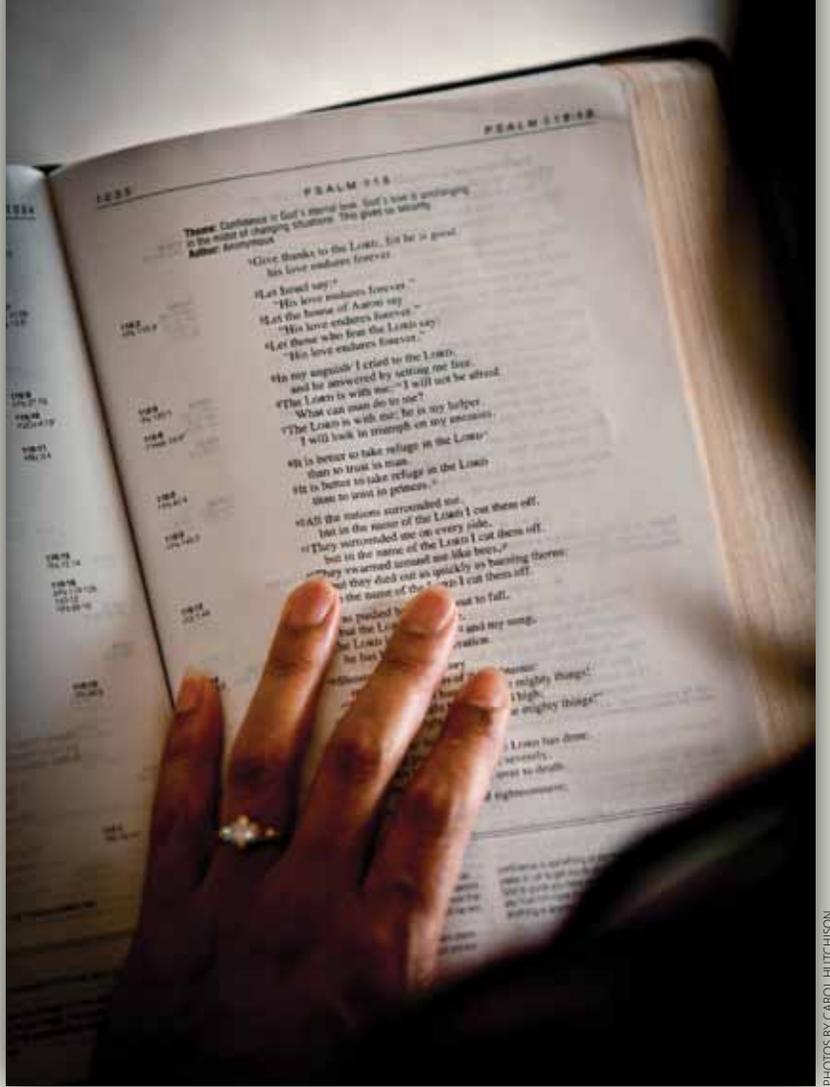




Greater Than Willpower



PHOTOS BY CAROL HUTCHISON

Scarred by her father's addiction, a daughter finds forgiveness and faith in his recovery

BY
ALICEA
JONES

One day when I was supposed to be running an errand for my father, I doubled back, peeked through the window, and saw him inject a needle into his arm. His chin flopped down to his collarbone as if his head were too heavy for his neck. I was 10 years old. Now I understood why he nodded all the time and why things like my mother's sewing machine had been disappearing. He had been selling them to get a fix. My father was a heroin addict.

At that age, I didn't understand the death grip of heroin, but it seemed that it made Daddy want it more than he wanted his family. It made him take the grocery money and fall into an intermit-

tent stupor when I tried to talk to him. It was going to take something mighty powerful to make him stop taking the drug. When I reached my teens, I started thinking about ways I could help him. If my five siblings and I intervened, and if my dad would just tunnel deep and gather up all of his willpower, he could get sober.

So we decided to have a talk with Daddy, a family intervention of sorts. We sat in a circle, pouring out our angst and desire for him to get sober. Even though he was nodding in and out of coherence, surely the appeals of his children would be powerful enough to make him stop using drugs. "We can take you to rehab. Please, we want things to be like they were before. Just use your

willpower. We'll help you," we pleaded. While cathartic for us, this encounter did nothing for my father.

Eventually, my father became very ill with myocarditis, an inflammation of the heart caused by infection related to his drug use. We thought this diagnosis would be his turning point. When my sister and I walked into his hospital room, we were afraid for him. We were afraid that he would die, if not at that time, then eventually from his drug abuse. We wanted to save him, so we visited often and tried to encourage him. We hoped that this near-death experience and our visits would coax him out of using drugs.

They didn't.

USELESS HELP

So many people tried to help my father but, ironically, in many cases, their help enabled his addiction. He'd tell them a sob story about needing to pay a plumber to get our toilet unclogged or there being no food in our refrigerator. The circumstances were true, but the money usually went to drugs.

My grandparents also tried to help my dad. They sent him to a camp for recovering drug addicts. He stayed clean for a while, but the call of heroin was too strong.

When I was in junior high school, my father was arrested and sent to the California Rehabilitation Center (CRC), a facility for addicts. At least now he'd have no choice but to quit, I thought. My mother took us to visit him on family day, and I was so happy that he was sober. His skin glowed, and his eyes were clear and focused. He even shared his plans to move our family to a farm where we could raise chickens. I smiled and told him how much I was looking forward to our new life.

When he was released from CRC, I would stand in line with him at a treatment center where he received methadone, a substitute for heroin. The goal was to wean addicts off heroin and then, eventually, off methadone. I thought that being there with him somehow would give him the encouragement he needed—that somehow my presence would be powerful enough to help him toward recovery.

A few months later, he was back on heroin.

THE FINAL CRY

By the time I turned twenty, I had given up on my dad. I had lost all hope for him. It seemed nothing anyone could do would help him. I avoided his phone calls. So

It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.

did the rest of the family. He just wanted money anyway. Eventually, he stopped calling.

Then late one night in my early thirties, my phone rang. Hearing my dad's voice after so many years froze me like the two seconds after a car wreck. I thought I had cast off all affection for him, but he was my father and I still loved him.

"Alicea, I need your help. I'm on skid row. I have no money and no place to go. It's dangerous down here, and I'm afraid. No one will help me. I want to kick the habit—I mean it this time. I'm tired." Was he conning me again? I'd asked myself this question so many times before. Then he said, "I've been praying."

Praying? A drug addict, praying? I figured if he could pray, I would, too. All night I prayed. "Oh, God, let it be so. Please give me my father back."

It was 5:30 a.m. as I rolled slowly down a Los Angeles street, feeling as if I were in a funeral procession. Windows up, doors locked. I was praying for my father and for myself. Greasy bags, newspapers, and scraps of forgotten food splotted the street. Shadowy figures clothed in baggy hues of faded gray and brown meandered past the buildings and stared into the street.

There he was, standing on the curb waiting for me. Tired. Gaunt. Soon, we'd be sitting in the same car, closing the years between us, for better or for worse. And for the first time, looking at my father's worn, dejected frame slumped in the passenger's seat, I realized that his deliverance was going to take something more powerful than anything I or anyone else could do.

During my father's 40-year enslavement to heroin, my family and countless others tried to



Alicea Jones

More than 28 million Americans are children of alcoholics. (Source: National Association for Children of Alcoholics www.nacoa.org)

Combined data from 2002 to 2007 indicate that over 8.3 million children under 18 years of age (11.9 percent) in the U.S. lived with at least one parent who was dependent on or abused alcohol or an illicit drug during the past year. (Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, SAMHSA)

RESOURCES:

Celebrate Recovery

First Baptist Church Georgetown

1333 W. Hwy. 29

512-869-2586

www.fbcgt.org/celebrate-recovery

Provides weekly support meetings that incorporate 8 recovery principles and 12 steps based on Christian values

LifeSteps—Williamson Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse

512-246-9880

512-246-9881

www.LifeStepsCouncil.org

Provides substance abuse prevention, intervention, counseling, and educational services to Williamson County

Alcoholics Anonymous/12 Step Program®

Georgetown 512-863-9938

Central Texas hotline 512-444-0071

Spanish Speakers 512- 832-6767

www.AA.org

A fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other that they may solve their common problems and help others to recover from alcoholism

Narcotics Anonymous

603 W. 13th

Austin, TX 78701

512-480-0004

Spanish 512-480-0007

www.ctana.org (directory of local meetings)

Support group for recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other stay clean

National Association for Children of Alcoholics

www.nacoa.net

Advocates for all children and families affected by alcoholism and other drug dependencies

help him, often depending on our own resources and my father's willpower. Yet now—when my father had nothing and no one, and I had no answers—I realized that only God could bring my father back.

"It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man."
(Holy Bible, Psalm 118:8 KJV).

LEAN ON ME

Seventeen years have passed since that dark morning on skid row; for 17 years, my father has been heroin free. Although I'm the one who picked up my dad from skid row and drove him to a detox center, it was God who softened my hardened heart and allowed me to see that I needed to trust Him with my father. And it was God who allowed my father to come to the end of himself.

A story appears in the Bible in the fifth chapter of the Book of Mark. A woman, sick with uncontrollable bleeding for twelve years, had seen many doctors and in the process spent all her money. Nothing helped. Actually, she got worse. But she had heard stories about Jesus' healing of the sick. When she finally saw him, she touched the hem of his clothes and was healed. After exhausting all of her resources, she too came to rely on a power greater than her own. This story and many others appear in the Bible to tell us that we are limited in our strength but that nothing is



Daddy and Me

COURTESY OF ALICEA JONES

ever beyond God's power.

As I reflect on my father's addiction and other life challenges since then, it often seemed that God was ignoring my prayers. But I've learned that sometimes God intervenes only when I cease depending completely upon my own power and resources. My faith would not have been as strong had God delivered my father after the first prayer. And I never would have thought that feeling helpless and hopeless about my dad would be the turning point for both of us. We had no more answers, which was exactly where we needed to be.

Epilogue: I just returned from visiting my dad in California. We had a lovely time together laughing, joking and reminiscing. When it was time to say goodbye, I studied his humbled eyes and was reminded that my father wasn't a bad man. He was a good man who, because of drugs, made some regretful choices. ■