

## This is Living: Surviving Substance Abuse in a Loved One

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Over a span of about 20 years, I was screamed at, choked, thrown across the room, spit on, head smashed against the drain as I showered. My car was rear-ended, my life and the lives of my children were threatened at gun point, my identity was stolen, my home was broken into and vandalized causing over \$50k of damage. I was harassed in the courtroom; told I was less than nothing. During this time, I found little hope or joy in sight.

I know God was irrevocably there with me. He was holding me up and sheltering me and my children during these hard years. At times I wondered whether I would survive emotionally, financially, and physically. I was never in the fire alone, and never left without visible protection to anchor from. It was here my character was refined. I look back with a sense of gratitude for every blessing and protection given to me.

In 2011, I got involved with a group called Celebrate Recovery. My first reaction was, "I am not one of *those people*." But as I continued to attend the meetings, I realized we are **all those people**.

So let me re-introduce myself.

I am a Celebrate Recovery women's group leader. I am a preacher's kid who began my 20s rebelling against every principle taught to me growing up. I am now married to a man of character. Ironically, he was my youth pastor growing up. He is a recovering alcoholic with 16 years of sobriety. I am proud of him. His story is not mine to tell, so I will stop there.

I began working the steps when I joined Celebrate Recovery in 2011. I obtained a sponsor and several accountability partners who have walked with me and encouraged me ever since. They made themselves available to me at all hours and prayed with me. They never rescued me from the consequences of my bad decision-making, but they did stand in the fire with me.

As I began to attend meetings, I realized that more than just being a survivor of an alcoholic-abusive relationship, I am codependent and an enabler. The curriculum helped me deal with the hurts that can lead to addictions as well as the behaviors and triggers that lead to the bondage of dependency. Through the curriculum I was able to see patterns in my choices in men. I began to understand my triggers and what it meant to be an enabler, codependent, and a rescuer—and how to tell when it was becoming unhealthy. I was able to break the cycle of insanity I found myself passing on to my children. I realized that I am modeling, in my words and actions, exactly what they will likely view as normal and acceptable behavior in their adult lives. I realized I was not teaching them life skills that would help them through life in a positive way. I learned I was not hopeless or helpless and I controlled the narrative. Freedom of choice is a gift not to be squandered. I chose not to be a victim, but a survivor. I decided the narrative should be one of healing. I was made whole by the power of forgiveness. This new hope and the life skills I was learning prepared me to deal with some of the impacts my previous choices had on one of my children.

In 2012, one of my children attempted suicide at school. Even though I had come out the other

end and had several years of healthy-minded living behind me, I was not exempt from the consequences of my previous actions. Many times, when a child watches a parent they love attempt to manage chaos day after day, it creates silos in the home. My teenage son did not want to put anything more on my plate. So, as he went through his high school years, he handled his struggles by getting advice from his peers and stuffing down the hurts he was experiencing. This led to an attempt to take his own life. He was one of my first amends while working my steps. I made my amends for my previous selfish living. He has accepted my apology and we are very close to this day. I know I should have never put anyone in a position to lead my family that was not equipped or capable. To this day, I combat the knowledge of this, and continue to give my past over to God.

I believe a crucial part in my recovery is being of service to others. The Peer Volunteers have experienced life out on a limb, just like you, but all have a different story. Find one you can relate to. We are available to help you get the resources and are here to encourage you on your journey.

Because of my own experiences, I have been able to turn pain into blessings for others who are experiencing the same struggles. I am still a work in progress and consider each day a blessing to be one of *those people* who get to hold up others in their recovery. I am a completely different person than I was. I currently sponsor eight ladies. I am listed on Kaiser's mental health referral sheets for Manteca and Stockton. I am blessed to be a patched member of the Biker's For Christ motorcycle ministry. And I am a proud member of PG&E's Peer Volunteer Program. I ask you to read this personal story looking for the similarities, not the differences.

To the reader I offer a prayer of support for whatever struggle you are going through. Find courage and peace to make the tough decisions.

I believe it has a lot to do with perspective. Figure out what gives you hope in a future, what gives you peace, what encourages you to be better tomorrow than what you are today. For me, that is believing I was intentionally created to fulfill a purpose. What gets you through frustrating desperate times with a sense of peace? For me, that's a faith that I have a future as a called and claimed daughter of the King!

The verse that gives me the most comfort through hard times is 2 Kings 6, and the one that keeps me pushing forward is 2 Chronicles 7:14.

*-Rebecca*