

Help, Hope, Healing from the Inside Out  
By Linda LaFever

My Sister...My Friend,

No one understands or has the capacity to feel and share your pain as another mother - another who has experienced the grief, guilt, and shame of giving birth to a child disabled by her own use of alcohol during pregnancy.

We have been and will continue to be called negligent, cruel, irrespons-ible, heartless, and on occasion, even evil. We will be unjustly judged by our ethnicity or by our lifestyles. Some of us, less visible because of our social standing, educational achievements or bank account balances will be accorded "philosophical grace." Some of us have support from our extended family members; some of us are the only ones that "know" why our children are not like all the others.

Nonetheless, each of us bears our own burden - publicly or privately - known to all, or unknown by anyone except ourselves. It doesn't matter whether we drank alcohol addictively, abusively or casually, with or without the knowledge of potential consequences, with or without the advice of our doctors, with or without our partners. We, you and I, and multitudes of other mothers throughout the ages have given birth to children with diminished potentials. It's a fact. And we grieve.

Recovery from grief comes in three stages. First there is the all consuming agony that hurts minute by minute. Then comes anger. At ourselves, at our situation and at the helplessness we feel. Next comes the realization that we cannot walk this path alone. It is the support and encouragement of others that turns anger into energy to care for our children.

We, all of us Sisters, expend far too much useless energy wallowing about in the swamps of our shame. Better we hold our heads up high, support each other and climb out of the depths of our grief to rebuild our dreams.

The first step we can take for ourselves and for our children is to enter into the ongoing process of recovery from our problems with alcohol. An important part of this process is to clothe ourselves in the power of these words:

"God, grant me the SERENITY to accept the things I CANNOT CHANGE; the COURAGE to change the things I CAN, and the WISDOM to know the DIFFERENCE."

Remember, my Sister, no matter what we do, how many tears we cry, how much self-incrimination we indulge ourselves in, we cannot make our children healthy and whole. Ever. It's a done deal. We must move on. We can wear sackcloth and ashes, pray all day long, whip ourselves to welts with switches and still our child will be the same. All that we accomplish is wearing down our spirit and rendering ourselves incapable of being advocates for our children. Remember, we can't ever make it right but . . .we can make it better.

When do we stop dragging the grief around like the proverbial millstone hanging about our necks? NOW, we stop. RIGHT NOW! Our children need us to be strong, informed, confident, and assertive.

My Friend, we and our children have a long and difficult road ahead of us. The sooner we acknowledge the obstacles that lie before us, the better prepared we will be to challenge them.

"After a while you learn that love doesn't mean leaning, that kisses aren't contracts and presents aren't promises. And you begin to accept defeats with your head up and your eyes wide open . . . with the grace of a woman, not the grief of a child. So you plant your own garden and decorate your own soul, instead of waiting for someone to bring you flowers. Remembering always that even sunshine hurts if you get too much. And you learn that you can endure. . . that you are strong and you really do have worth and, that with every dawn comes a new day."  
Author Unknown

My Sister, my Friend, you and I and our children have some very tall mountains to climb. The peaks are high; the valleys are low, but we do not climb the mountains alone. I care for you, so you are not alone. Neither am I because we have each other now.

(A brochure forbirth parents by Linda LaFever is available. See publications page.)

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