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# *IN SIGHT* for Oregon Lawyers and Judges

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

## A FEMININE PERSPECTIVE ON ADDICTION

I always liked partying. I liked the way drinking made me feel. I knew I drank more than most of my friends, but I didn't think too much of it. I played around with some drugs, but I never went to great efforts to seek them out. I was pretty much content with drinking. It was cheap and available. Partying after work and classes was fun. By the end of my senior year in college, I knew drinking affected me differently: I didn't have a stopping point. Once I started, I lost all perspective. At times, I tried to slow down and pace my drinking. Sometimes it worked; oftentimes it did not. Looking back, the chaos was constant. I believed that I just had to get hold of my finances and accept the fact that I had more bad luck than most people. It seemed I was always running on the edge, barely able to get by, but then somehow making it nonetheless.

My addiction to opiates began in the closet out of curiosity. I truly intended just to see what it was like, to experience it. The warm rush slowly moving through my body as it pleasantly calmed and soothed my anxiousness was beyond anything I had ever known. I remember thinking that this was the piece I had been missing my entire life. Using was my secret vice; it helped me cope and was truly the best friend I'd ever known. The secrecy and paraphernalia were part of the ritual. I could be so high and feel so good, and no one would know I was mood-altered. Having the secret was powerful, and in no time at all I became its slave.

My drinking persisted, as my life was steadily and continuously going awry. I never thought about the magnitude of what I was doing to myself. Using and finding

ways and means to get more became my way of living. As my addiction progressed, so did my need for more drugs. I often caught myself nodding off, unable to write, see, or even comprehend where I was. Eventually, I lost my license.

Before entering treatment, I realized that I was very sick and that, as much as I tried, my attempts to get a grip were not working. Leaving my children to go into treatment was probably the hardest thing I've ever done. It went against my distorted idea of the truth. I remember thinking – what kind of mom leaves her kids? On May 1, 1995, I kissed my four-year-old daughter and my seven-year-old son goodbye and left for treatment.

In treatment, as the fog began to move, I was left raw with emotions. I learned that, despite my intelligence, I knew very little about myself. I felt broken, weak, and alone. I was terrified that my treatment team would discover my worthlessness. I remember my counselor telling me clearly, "When you look at you, you will get well. If you keep looking at other people, places, and things, you will stay sick." This began my journey of recovery.

Taking a rigorously honest look at my life required that I ask for help. I would have preferred just to read the directions, but my counselors suggested that I consider the possibility that my way wasn't working too well. I was so full of fear and doubt that I could not see the obvious. Facing the truth and coming to terms with my own behavior and my self-destructiveness were difficult, but not nearly as difficult as staying sick.

Getting off of the drugs was the easy part. I say that not in any way to discount

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the significance of withdrawing from drugs. I could not move forward in my recovery without being totally abstinent from mood-altering substances. But the drugs were the symptom for me. They covered up the gnawing emptiness I felt deep inside. This cavernous place in me constantly yearned to be okay and to be good enough. In my active addiction, I had used whatever I could find from the outside to fill this gaping hole on the inside – almost to the point of extinguishing myself. In recovery, I have learned that becoming whole and complete is not an outside job.

As a woman and a mother, recovery presented additional stumbling blocks. Most of these arose from my own beliefs – all of which were forms of judgment; in the end I became the person I judged. Somewhere in my history I “learned” that I belonged to the inferior gender. I thought that being a woman meant I had to try harder, do more, and rein in my femininity to prove my worth and make it in this world. I found myself living to prove a point, which was not living at all.

My journey in recovery has been filled with many lessons, many of which I had to relearn. Today, I cherish the essence of being a woman and what that means to me. I truly marvel at my femininity. I obtain strength from my intuitiveness, compassion for others, and sensitivity. More importantly, I learned that what I think about myself reflects in everything I do. I love being a woman, a mother, and a professional. I am an alcoholic and a drug addict, and I know beyond any shadow of a doubt that recovery is possible.

Working the twelve steps, going to meetings, and sponsoring women in the program keep me sober. The twelve steps keep me living in the middle and remind me that I am not in charge. I believe, as it is written, that acceptance is the answer to all my problems.

As a professional, I carry this message of recovery to lawyers, judges, and law students suffering from addictions and other mental-health disorders. I am truly privileged and humbled to do this work, and I am grateful every day to be alive.

#### ENJOYING RECOVERY

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