

Our journey with our son began more than 20 years ago, though we didn't realize we were even on the journey for many of those early years. It was just “normal” kid stuff. It was just another “phase”. What is “normal” anyway when it comes to kids? Defiance? Skipping school? Drugs? Drinking? Any of these things in moderation I suppose would be considered “normal” kid behavior. At what point do we begin to be concerned?

How about a 6 pack (or more) for breakfast? What about draining every drop of liquor in the cabinet? Our daughter finding her brother drooling and near death after huffing chemicals in the garage? I’m not really sure when it progressed to such a degree. It seemed to be years, yet it felt as though it was just overnight.

When he was 17 things had gotten extreme and he was continuing to spiral out of control. We feared for his life, and felt we were running out of time. Soon he would be 18 and we would no longer have any leverage (we thought), so we opted to trick him into treatment. On the premise of a temporary job out of state he flew to Utah where he was then taken basically screaming and fighting into a treatment facility.

He stayed there for 10 months and seemed to have an amazing recovery experience. We were invited to visit a couple of times, but the program did not include support or education for the families and loved ones. He graduated from the program and returned home. We enrolled him in his old high school so he could finish his senior year. We were thrilled — he was cured! (Or rather, we were naive enough at the time to believe that.)

Well, it didn't take us long to fall back into the same familiar roles. He started drinking again. He failed his senior year. He was disrespectful. He would not contribute to the household, and he began to sleep most of the day. Still we kept trying to “help” him into recovery. This went on for years. But in retrospect, did he really have any motivation to change? He had a comfortable place to sleep, and a fridge full of food.

Then he got a girlfriend (motivation) and they moved a few hours away. I was happy for a time, but then began to miss him. It lasted another few years, but then a bad breakup... so of course he needed his mommy to take care of him! So back home once again. AGAIN the same old roles. As they say, if nothing changes, nothing changes. We were living proof of that! Groundhog Day — back to the same old destructive roles.

I'm not even sure how much time passed, but he next moved out of state to live with some relatives. He was gone about four years, and then, yep, WE LET HIM MOVE BACK HOME AGAIN! We still were not educated in addiction and because of this, he, in his disease, was continuing to manipulate us. We were not done over-helping yet. We next decided to get him an apartment. I painstakingly and lovingly furnished it. I even painted it. Of course we paid the first few months, and then when he "couldn't" make the payments, we were always there. He eventually lost it and everything in it.

It wasn't until we found PAL and began to educate ourselves that things began to finally change. As we learned and practiced the GEMS with each other, it became easier to use them with our son and create the boundaries that had been lacking for so long. We began to see that by over-helping him, we had in fact actually contributed to his disease. We devoured *The Four Seasons of Recovery* by Mike Speakman and countless other books. We became PAL facilitators. It has taken time and practice, but we have learned to lovingly speak the truth to our son. We now have healthy boundaries with him, and we know the difference between helping and enabling.

As we traveled in our motorhome that summer day, we did not turn around, and our son did not die. The well-meaning ER nurse on the phone it seems had prematurely declared our son's death, as the hospital doctor had accidentally overdosed him on Narcan. We continued on our journey believing that this was not the end, and that God had bigger plans in mind.

I think the most important lesson that I have learned over these troubled years is that I cannot live in fear. I must live in faith. Choices and decisions made in fear are usually not very rational. I have given my son to God and trust that He has a special journey carved out just for him. Although he continues to struggle and has not yet found recovery, we have recently witnessed an increase in his maturity level and he appears to be taking some responsibility for his actions. We do, however, remain in the Hope Hotel lobby. We will always love him unconditionally, and we have faith that he will figure it out - in God's time. As for us, we have found that it really is possible to find the JOY in our lives, regardless of the choices of our loved ones.