

Intimate Expression: An Orphan's Experience of Healing

Dennis J. Dodt

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Dennis Dodt was in his early thirties when he walked into his first support group meeting. *Intimate Expression*, Dennis's short narrative of his tumultuous, but ultimately successful, journey to mental health is a worthwhile, well-organized read for both those on the healing path and those who care for them. Dennis writes from the heart with a guilelessness that is tremendously moving; his voice makes it easy to overlook the book's many typographical and grammatical errors.

In 1964, at the age of four, Dennis was sent to live in an orphanage with several of his siblings, following the death of their mother. Born into relative poverty in Australia, Dennis was one of ten children; he has no memory of ever receiving affection from his parents. The first orphanage he lived in was tolerable, but, at the age of seven, Dennis was sent to a boys-only facility run by a sadistic couple who were physically and emotionally abusive. Security there was provided by a police officer who sexually abused Dennis and other boys on a regular basis. At twelve, Dennis moved into the foster care system, where he discovered the self-medicating benefits of drugs and alcohol. Gaining his freedom at age eighteen, Dennis was ill prepared for the challenges of adulthood and struggled through his twenties. He endured chronic and debilitating nightmares, continued substance abuse, and a string of unhappy and unfulfilling relationships with women.

Dennis began his healing journey at age thirty-one. He writes, "After identifying with so many addictions; ranging from alcohol, work, sex, love, gambling, prescribed drugs, cigarettes, caffeine, and several other unhealthy coping mechanisms, I sat down one night and said to myself, 'God, where do I start?' I didn't believe in God at the time, but I think that when anyone genuinely asks for help from whatever source they believe in the tumblers on the wheel of life click into place and miracles begin to happen."

He was compelled to phone someone who suggested he attend a twelve-step meeting, something he began doing every day. Dennis learned to live with his pain rather than run from it. Although he came close to committing suicide due to the agony of confronting his long-standing shame, guilt, and fear, he stayed the course. When he needed them, individuals, workshops, retreats, and other tools to facilitate his growth appeared, and Dennis gradually moved into a place of serenity and joy.

The last two chapters of *Intimate Expression* are beautiful testaments to the transforming, redeeming, and world-changing power of perseverance and hard work. In chapter nine, Dennis shares how far he's come and his truth is patently inspiring. In the final chapter, he offers an excellent overview of his journey, plus tools, resources, and words of encouragement for those on the path toward recovery.

Intimate Expression is easy to read and unsophisticated in a good way. It is highly recommended as a potentially priceless resource for counselors and others in the helping professions to share with their clients.

PATTY SUTHERLAND (August 30, 2012)

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