



LISTEN TO THE VOICES OF THE FAMILY

by William Cope Moyers

It was the most difficult telephone call I've ever made, but it was one I had to make if I wanted to recover from a near-fatal relapse.

I called my wife from a detox center and told her that I could not continue to be her husband, or the father of our two boys, until I was able to recover from my addiction to alcohol and drugs. In other words, I needed to stay long-term in a treatment facility to focus all of my time and energy on getting better. I simply could not use the excuse anymore that other things were more important than getting help for my disease.

That wasn't easy to say or do, because I love my family. But without sobriety, I would have no family, no future, and perhaps no life. Fortunately my wife, Allison, understood. She, too, is a recovering alcoholic. Still, it wasn't easy on her or my two young children. In the months ahead my children repeatedly asked their mom, "Where's Dad, and when is he coming home?"

Experts estimate that about 10 percent of the U.S. population is addicted to alcohol or other drugs. But that statistic is deceiving, because it does not count the family members who must live with the consequences of addiction. If 10 percent is addicted, that means there are millions of others who are directly impacted simply because they are the spouses, children, parents and brothers and sisters.

That's why it is critical that the voices of family members are heard in the growing national debate about what to do about addiction, prevention and treatment. A family member has a unique perspective on these issues, and when that story is shared from the heart, it carries a powerful message with policy makers at home and in Washington, DC.

Families, especially children, are a popular topic with policy makers right now. Congress recently approved tax credits for families with children, and passed legislation that provides badly needed health care coverage for many uninsured children. However, there is much work to do for children of alcoholics and addicts.

That's why NACoA and its supporters must keep pressing ahead. It has been three years since I made that difficult phone call to Allison. Since then, my entire life has changed for the better. Today, part of my job at Hazelden is to speak out publicly about the power of addiction and the power of recovery in my own life and in the lives of my family members.

Why, somebody asked me recently, do you care so passionately about carrying this message into the public arena? After all, you are better now.

My response is easy; my wife and I are recovering alcoholics. We know that our children are part of that population that is more at risk for addiction. Healthy family interaction and ongoing education about alcohol and other drugs may prevent that from happening. If it doesn't, early intervention and treatment will give them the same opportunity to get better that I had. It is that simple.

NACoA understands this; just look at the mission statement. Many policy makers do not. It isn't easy to sway them, especially on an issue as emotional and complex as alcoholism and drug addiction. But if, as many people believe, society's future depends on what happens to today's children, then now is the time for all of us to stand up and be heard.

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