

How One Parent Engaged Addiction: A Mother's Healing Journey through Her Son's Addiction

Deni B. Sher

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Sher has created a unique memoir in this literary scrapbook chronicling her son's recovery from addiction.

Deni B. Sher reports from the trenches of motherhood and middle age in the pages of this sincere memoir. *How One Parent Engaged Addiction: A Mother's Healing Journey Through Her Son's Addiction* chronicles her son Ryan's recovery from drug and alcohol addiction, as well as her own personal reinvention after her grown child got well. While the content of Sher's story is not new, her presentation is. Inspired to create not only a journal-like narrative, but also a musical production to honor her family's experience, Sher offers a unique memoir that's part diary, part poetry, and part musical theater.

Sher has devised a literary scrapbook that captures various aspects of how she reckoned with her son's illness and her own role in it. Anybody who has had an addict in their family will recognize the stages of denial, discovery, controlling, and codependency that Sher went through as her son's health deteriorated before her eyes. She is articulate about her dawning recognition of the problem, and she shows exactly what the process was like through journal entries, letters, e-mails, poetry, song lyrics, stage dialogue between imaginary characters, and Ryan's artwork. While the variety allows Sher to create a multifaceted portrait of her struggles, some of the entries are quite lengthy and repeat themes already addressed. For instance, readers probably don't require reproductions of entire e-mails between Sher and her son's girlfriend, Michelle. Email excerpts and the many songs shared here would suffice to showcase Sher's creative approach to recovery.

The five chronologically based sections of this memoir set up an unrealistic expectation that the story is told in a linear fashion. Instead, the time line of events gets a little confusing, particularly in the final sections devoted to Sher's own biography. She chooses to "fess up" to her own dysfunctional behaviors—workaholic, serial marriages—only after she has essentially finished telling Ryan's story. Her confessions, however, require her to mine memories that are directly related to the earlier material, and might have been more useful to readers in Parts I and II. Stories about Ryan's reckless, undependable father, for instance, might be better integrated into Ryan's own story, where their relevance would be evident.

In addition to her own thoughts, Sher shares insightful quotations from a number of authors, reflecting the evolution of self-help theories from Melody Beatty's codependency theories in the 1990s to Rhonda Byrne's law of attraction methods that are so popular today. A list of recommended books encourages readers to explore their ideas and many others.

While Sher's story is sometimes more creative than cohesive, her consistently upbeat tone brings a unifying voice to the book. Throughout her story, the author conveys her intention to inspire others. Indeed, the title itself includes an uplifting acronym—*How One Parent Engaged Addiction*—that quite intentionally contains the word “hope.” While readers may wish for further refinements in Sher's storytelling choices, they will never doubt her message about the power of perseverance and a positive outlook.

SHEILA M. TRASK (February 10, 2014)

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