

A Mother's Worry

Category: Worry

written by Alison Hartman | May 11, 2018

How does a mother *not* worry when her son is a heroin addict? Yet, counterintuitively, it was letting go of my worry that allowed me to survive.

My son died from a heroin overdose last year. Losing him was the most painful experience of my life. As they say, it's a club no one wants to join. Suffering the death of a child defies the natural order of things.

But truthfully, I lost him years ago, when he started abusing drugs. Although he experienced brief periods of sobriety, he became another person when he was possessed by the demon of drugs. I hardly recognized the beautiful person he had been—full of compassion, vitality and creativity.

As I watched his early self-destruction, I must have looked like a living replica of Edvard Munch's famous painting *The Scream*, the epitome of worry and horror. I hopped on the "runaway train" with my son, trying to find the brakes, thinking I could put a halt to his behavior. After realizing this was futile, I jumped off the train and watched it careen on from the sidelines. This was equally heart-wrenching. Finally, I realized, the healthiest choice was to walk away—not with anger, but with love, for him and for myself.

This might sound harsh, considering that my son ended up homeless and HIV-positive. But after countless attempts to "save" him through rehabs, therapies, and medical interventions, it was clear there was nothing I could do to change his behavior.

Worry—a word derived from an Old English term meaning "to strangle"—was cutting off my life force. Ironically, as my worry escalated, I experienced symptoms similar to those of an addict. I suffered extreme anxiety, weight loss, digestive disorders, insomnia, PTSD—mirrors of the pathological forces of addiction that take over the body, mind and spirit and that wreak havoc on the internal organs and the psyche.

Worry didn't change anything other than make me sick. It was senseless for *two* lives to be at risk. As I detached myself, I replaced worry with acceptance (he had a disease I couldn't change), humility (this was far bigger than me), and compassion (love was the only reliable emotion).

I'm not tempted to worry about my son any more, sadly, because he died. Yet I'm grateful I released my worry before his death. Worry became my teacher, as my son was. He taught me to find strength and resilience through the darkest storms.

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