

Through a Sober Lens: A Photographer's Journey

Michael Blanchard

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Through its artistic photographs and inviting, practical writing, Through a Sober Lens conveys hope and encouragement to others struggling with pain and addiction.

Michael Blanchard's beautiful and imaginative memoir *Through a Sober Lens* features stunning photographs as it tracks his personal transformation.

With his marriage and career failing, fighting bipolar disorder and alcoholism, and facing six months in jail for drunk driving violations, Blanchard's previous successes as a marathon runner and company head brought him no comfort. After thirty-five years of drinking, he decided to accept that alcohol was not his friend, but instead was a deadly enemy.

Blanchard contemplated suicide, but he was found by his wife and sent to a psychiatric institution instead. There, he met a remarkable physician who'd faced similar challenges and triumphed. Moving from Blanchard's addiction to sobriety, this project honors those who supported and encouraged him. Now chasing light instead of alcohol, Blanchard discovered his true purpose: to use his camera and his words to help people heal. Martha's Vineyard became his inspiration, teacher, and sanctuary.

The book's warm, conversational narrative reveals synchronicities leading to mutual healing: Blanchard helping an addicted woman through her shame, which also helped him to release his own; Blanchard taking a life-saving stand for a young anesthesiologist that also helped him let go of his own self-centeredness; and a visit from a hardhat-wearing person covered in tattoos that brought him hope when it was most needed. Including a discussion of how the brain becomes addicted, leaving the addict at the mercy of an amygdala (primitive brain) "on steroids," the book is realistic as it advises that time, therapy, self-care, patience, and support systems are required to recover. An important assertion that suicidal people most want the pain to stop becomes an entry point for others to help.

Honest, open, and engaging, Blanchard takes responsibility for his failings and the pain that he caused to those who were close to him. "Addiction is cold and relentless," he warns. "It lays in wait for the smallest of openings and then uses your own reasoning to get you to fail." He argues that "tough love" and pain are allies on the way to recovery and argues that every moment is a part of the healing process.

Lovely and discerning color photographs concentrate on revealing nature's moods. They feature boardwalks buffeted by a storm-tossed sea, leading to a sense of disorientation, even vertigo; a small bird on thin legs that's poised to take flight from a sandy shore, evoking the courage needed to take that leap; and a blood-red moon floating against a black night sky that suggests peace and awe.

Through its artistic photographs and inviting, practical writing, *Through a Sober Lens* is a personal project that also conveys hope and encouragement to others struggling with pain and addiction.

KRISTINE MORRIS (December 24, 2019)

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