

LOSS OF A LOVED ONE

(a working title)



This booklet contains writings from members who have lost their loved ones due to the disease of addiction or have been affected by this loss. We are all affected by the loss of our loved ones, whether it is physically, mentally, or emotionally. The hope is this booklet will be of benefit to the entire fellowship, not just those who have physically lost their loved ones.

**This booklet is dedicated to the
members of Nar-Anon who have lost
someone they love due to the disease of addiction.**

REVIEW DRAFT - NOT FOR USE IN MEETINGS

MISSION STATEMENT

The Nar-Anon Family Groups are a worldwide fellowship for those affected by someone else's addiction. As a Twelve Step Program, we offer our help by sharing our experience, strength and hope.

VISION STATEMENT

We will carry the message of hope throughout the world to those affected by the addiction of someone near to them.

We do this by

- letting them know they are no longer alone;
- practicing the Twelve Steps of Nar-Anon;
- encouraging growth through service;
- making information available through outreach encompassing public information, hospitals, institutions, and websites; and
- changing our own attitudes.



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There are no words to describe the pain of losing someone you love to addiction. There is also not just one way to experience grief. The process is personal and individual. Each person grieves in their own time and in their own way. This booklet is not meant to be a guidebook for grief, it is not meant to tell you how to feel and how to grieve. These stories are written from the heart of those who have suffered and lived through the loss. They are shared to let members know how Nar-Anon has helped them through their grief and that meetings will always be a safe place to reveal their feelings and receive strength through the journey.

Some members share their questions and concerns after the unthinkable happens. Do I still belong? Will they still accept me in my group? Where do I belong? Once addiction has entered our lives we will always be affected by it whether the journey takes us through death, divorce, or recovery.

All members who shared are still attending Nar-Anon. Some are doing service. All are sharing their experience to help and support others. The members who have shared here tell their story, their process of healing, and how Nar-Anon has helped them work through each day or each moment. Even though their lives have changed forever, there is now a new kind of normal. As the stories explain, we never lose hope, we have a spiritual kinship, we still belong, and this is not the end.

This booklet is meant to be a catalyst for those who are willing to tell their story in order to help and support anyone who needs it or has questions.

REVIEW DRAFT - NOT FOR PUBLIC MEETINGS

Observing the Loss of a Loved One

I cannot begin to imagine what it would be like to lose someone I love to addiction. Though addiction is a powerful disease, recovery is a powerful tool. What I can share with you is my experience, strength, and hope in observing the support and love that comes with being in a Nar-Anon family and supporting a member who has faced this difficult situation.

A member of my home group, who had been working the program for two years, came into our meeting the other night and began to share his story. His daughter had been released from jail three days earlier. Though he wished it to be so, and hoped it would happen, she did not decide to enter a rehab or accept help. He ended his story by saying he had received a call that morning from the coroner.

He always came to the meetings alone. His wife did not attend; however, she sent her heartfelt thanks to all of us for the comfort that had been given to her husband over the past two years. He had come to his Nar-Anon family for strength and courage to face the days ahead. Those of us in the meeting were, of course, devastated for him and no words could begin to express our feelings beyond the compassion we felt.

We state in our meetings that we are a family – that you may crawl into the meeting, but you can walk out; we are a group of people who loved you before you ever walked into the room. What a wonderful, powerful, amazing program this is, that even through death we can lean on each other and find strength and comfort that is indescribable. Isn't it amazing one of our first thoughts when the unthinkable happens is, "I need to be with my Nar-Anon family"? Other family members and friends, even though they do not attend, can see the miracles that happen in the lives of those of us who work the program.

There are members who have, at times, stated that death would be a welcome friend as it would end the suffering of both the addict and the family. If this happens, they may feel guilty for having these thoughts – I cannot imagine that either, as I am only an observer. I am so grateful to my Higher Power that I have found this new family. I am grateful that I stayed until the miracle happened. I am grateful that in some small way I can be a comfort and strength to a member who faced what we all keep in a very secluded spot in the back of our minds, hoping that it never comes to pass.

Coming Full Circle

It's been four years today since my daughter died, for the final time. I say this because it seemed like I had lost her several times over the years due to her addiction. My sweet and bright young girl, who showed so much promise, grew up to be someone I never could have imagined she would be.

She went away to college and it was there she became an addict. She also suffered from major clinical depression and the combination rapidly destroyed the life she had planned for herself. I did everything in my power to find help for her but nothing seemed to work. She was on a path of self-destruction.

I remember the evening of my first Nar-Anon meeting. A close friend told me she had heard about Nar-Anon and offered to take me to a meeting. I said "no, not tonight" because my daughter was home and I was hoping to be able to spend some time with her before she disappeared again. My friend left and I went to speak with my daughter. We were sitting on the front porch and I was telling her how much I loved her and wished I could help. She turned and looked at me with vacant eyes. She said she was going to leave and catch a bus out of town. What I saw in her face, her eyes, was someone who was already gone. To me, that was the first time I felt a part of her had died. The daughter I knew was gone. I went back in the house and called my friend and asked if she would take me to that Nar-Anon meeting.

As soon as I entered the room of my first meeting I felt at home. I was with people who truly understood the pain I was going through. I did not come to Nar-Anon to save my daughter. I came to Nar-Anon to save myself from the unbearable pain I was going through. At this first meeting they let me pick the topic and I chose acceptance. I needed to learn how to accept this horrible disease that had taken my daughter away from me.

I made new friends in Nar-Anon, got a sponsor, and worked the steps. Little by little I found a new life for myself. It took me years to really learn how to let go. I had come to my daughter's rescue many times, and then needed to step back. My Nar-Anon family was always there for me, supporting me and my efforts to work a program that would teach me to detach with love.

I believe service work was a big part of my recovery. I became involved with my group, area, region, and served as a delegate and board of trustee member. I also became involved with several world service committees. My life became so full that I stopped focusing on my daughter's life and really focused on my own and how I could help others going through the same thing. I married a man I met in Nar-Anon. We both had daughters who were addicts. Working a program of recovery became my way of life. The beautiful part was that my daughter saw me grow into a new woman of strength and she finally admired me for making a life for myself that was not solely focused on her.

I am thankful that I had 11 years in Nar-Anon before my daughter died. I cannot imagine how I would have coped without it. The first year after she died was the worst. I had major doubts about my Higher Power. I found it hard to believe there was anything out there at all. It hurt to hear others talk about their addicts when mine was gone. But I kept going to meetings, worked the program, and stayed on my committees. I kept saying I am going to fake it till I make it. With the love and support of my family and Nar-Anon friends, I continue to live a life filled with love, joy, and sorrow. Not a perfect life, but a real life. I still really miss my daughter, and always will. At times I find it hard to believe she is really gone. I try to keep the good memories close; the ones of her when she was younger before she became an addict.

I will always be grateful to have a program which has helped me find recovery and to appreciate that life will never be perfect but it will be as good as I can make it. I never would have found this if I didn't have an addict for a daughter. So we come full circle.

This is Not the End

My wife and I have two sons, the oldest is 27 and our youngest will be forever 21. We started attending Nar-Anon meetings hoping to find a way to help our younger son realize the things he was doing were ruining his life. We wanted to help fix him. Our lives were hectic, and out of control. We were constantly fighting with our son, and then fighting between ourselves.

I was angry with my son for many reasons, like the loss of material things, his laziness at home, and his disrespect. I blamed him for causing us to learn how the police system worked; from arrests to booking, understand the process of the court systems, and work with lawyers and district attorneys. We became familiar with the jail system; putting money on his books, visitation times and restrictions, mailing magazines and books, getting jail approved eye glasses, and of course, the expensive collect phone calls. These were things I thought I would never experience.

While our son was in jail, we kept attending Nar-Anon meetings, learned how to work on ourselves, and set boundaries. By working on myself, I stopped the lecturing and started to really listen to him. He and I were able to talk more and set boundaries we both would work on. During this time my wife and I celebrated our one year birthday in Nar-Anon.

Soon after our celebration and only six days following our son's release from jail, he died in his sleep. It was unexpected, and shocking. Things were looking positive and then he was taken away. It wasn't fair.

Our Nar-Anon group provided us with extraordinary support. They were the therapy which helped us get through this tragedy in our lives. I cannot imagine how we would have handled our loss without their incredible support.

We found out later he had a bad heart, and his death was not drug related. We truly believe he had seen his bottom, and things were going to be better.

We have continued to attend meetings and share our story. This helps others understand death is a real possibility. We tell them to enjoy the good times, cherish the positive moments, and live one day at a time. I am thankful my son exposed me to Nar-Anon. I have started working the steps and will continue on this journey. What we experienced is the worst thing that can happen to any parent; however, it was not the end for us.

Twelve Steps over Loss of My Son

I'm grateful to my sponsor who shared her experience of recovery with the help of the Twelve Step program.

My First Step

I was powerless over my son who died and his addiction. I lost control of my life. Eight years have passed since my son died and I still cannot talk about losing him without tears.

My Second Step

I came to believe there is a Power greater than me and this Higher Power can restore me to sanity.

My Third Step

I made a decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understood Him.

My Fourth Step

God, please help me take an honest and fearless look at my feelings over the loss of my son. Did I suffer needlessly after the death of my son? How did my health suffer? I overloaded myself with work, I couldn't concentrate, I cried often, and did not say no when I wanted to. The relationship with my grandchild suffered because of expectations I placed on my role as a grandmother. My daughter-in-law left for a different city and I had no contact with her or my grandchild. How did I react to this? I cried, prayed, joined Nar-Anon, and worked the Twelve Step program with my sponsor. I became active in service work, practiced the spiritual principles, and changed my relationship with my other children and myself. I have two more sons, thank God!!!

What feelings do I have regarding the loss of my son? Powerlessness, resentment, anger, self-pity, sadness, rage, guilt, feelings of abandonment, meaninglessness, hopelessness, dullness, pain, and fear for my children.

What prevents me from moving on with my life? My defects in this situation: low self-esteem, dependence on other people's opinions, distrust of God, distrust of myself, self-will, poor judgment, fear of disapproval, self-pity, anger with myself, disapproval/non-acceptance of myself, guilt, and lust for power (playing God by trying to control everybody and everything).

My Fifth Step

I share my defects of character with God, my Sponsor, and my home group. I am ready to share my recovery experience with others.

My Sixth Step

Higher Power, I am ready to ask You to remove my defects of character: low self-esteem, dependence of other people's opinions, distrust of God and myself, self-will, poor judgment, fear of disapproval, self-pity, anger with myself, disapproval of myself, non-acceptance of myself, and a lust for power (playing God by trying to control everybody and everything).

My Seventh Step

Higher Power, I humbly ask You to remove my shortcomings. Help me to overcome my low self-esteem and my dependence on other people's opinions. Higher Power, I ask You to help me with my distrust of God, distrust of myself, self-will, and poor judgment. God help me let go of my fear of disapproval, self-pity, and lust for power. I ask You, Creator, to free me of feeling guilt, anger, and disapproval and non-acceptance of myself.

My Eighth Step

Higher Power, I ask You to help me become willing to make amends to myself, God, my son, my other children, my granddaughter, my daughter-in-law, and all others I have harmed.

My Ninth Step

How can I make amends to myself? I can love myself and look at my creative talents. I can work the program, carry the message to others, and take care of my needs in all areas of my life.

How can I make amends to God? By practicing the first three steps and Step Eleven. Every morning I write in my journal. This keeps me in contact with my Creator. I will pray for the continuous awareness of my Higher Power's presence in my life.

How can I make amends to my son who is no longer alive? I can make amends by caring about my granddaughter and daughter-in-law. By finding time to call, invite them to my place or spend vacations together, I can improve our relationships.

How can I make amends to my children? By being attentive and spending quality time with my children I can make amends in a loving way.

My Tenth Step

God I ask You to help me admit my wrongs when I take my daily inventory so I can promptly make amends. This helps me keep clean my side of the street.

My Eleventh Step

I use the Serenity Prayer as a meditation for my Eleventh Step. I ask my Higher Power "help me to understand Your will and grant me the power to fulfill it."

My Twelfth Step

How can I practice the principles in all my affairs? I can carry the message to those who have suffered the loss of a loved one.

When I work the Steps in different situations it becomes easier for me to breathe and live! Humility comes when I turn everything over to my Higher Power.

Life Changed Forever

My son's addiction took me on a life altering journey which led me to feelings of anger, frustration, embarrassment, anxiety, fear, and obsession. This resulted in my stress level going through the roof. I felt lost and was moving towards depression. I asked myself, "Why is this happening to me?" If I was being honest, I was in the throes of insanity.

A friend at work suggested I attend a Nar-Anon meeting. In Nar-Anon I finally came to understand that addiction is a disease, just like cancer and many other disabling diseases. For over two years I was reluctant to accept the truth for what it really was, that my son was an addict. I was the father of an addict and would be until the day I die. Up to this point, I judged, criticized, and tried to control my son's bad choices and behavior. This kept me in a defensive mood, always reacting with resentment and a pompous attitude. It was not easy to love the addict when he was choosing active addiction. I was consumed by feelings of anger, disappointment, fear, and betrayal. All the hopes I had for him had been shattered. I was so emotionally wrapped up in holding him accountable for his choices and actions that I was unable to make the connection; I had to change my point of view regarding the truth. The addiction was the cause of my son's struggle.

Accepting the truth allowed me to change my entire outlook towards my son. We built a new relationship founded on my program with new boundaries such as, "My program doesn't allow me to do that anymore." I was staying out of his business and he was attending NA meetings, working towards sobriety. I accepted his addiction as his struggle in life.

My challenge got easier by attending meetings and hearing the experience, strength, and hope others shared. I saw in real time the pain members were going through as they openly shared their stories, many with tears on their faces. I also saw the progress others had made and the smiles of victors not victims. As my awareness of addiction grew, I became stronger and my outlook towards my son improved in spite of his situation. I especially locked onto a nugget that a member at the meeting said, "Never take away their dignity; they are still human beings." I learned I can hate the addiction but I will never stop loving my son.

I stopped and reflected, if it were not for Nar-Anon meetings, I would have continued a destructive relationship with my son. I would have had so much guilt when he passed. Instead Nar-Anon allowed me to build a renewed relationship with him several years prior to his passing. When my son died, the support I got from the members of my group was beyond words. They provided emotional support and attended the interment in great numbers. You cannot begin to imagine the gratitude and solace I felt by their presence. It allowed my broken heart to begin healing. In Nar-Anon I learned to move from a love/hate relationship to loving my son in spite of his addiction. For me Nar-Anon is about the meetings, the members sharing, and the readings from the SESH book. It can be experienced by anyone who has the courage to enter these rooms with an open mind and heart. I will forever be grateful for the changes in my life resulting from Nar-Anon's Twelve Steps and its members. It has made me more compassionate and wiser in the understanding of addiction and its impact on a family. It has energized me with a willingness to serve and pass on the courage, strength, hope and serenity that was given to me.

Spiritual Kinship

My son was an addict. It was a nightmare when I realized he was using drugs and needed help. Next came hopelessness, shame, and fear. I never believed this terrible thing would happen to me. At that time I only thought of how I would look and what people would say. Shame! I didn't understand how to help my son, help, but not just to give up drug usage. I started to look for a rehabilitation center to treat him. Eventually I found a center where we were informed about the Twelve Step program. I started to attend the meetings and everything started to change.

Even though my son lived nearby, we had not been close since he was a teenager. We did not have an inner spiritual kinship. Nar-Anon and my Higher Power helped me reconnect with my son. As we became closer, I grew to love him unconditionally. We began to talk on different spiritual topics; how to accept life, how to get to know ourselves. With his help I became closer to God and to my understanding of a Higher Power. I remember a conversation we had when I learned he had not been happy with his life for a long time. My heart trembled. I am grateful he was so open and honest with me. He had such an understanding of God. I was amazed he was able to feel, understand, and think of a Higher Power in such a way. That was a conversation full of marvelous spiritual warmth. Thanks to my own spiritual changes I could feel this with him. This was a special time of happiness.

Just before his death my son recommended a book to me in which the power of prayer was described in detail. Every time I open it I am comforted by how my son could feel so deeply and realize such spiritual things! He opened another door to my understanding of God.

When I have difficulties, I am grateful my Higher Power gave me a gift by granting me the opportunity to see my son find a spiritual path while he was seeking recovery. He is no longer here but my spiritual kinship with him continues through my Higher Power, my memories, and my spiritual development.

We Still Belong

Our son's years of active addiction were a terrifying roller coaster of chaos and sadness for my wife, our family, and me. Nar-Anon provided the relief we needed to find serenity and a better way to live, no matter what our son chose to do with his life. During the year of his amazing recovery from the disease of addiction, he found a job, a place of his own, and a new, loving girlfriend. Meanwhile, we continued to build our Nar-Anon tool-belt. We needed this to sustain us against the ever present possibility of his relapse and the impact it might have on us.

Following our son's year of recovery and sobriety, he had a terrible relapse, which rapidly took him back to the awful ways of addiction. This time, it ended with his death from a drug overdose the day after Father's Day. Our family was devastated and felt as if we had lost him for a second time, first to his addiction and now to his actual death. The grief was beyond overwhelming.

The morning my son died was the day my home group meets. Our family and friends flooded our home with love and support, but I desperately needed to be with others who understood the ultimate fear and impact of addiction on a loved one. My son was gone and I wondered if Nar-Anon was still the place I could find the unconditional acceptance and support I had experienced up to this dreadful turning point.

I went to the meeting that night, apprehensive, but desperate. Not only did the group turn out in force, but they somehow already knew of my family's loss. They greeted me with love, hugs, tears, and the Nar-Anon miracle of support I needed so badly in the worst moments of my life.

It has been several years since we lost our beautiful son. It has not been easy. My wife and I continue to attend Nar-Anon meetings. We are encouraged by the ongoing experience, strength, and hope that only Nar-Anon can offer in such terrible tragedies. We continue to serve the fellowship and have progressed to the point where we can support others who have experienced the devastation of addiction. Nar-Anon continues to help us find the miracle of recovery, even in our darkest hours. Our Nar-Anon friends made it clear that not even death could separate us from their loving embrace. Keep coming back!

Never Losing Hope

"This isn't happening...This isn't happening!" Those are the first words I remember uttering to myself after I somehow got up off the floor and began aimlessly walking in circles in my kitchen.

"I am just like them." These are some of the first words I remember uttering to myself during my first Nar-Anon meeting several years ago.

The pain and fear that brought me to Nar-Anon had lessened over the time I spent in the fellowship. I did what was suggested. I kept coming back. I got a sponsor and worked the steps with her. I took on service work and did my part to carry the message to others. Because of these things I know my life became manageable. I grew personally as well as spiritually. The relationship with my addicted loved one had changed and became a real relationship again. I learned to truly love my daughter and ceased trying to change her. I had accepted her as she was. I had supported and encouraged her attempts at recovery. I had learned to still love her and keep hope in my heart even when her attempts failed. Our love could now withstand the storm.

I thank my Higher Power and this fellowship every day for showing me a better way to live. I am grateful that I took that leap of faith and tried something new. I cannot imagine that I would still be here.....living that is....if I had not followed the path I was offered in that first meeting.

My daughter's choices and her disease took her places I never wanted for her. In the end it took her from me.....she is gone...forever.

How can I survive this? How can I fix this? How can I accept this? How can I keep living? Why? These are some of the same questions I had when I first found the rooms of Nar-Anon when I was battling her addiction, before I had any recovery. After her overdose death I had these same questions again....only now they were about me and how I was going to cope with her death.

It was a while before I could go to a regular meeting. My sponsor and other Nar-Anon friends surrounded me with love and support. I just couldn't sit in a meeting where some members complained about their loved ones. How could they complain? At least they had their loved one!

I was not sure I still belonged. In recovery I accepted her disease. It felt completely different to no longer have a choice about acceptance but I had no other option. I could not do anything... ever... to change this.

Complete re-entry into Nar-Anon took a few months. Today I know that it was by the grace of my Higher Power and the help of others that I began to see that the literature was correct. There is no problem too great to be overcome by the working of these steps.

I have utilized the steps to deal with her loss. I accept that others are where they are in their recovery and I am where I am. I don't have the answers to all those questions, maybe I never will. We don't all have the same experience, strength, and hope. We are all the same though, learning a better way to live. I do know that I can have a good life. Not the good life I imagined years ago. For me, it is about the journey of finding a different kind of good. It is about never losing hope.