

There is No Hero in Heroin

Janice Nargi

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"If I were honest with you, and myself, I would admit that soon after I discovered Tommy was a junkie, I quickly became addicted to heroin, too. I never injected, I never snorted, smoked, or ingested the gooey black tar, but I lived and breathed it, as long as my son used." When someone becomes an addict, it takes over not only their lives, but the lives of those closest to them as well. Nargi deftly shows what it's like as a mother to be swept into a terrible world where frustration, fear, and suspicion overwhelmed her while love and self-preservation fought to keep her afloat.

Nargi began a blog using the book's future title as a collaborative effort with her son, hoping that writing about their journey would bring them together, help in his recovery, and encourage others in the same situation. That blog has become this, her first book. A few chapters are written by Tommy, giving insight into the allure heroin has for him, but the vast majority are written by Nargi. In a voice raw with honesty and pain, she exposes what life is like for people who love drug addicts.

Tommy began his life on drugs with smoking pot and abusing Oxycontin, and Nargi began the frustrating journey of begging for help from people who promised to give it, but failed to follow through. The school had more important things to worry about than some kids smoking pot. The police would promise one outcome if she helped them track down Tommy, only to do something different. When she begged for the courts to sentence him to prison or a long-term, residential treatment center, they repeatedly gave him probation, sending him back into the streets where his old life awaited him.

The effect an addict's addiction has on those closest to him cannot be underestimated. It takes over their lives as they spend countless hours worrying, making phone calls, tracking the addict down, replacing items he has stolen, and going through stomach-churning hurricanes of emotion. Nargi's intimate portrayal of her life as the mother of an addict will bring the comfort of community to those facing the same struggles. For those outside this world, it provides an education in what it is like, leading to better understanding and compassion for those caught in the whirlwind of another's addiction.

"Loving a heroin addict is like owning your own personal Six Flags, minus the satisfaction," Nargi writes. However, the understanding and compassion that result from reading her story will lead to a community that is better able to help these families survive the ride.

CHRISTINE CANFIELD (February 6, 2013)

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