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Season 06. Episode 11

Podcast Title: Help is just Around the Corner

This is episode 11 of season 6.

In this conversation between Tony and Bruno J., they discuss what a family can do to get the help they need when they are faced with addiction and/or alcoholism in their family, whether their loved one is living under the same roof or not.

Bruno J. goes on to talk about co-dependency and what he has learned about helping others on his 27-year journey on the enlightened side of the street.

Tony: " What is the absolute first thing a caring family member should the moment she (say it's mom) realizes she has an addiction problem on her hands"?

Bruno J.: "I cannot understate the value of education in the early going for a family who has discovered or concluded that their loved one needs help.

In some cases, it takes years for a family to wake up to reality, as they may initially deny that there even is a problem, as in 'not in *our* family'.

Having awakened, however, the first thing that they must do is to learn about the disorder. One great source that isn't heavy scientific reading is the book Love First by Jeff and Debra Jay. They offer insight, among other things, on how addicts think. They just don't think the way we so-called normal people think.

You may think that the problem is the addict's abuse of drugs. He thinks the problem is you because you stand in the way of his getting high.

Another example is how the addict uses deflection to evade a reckoning with the truth. Mom might say something about his denial that he has a problem and he'll respond by attacking her for her poor parenting. Ouch. She starts to defend herself, and now the shoe is on the other foot. He's made his getaway".

Tony: "Then there are other people a family can turn to".

Bruno J.: " One of the ways that the disorder affects the entire family is that family members experience shame over the very existence of addiction or alcoholism in their own family. So, they tend to isolate in order to shield the problem from view. That's exactly the time to turn to others who share the same experience and can offer help in privacy.

In addition to sessions (more than one) with an accredited AODA - Alcohol or Drug Addiction - counsellor, we highly recommend attending Al-Anon meetings, a recovery program for friends and family of alcoholics (and addicts) which will educate them on what is possible and what is unrealistic in light of the power of the disorder".

Tony: "So the key is to get help for yourself, not to try to get the loved one clean and sober".

Bruno J.: "When that light goes on, it can change everything. Mom realizes that she has been caught up in an enabling and sick, co-dependent relationship with her son or daughter.

We suggest getting the book Co-dependent No More by Melody Beattie, a highly readable treatment of the condition that exists in every family with an addiction problem".

Tony: "Share what happened in your life after you got clean and sober".

Bruno J.: "I would not have even been capable of recognizing my co-dependency had I not been awake to it.

The basic premise is that we develop a compulsion to control the so-called sick person without understanding the high price we ourselves pay in so doing. We are tied by a chain to the other's needs, ignoring our own. We are OK if the other is OK. We are not OK if the other is not OK, or worse, not OK with us.

It was that way with my college-age daughter 20 years ago. She had decided that she liked cocaine more than she liked attending school. That got me into Al Anon on the advice of my AA sponsor who could see that I was obsessing over her 24/7.

I learned that I could detach from her craziness and still love her. I had a session with an old friend who was an experienced counsellor, and after the hour, I asked him how he thought I was doing.

He stated that I was doing quite well under the circumstances. 'You're not flying off to save her, you're taking care of yourself well, and most importantly, you're attending your Al Anon meetings'.

I then asked him what was the most important thing I should be mindful of? I carry his answer with me to this day: 'Don't let her disease steal your money or your peace of mind'.

The same sort of thing happened with my then-fiancé. By then, I had learned enough to know that, as it says on the walls in the Al Anon rooms: 'Didn't cause it, can't cure it, can't control it'.

That made me realize that I should not even try to change the trajectory of her disease. Save for an intervention, but she had not yet arrived anywhere near the bottom of the chute".

Tony: "But you understood that, although powerless over her disease, you had the power to change yourself".

Bruno J.: " Starting with reaching out to others in the same boat. By then I realized the immense power I received quite unexpectedly in helping others.

That's the spark that started AA in 1935. The story is that Bill Wilson, who had been sober six months, trying to sober up other drunks, came home dejected and declared to his wife Lois that he was a failure because he was not able to get those guys to sober up. Here came the spark. Lois said: 'But Bill, *you* stayed sober'.

What we quickly learn in AA is the critical importance of becoming selfless in order to heal, to shift the focus from a self-centred way of life

to a state of giving, not taking. In so doing, we receive the joy that comes with watching others awaken to their own potential, no longer enslaved to another's disease.

That change of heart then gives gratitude a chance to take over, displacing the fear, resentment and despair that ruled our lives before we awoke to our own possibilities.

Tony: "There is more hope for change than people in dire straits ever realize. I know I have experienced the joy of giving back many times over".

Bruno J.: "I've seen you work your magic, Tony, and I am mighty proud to be your partner in carrying this message of hope".

What we learned in the conversation with Tony and Bruno J. is that:

1. Education on the nature of the disease is the first essential step that needs to be taken if there is to be any hope of change.
2. The major turn is the realization that mom cannot change the course of her child's disease, and that she is as powerless over it as is her loved one.
3. Reaching out to others who gladly share their experience, strength and hope will end isolation and shame, bringing light where there was once darkness and despair.
4. Helping others will shift the focus from selfish, obsessive control to a selfless way of acting, bringing gratitude and joy to those who once suffered the pain of addiction in the family.