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FLIP SIDE

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Parenthood

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Acceptance

Facing up to my honest thoughts and feelings about being a mother has been one of the most excruciating aspects of recovery for me. The guilty secrets that I kept deeply hidden, including from myself, one-by-one bubbled to the surface as time progressed since my last drink nearly six years ago.

These secrets included things like putting my need for alcohol ahead of my son's need for time with me, increasingly feeling like being a parent was too difficult for me, not keeping promises I'd made to my son, and constantly comparing myself to other parents. I judged them and myself for not living up to some sort of standard or expectation of 'good' parenting that I held.

As they came to light, along with all these secrets came intense feelings of guilt and shame. The shame seemed to come from very deep inside me, somewhere from before I even picked up a drink.

I found that sharing my secrets with other people, particularly other mothers who are in recovery, to be immensely helpful. I know I'm not the only one to have these sorts of thoughts and feelings.

Thankfully, I've mostly let go of and replaced these negative, self-harming thoughts with ones in which I accept myself how I am today, as well as how I was in the past in my active addiction. I know that I've always loved my son and am doing the best job of being his mum that I can – and that's OK!

Bronwyn

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Black Sabbath 093

The day dawned, hot, oppressive, neath an eerie, livid sky,
The mountains and the flat land lay parched and tinder dry,
T'was months since last the countryside had felt a soaking rain
And the threat of raging fires was evident again.
But imagination, keenest could not hope to foresee
The tragedy that happened on Black Sabbath 093,
For the wind whipped to a frenzy, any spark it could ignite
And fire ringed Mount Arapiles, with a harsh and vengeful spite.

With no heed for wealth and status, it consumed homes large and small,
For class was no deterrent to that fearsome fireball.
And another in the Strzelecki Ranges, a voracious bird of prey,
Swooped down and razed both Churchill and Mirboo North that day.
Never before such vengeance, t'was the devils might set free,
Satan's signature emblazoned on every blackened tree.
For hours without respite fire fighters toiled, despite
The news that their comrades had worked throughout the night.

In the dry Cathedral Ranges two fires exploded side by side,
They embraced Marysville, Blackspur, Narbethong and ninety people died,
Then the flames swung round t'ward Whittlesea and Kinglake as an army at the Somme,
Blasting drought-wrought farmlands like an incendiary bomb;
And one flared in Baw Baw and raced towards the sea
Testing Man's resourcefulness against nature's enormity.
Both the towns above the Princess Highway from Warragul to Yallourn
Were nought but blackened skeletons revealed in hazy dawn.

And as people fled their houses, many destinies were cast
As the searing heat bore down on them like a great atomic blast.
And the death toll mounted hourly as they sadly learned the names
Of those who'd been identified as victims of the flames;
But for the weary fire fighters the job was nearly done.
They'd fought a raging battle and the battle had been won
For the wind had changed direction, the danger almost past
The cruel, rapacious torrent had been laid to rest at last.

From the ashes Phoenix rose the stores of fear, beyond belief,
Of the death and destruction, of hopelessness and grief.
Two thousand homes lay ruined, two hundred lives were lost,
The sickening statistics of a raging holocaust.
The loss of mountain grandeur, the loss of wildlife, rare
Is a loss which all Australians must, as a nation share.
Come spring, new life will blossom from many blackened tree,
But God forbid we should ever forget Black Sabbath 093.

Parenting, the Hard Way

These days with wonderful groups like Family Drug Help, The Salvation Army, Reconnexions and such there are plenty of options available for the parent of an addict but what if it's the other way around and the parents are the addicts? Who offers help and advice then! Who advocates for the drug or alcohol user in times of trouble? Where can you go for real help and advice when you have concerns regarding your children? Is there anyone who you can really trust with your true life story if you had to? Who defends the many hard working addicts in society who hold down jobs, live full and exciting lives, bring up families, and do great things in their communities?

Who do we go to when we need to ask hard questions about our health care, or our children's development in relation to our past and present D&A use? Are we safe to speak openly without putting ourselves in the firing line? People always think it's the stigma that worries us, but the truth is we have lived with the stigma for so long we don't really give a shit about it anymore. It's being vulnerable, and that is our main problem when you are parenting as an addict. If anything goes wrong in your family's life it's frightening how vulnerable you and yours can become instantly. It's not like you can ring anyone and says "hey, I'm having a bit of trouble providing for my habit this month, any ideas!" And if you do disclose your situation to any of the helpful agencies you can be sure to get the strange and judging looks when you need help with food, bills or whatever, because God knows you have probably spent all your money on drugs or alcohol! Why is it so hard

for the public to understand and accept that drug and alcohol addicts are a part of all communities, they are normal people, they go through the same battles as the straight people do, they feel all the same feelings share the same worries, they hold positions of power, they work in all levels of government, they are strong and intelligent people who for whatever reason have chosen a different path. Does it really make us that different from you just because we choose to take drugs or alcohol? Are all the straight people really so shiny clean, shameless and blameless! Are they all out there living these great and special lives that they can be so proud of? Does it really make you a better parent because you get your drugs on prescription from your Doctor, or because you chose alcohol which is legal and so much more socially accepted?

So spare a thought for all the hard working parents out there who just happen to be addicts as well. They carry the heavy weight of their own guilt everyday and do not need judgment from you just a small amount of understanding. With that understanding we have a chance of being proud of ourselves and raising strong and compassionate children, because our children as well as yours will be the future.

Anon _____

Too Much Love

I am a thirty one year old woman who's had a history of heroin abuse since the age of eighteen. I have been on methadone since I was about twenty one. This life has affected me and my parenting in many ways.

When I fell pregnant with my firstborn, 7 years ago, I was very overwhelmed and confused about how I would be as a parent. I chose to stop using and continue on methadone as I wanted to bring this baby into

a stable world.

When he was born, he had numerous physical problems for which I blamed myself and the methadone.

Even though I wasn't on heroin at the time, I was still quite anxious and not very confident as a parent.

Right through his toddler years, I parented in a passive, loving and very cautious way. Domestically I was great, but the discipline let me down.

I had no boundaries as a child, so I didn't know how to set them or to give him consequences for his actions when he was out of line. I was too inconsistent.

Over the past 7 years I've had small relapses and I've noticed that I get more agitated and impatient and am really all over the place during them.

In 2008, I had another boy, who's now one. I'm still on methadone, but am not on heroin at all. Although things aren't as bad, I do find I struggle with many of the same issues. Guilt is a part of me and I wish it weren't.

It makes me overly lovey, to the point that I can be smothering. I still find it hard to discipline, to be consistent. Doing a few parenting courses has helped give me more tools. I know discipline and love go hand in hand. I know kids need clear boundaries and consequences for their actions.

I must admit that I've done something positive as they are good kids. No child is perfect.

I want them to grow up and have integrity, to be honest and loving. Most of all, I want them to have confidence and to make good life choices. I'm trying to live these things out the best I can, in my everyday life now. I feel this will put me and them on the right path. I hope so. All I can do is learn from my mistakes, try not to repeat them and be the best parent I can be, without drugs in my life.

Anon

Growing Up

When I was young and growing up, things at home often ran amuck.

Mum was good but Dad was bad, and you know whose genes I mainly had.

So I followed his lead and started to drink, before I knew it I had started to sink.

So down I went as low as I could go, with what I saw growing up you'd think I would know.

That alcohol takes away your ability to grow.

For a while I continued with my chip on my shoulder, and despite my best efforts I got to grow older. Luckily for me someone saw more in my crazy, abusive drunken core.

I was given the chance to change and grow, and begin a life I thought I would never know.

So before you reach for that next drink, stop yourself now and try to think.

Reach for help if that's what you need, and find something real on which your soul can feed....

Anon

The Long Haul

I became pregnant when I was 19 years old and gave birth to my daughter just before my 20th Birthday. I had been smoking choof and drinking since I was about 16 but had managed to hold down menial jobs and drag myself to work even if it meant I walked straight in from a night out on the town.

I thought it would be fun to have a baby. Like most of my decisions at the time, it was made with little consideration or insight. Her father was a nice bloke and the idea of playing family seemed like a good idea at the time. I was soon overwhelmed by morning sickness and a need to get out of my relationship. My daughter's father probably tried his best (he was ten years older than me) but I was already in the habit of moving on as soon as I became bored and so I chose to do it alone.

Unfortunately parenthood is not something you can get bored with and move on. I stayed clean and sober throughout the pregnancy. This was not a conscious decision but rather my body's natural rejection of anything but food covered in salt. My daughter was born happy and healthy despite the diet of salt and vinegar chips that nourished her over the 9 months. I felt isolated being so young and

having a baby. My first night out after she was born was on my 20th birthday. I dropped her at her father's and began one of many nights where I would try to cram a whole week's worth of drinking and choofing into one night. As the years wore on my need to use substances increased in amounts and variety. By the time I was 25 years old I was using heroin, speed, pot and alcohol and using any means to get the money to do so.

When my daughter was 8 years of age I sent her to live with her father because

I was out of control and had entered into an abusive relationship that I didn't want to expose her to.

I spent years in and out of rehabs and detoxes, methadone programs and dysfunctional relationships. I saw my daughter on a regular basis but this was due to the patience and understanding of her father rather than my ability to be a manageable parent.

Eventually I got my shit together. I was 32 years old and my daughter was 11.

I have been clean now for almost 7 years. My daughter still lives with her father. Our relationship is good. She is at TAFE and has part-time work. I am pretty open about my past. I need to be as she was having a childhood at the time and soaking in everything like a sponge. She occasionally asks me questions to clarify memories she has. I try to answer honestly and not get caught up in the guilt and shame I feel. It is unproductive and affects my ability to parent in the here and now. I cannot change the past, but I can own my part, acknowledge it, and allow myself to give and receive love from my child, and be there as she makes good and bad choices, which sometimes means keeping my mouth SHUT!!!

Emma

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Trouble

I am having trouble writing this article. Trouble not because I cannot write, but because is it describing what is particularly fraught with feelings that fail to blend, harmonise. Conflicting feelings when drug taking was what I needed to do, and knowing that daughter was a victim of this, at times, diabolical need. My beautiful daughter for whom I wanted the world; my need to be in a chemically submerged state so I could work, put the washing on the line, have a phone conversation, be at one with the world hammered at my ability to raise my child.

I was a cripple parent pretending to be otherwise, a sad sack who fed her depression fat as fat, sharpened her anxiety to cut like a razor, her sole parenthood an impenetrable badge. This I did until I couldn't do anything but sit and smoke and drink and smoke and drink, the cycle infinitesimal. I would break 'it' only to pick 'it' up again when things were good, when I had enough money, when I was doing well at work, when I wanted to party.

My daughter observed all this from babyhood and beyond. She watched as I drank to black out, she weathered my psychotic episode after smoking what she innocently observed as 'Stinky Mum!'. I'd take her to child care stoned, paranoid, slithered in and out of that centre feeling like a viper, and then at the end of the day, pick her up anxiously wanting to return home to be in my preferred state once again. I had relationships with people purely because they smoked dope, who knew how to seriously drink. These people that I happily culled when I ceased my usage, my daughter befriended, put up with their at times frighteningly extreme behaviour, wanted me to move house to ensure that they would not return. Upon my becoming abstinent, she stated 'now that you've stopped I know that I don't have to do that.' By 'that' she meant be in an inebriated state merely to function. Poignant words from an

adolescent beginning to build the foundation to her own life. When I was diagnosed with Hepatitis C, she didn't want me to have treatment. I understand. She wants me to stay as is for a while; not sad, sick or in need of help. She wants the help. She wants me to talk about her homework, her friends, her future, not about me and my problems. She doesn't want to worry about me dying. She wants normalcy, to present to her teachers as a student with an acceptable homelife. No more chaos please. No more uncertainty. I know this as I know she wants to move the world, and how I ache with this knowing.

It is because of this trouble, the very trouble that I have difficulty writing, that there are shut doorways to our conversation. When I attempt to trespass these closed doors, acting out of hope for healing; when I scratch the surface of the 'unsaid' she says 'I analyse what I don't understand; it's none of your business; fuck off!; You don't know what you are talking about!' How can she know? It is fierce when I want all this to be assessed and labelled, soothed then bandaged, to say that we have been through all that, all is forgiven and now we can get on with the future without this cumbersome baggage, go home and have a well deserved cup of tea. Rightly, fairy tales are just that. In life it is hardcore. Nothing is that neatly constructed. The conflict goes on without resolve, our understanding deepening as we resist, doing our darndest to avoid the clutches of habit, of the robotic, of slavery. She is moving on now. Soon she will go and be the independent and passionate person I have seen blooming since infancy. It is strange to see her move away from me but thankfully comforting. For somehow amongst all my falling down and picking up, my illness and wellness, my self centredness and selflessness that she has risen intact. The wounds are hers. She will reveal these. She will not always have trouble with the unsaid.

Anon

It's Not All About You Dad!

My name is John T. I am an addict and I have been clean for nearly 3 years. I am also a sole parent of 2 boys, aged 10 and 11 years. I am also someone's son and a human being. I've been a sole parent for over 9 years and that was never my planning in life, it just turned out that way.

I've always had a conscience from a very young age, being explained what was right and wrong by my parents and school, then as I got on with life I started to wag school and did what I felt and knew was wrong. Then alcohol and other drugs came later in life. 'Who cares anyway? I don't!' I lived that life for many years, in boy's homes and jail, but I was always going to get my shit together and live life differently – 'normal stuff'. As years went on and I became a parent of 2 boys, I was in and out of addiction, I felt what I was doing was not right, but drug addiction was so powerful within me. I did numerous detoxes and told my boys that they were going to have a new Dad only to use again, constantly giving my sons broken promises. That gave my conscience the ability to ever lower my self esteem. Then no matter how many drugs I used, I still felt like a worthless person. Being a parent gave me more of a conscience of what addiction was doing to my sons and me, but I couldn't stop.

I reached out for help as detox alone wasn't doing the job. I accepted I needed rehab and asked someone to look after my boys. I was a mess. I stayed in rehab for 3 weeks. Upon

coming home my eldest son didn't want to come home, which hurt terribly and I knew and felt that my addiction had affected him and that work on my part had to be done. I stayed clean for the next 12 months doing a lot of work on myself, accepting that the only way I can set things right and remove the guilt and shame of my addiction and how it affected my sons, is to just stay clean. I never want my sons to live the life I lived. In the past I stayed clean just for my sons for nearly 2 years, but then the thought came that a hit would be great, just to kick back. One day resulted in me using every day for years. Today I want to stay clean for me. I love being clean and my family, my sons, reap the benefits ten fold. I've recovered and know now that a drug is not a solution to whatever comes up in life and as a result my sons don't want to leave me at all – mostly. I accept being a sole parent, which I have been for over 9 years. Being a parent is big picture stuff and I did it on my own and burnt myself out and used, and to think that I can do it on my own, is for me insanity. I don't have family help, but I have friends, other parents, and in recovery that's my family. Me and my sons are reaping the benefits of me being a responsible member and parent of society, now my sons have a new Dad. My son once said to me "it's not all about you Dad!" and blew me over and it's not all about them either. It's great to now have consideration, honesty and I guess our family now has a sense of balance and harmony.

John T.

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All I mourn

All I mourn is this,
To gaze an outstretched
palm,
And know that it searches
mine,
And in that moment,
Where stillness lies,
With no perception of
mobility,
Two are met,
And an understanding,
Beyond words is emblazened,
The moment enough to fill
any emptiness,
That moment,
Is all I mourn.
Json

The Stolen Generations

We are the stolen children from the land of broken dreams
Broken hearts for promises, white skin that only gleams.
Now here and there a whisper in the depths of those below
The high voice of opinion swinging to and fro.
To the left and to the right, and the optimistic finger
Has therefore pointed on the map the land that we should linger.
On the fringes of the town, far out on the plain
But the wheel has broken on the road and left us in the rain.
In the heat of the rising dust that even to the flowers
Shall weep for they have left us short of the land that is not ours.
That long ago we met you here, or you met us the story
Is one that maybe they forgot in place of other glory.
Yes we the stolen children are some faint voice in a dream
That echoed once and won't return in the bosom of that stream.
But where the thunder rolled away shall come back even stronger
In time to come and time won't wait another moment longer.

SERVICES FOR PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

Moreland Hall – 9386 2876

- Playgroup for women with alcohol and other drug use issues with young children

Windana – 8574 7000

- *Family Support* – aims to link families into the community and assist with family needs
- *Parenting Groups* –three different groups to increase parenting skills
- *Parenting Under Pressure*–intensive parenting therapy for individual families

Odyssey House Victoria - 9420 7610

- *Family Program* – State wide residential rehabilitation program for people with alcohol or other drug dependencies and their children (0-12 yrs)
- *Counting the Kids* –Metro Melbourne specialist AOD child and Family Support Program
- *Counting the Kids Brokerage Fund* – Most states and territories, funds up to \$4000 per child whose parent(s) have an alcohol or other drug dependency

APSU - 9573 1736

- Peer based playgroup for pregnant women/new mothers

who have/have had a history of alcohol and other drug use

Bridgehaven - 9480 6488

- Residential rehabilitation for women and their children (0-12 yrs)

Taskforce – 9532 0811

- *Support for mothers on pharmacotherapy* –during pregnancy and for parenting, includes outreach
- *Family Counselling* – phone or in person for families
- *Family Support Group* – support for family/friends of people who have alcohol and other drug issues

W.A.D.S. – 9344 2719

- Pregnancy care for women who are using alcohol and other drugs or on pharmacotherapy, based at the Royal Woman's Hospital

PAMS – 1800 443 844/9329 1500

- Advocacy, mediation and support for people on pharmacotherapy

Family Drug Help – 1300 660 068

- Peer based Helpline and Support Groups for family/friends/ siblings of people with alcohol and other drug issues
- Family counselling

Directline- 1800 888 236

- Information, referral and counselling helpline

Suffering in Silence

I began using drugs from the age of thirteen and by the time I reached twenty one things had become so bad that when my son was conceived I had a heroin habit and was unable to stop. When my son entered this world I realised what I needed to do, stop using and become a father. I needed to change. And for a short time I did but left untreated my disease of addiction began to manifest and soon enough I was using again.

I always believed that I was the only one that was affected by my using. But my son was continually suffering in silence so much more than I could have ever imagined. This came to light for me the most at times when he felt he could no longer keep his silence and spoke out. At the young age of four this first happened. He come into my room when I thought he was sleeping and begged me not to smoke a bong. I put him back to sleep and went on my way again to smoke a bong. But he was not fooled and when I had finished it I turned around to see him staring at me almost in tears.

It was times like this that made me realize what my using was doing to my son and that I had to stop. But still stopping was not something I had experience in or knew how to do for long periods of time.

As a parent I always wanted to be there for my son and give him everything. But I never really was, not the way he needed me to be. When I included drugs in my life they seemed to come first and once they were there I could then continue to do everything else. I let my self believe this was not the case but in reality my judgment was impaired, clouded by drugs and thoughts of using.

Now that I am in early recovery, I have reflected on what I have done and why I did not act earlier. I can't change what has happened but I can change the future, make new memories for my son and for myself. The hardest thing is realizing that I must take myself out of my son's life to an extent for a period of time to get better and I don't know for how long. Every day I wish I was with my son but I know now that by doing this I will be there for him as the parent he desires for the rest of his life.

Anon

Pregnancy and Parenting Playgroup

After the birth of my first child I was asked by the maternity health nurse if I wanted to attend a parenting group. I used to take a lot of drugs and I still smoke. I didn't think I'd feel comfortable with a group of straight women. I'd have to hide my past and probably get looked down upon for smoking within a miles radius of my little boy. I knew a couple of other women who were in a similar position. I decided it would be a good idea for us to start our own group, for women like us. I contacted APSU who I knew supported ideas like this, ones that come from those who have problems with addiction. I also had a friend working at Concern Australia who was looking to start a new program in the community.

Together we started a playgroup for women who have or have had issues with alcohol or

other drugs, who are pregnant or have recently had a baby. We meet at St Martin's Community Church in Collingwood. A hot lunch is prepared for us, and then we sit around and chat and play with our babies. It beats staying home all day.

A little while ago, a group of Sudanese women living in the Collingwood flats approached us, asking about activities for their kids. As our playgroup was small, we figured we could do with some new members so these women have joined us.

Quite a unique group really, a few women who have drug issues, a few refugees and a bunch of kids. But we seem to have a lot of fun.

If you would like to know more about the group, please contact Miriam on 9573 1776.

Membership Application

I wish to become a member of APSU. I would like to:

- Receive the quarterly Flipside newsletter
- Be sent information about how to become involved.

Name

Address

Phone

Email

Signature Date.

Are you:
service provider service user family member other

Language spoken at home

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

All personal details obtained by APSU will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purposes outlined above. Personal details will not be given out by APSU to other members.

Mail to:
The Association of Participating Service Users, 140 Grange Road, Carnegie 3163.

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