



SafeHouse

a modern approach to recovery

You can listen to all SafeHouse Podcasts at:

<https://safehouserehab.com/safehouse-podcasts/>



Busting Addiction and Its Myths Season 3 Episode 11

You're Addicted and Don't Even Know It.

This is episode 11 of Season 3. I shall call this episode You're Addicted and Don't Even Know It. Just to get your attention. But I am making a larger and important, legitimate point. More about that in a moment.

So, let's go to the part where addiction takes many forms.

Here's where I can start my story just to illuminate my point. I should add at the outset that I happen to have been lucky enough to experience the gradual peeling away of the layers of self-deceit that kept me prey to my shame and resentment for several years. This despite my being clean and sober throughout my recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction.

I started recovering "for good" at a rehab in what was then called Milwaukee Psychiatric Hospital in July 1993, which makes it 26 plus years ago. The name of the institution gives you a clue as to how serious my case really was.

I was diagnosed not only as an alcoholic addict, but I also presented a long list of psychiatric disorders: depression, possibly bi-polar, OCD, sex addiction, panic attacks and dissociative personality disorder. All true.

I had previously been seeing a psychiatrist arranged by the company from which I was fired for dereliction of duty - because my disease at that point had me in its grip to the point where my mind didn't work anymore - so the psychiatrist asked me: "Bruno, how are you doing with the OCD meds I prescribed last week?" I answered: "I think my head's going to explode". She asked: "You're not drinking, are you?" I said, "Of course I'm drinking".

That was the first time in 24 visits - once a week for 6 months - that I actually told her the truth.

She then said: "You better check yourself in before you check yourself out". She could see what I couldn't.

So, I checked myself in and started on the long road to recovery.

Then about 10 years later, I fell in lust with a fabulously sexy woman 16 years younger than me, with two lovely little kids to go with her lovely body and magnetic smile. (I served as the House Manager at Manitoba House in Milwaukee Wisconsin for two years and the object of my intense desire lived two doors down.) After I moved in with her and her kids, my job at the sober living house ended - in truth, I quit the job even though it was a great deal and a genuine learning experience.

Shortly after we started living together, I discovered that my controlling tendencies were bringing out the worst in me and making everyone in my new family unit neurotic. Tension, resentment, fear, and dishonesty ruled the home. I was taking out my anger toward my fiancé on her children who weren't guilty of anything except for being there. There was lying and infidelity plus untreated addiction in the house.

I almost allowed the situation – that is, a problem largely of my own making – to almost sink my sobriety, then fairly solid, or so I thought at the time.

The truth was that I was obsessing about my then-fiancé 24/7. I allowed her to live in my head rent-free. Here, go ahead, take my space. I know I can choose to use my mind for other, more productive things like self-care, or giving back. But, I figured that if I obsessed long and hard enough, I could "get you to stop running out to the bars every weekend and leave me with the kids while you go off and sleep with other men".

That was my unconscious thought process and if you look at it at face value it was an obviously absurd idea for any rational human being to have. I learned the true value of Al Anon which I joined after my AA sponsor kicked my ass. He said this: "Bruno, you are addicted to this woman and to the sex you are or were getting, and you need to learn from other people who have successfully overcome living with an alcoholic or addict on *how to deal with your inner state*". I said to Bobby: "Hmm, I never thought that I might be addicted to her and that I am - uh oh - as powerless over my addiction to her as I am over my own alcoholism".

That was the light going on, another turning point in my life of recovery. My pattern is this, as it is for many others, I later discovered: we have to be in enough pain to the point where we cannot stand it anymore, and then we begin to look for the answer, and the answer is always inside of us. It means we need to change our thinking and then take action based on a healthy, not a twisted and negative thought process.

That for me also meant seeking advice from people whom I had learned to trust because they were trustworthy. They had earned my trust because they did indeed want the best for me and – this is critical - they also understand how addictive disease works and how addicts think.

So, don't be asking your mom or a brother whom you love about what to do, as their advice may bear nothing to reality if they don't have a clue about how insidious addictive disease can be. AA literature calls it "cunning, baffling, powerful" for a reason. Even the best scientists cannot explain our actions, and instead just label it as insanity and put it on the shelf for later examination and reference.

The sick attitudes and actions I spoke about earlier are defined and driven by the extreme self-centeredness that runs an addict's life. And this so-called life consists essentially about self-sabotage at every turn, all for the sake of using alcohol and drugs to escape the consequences of living.

I also learned in my Al Anon journey about the immense influence co-dependency had on my way of thinking and behaving. It took several months of meetings before the rock I was carrying - that obsession with her - would slip off my shoulders and free me to live a decent, peaceful life for the first time in a long, long time.

This where I can say that *I was addicted and didn't even know it*. Until I asked for help and until the light went on, I didn't know how badly I had been twisted

by the disease. It is said that an addict seeks help not because he sees the light, but because he feels the heat.

In my case, I had to feel like I was going crazy, but I was lucky: I knew just enough to share my thoughts and feelings with someone who A. Knew about the disease B. Knew me as a recovering alcoholic trying to heal my life and C. Knew about the power of Al Anon to lift addicts and others out of their misery and start taking responsibility for their well-being, to start looking at ourselves not as victims or martyrs, but as sick (yes, sick) people affected by addictive disease for which there is grown-up treatment. So, there is nothing or no one to blame any more.

I also got over the illusion that I had any ultimate control over or any influence whatsoever on the course of my lover's disease, or over her drama as she played it out with me as one of the objects of her manipulation. Turned out I wasn't the only one, but that is water under ye old bridge running to the sea. It hurt at the time, though.

That time in my life brought real meaning to the sayings on the walls in many an Al Anon meeting room: Didn't Cause It. Can't Control It. Can't Cure It. A straight up reminder that needs to be repeated over and over, simply because our thinking will quickly revert to something that is more familiar and comfortable even if it's faulty. New thinking invariably pushes us out of our comfort zone and even though it's necessary and we accept it, we still don't like it. I would say to myself: "Nobody is asking you to like it, Bruno. But you must accept this discomfort, for without some sacrifice on your part, no progress can be made".

So now, at least one of the co-dependents in the sick relationship was getting the help that was needed to liberate himself from a prison of his own making. I do not know that I had these choices I could make to attain my longed-for freedom.

I ultimately gained the courage to separate myself from the beautiful lady, but the good news is that we remain friendly, and both children still love me and show me that they appreciate me for being a good dad after all. The young man is now a Sergeant in the US Marine Corps and his younger sister works as an administrator in a healthcare system near our home.

That could have all ended badly had not a higher power intervened. It's what I believe, and you are free, of course, to accept it, or not.

What did we learn today?

1. You could be addicted to the addict himself and not know it until you have to look at it and begin to see your addiction as the cause of your pain.
2. Those who love an addict/alcoholic are just as powerless over their loved one's addiction as is the addict himself.
3. Co-dependency is revealed and amplified in families who have an addict in their midst, and it results in much irrational behaviour. Co-dependency shows up as obsessive thinking and controlling behaviour.
4. Family members are driven by the illusion that if they obsess and manipulate "effectively", the addict will change his ways. The cruel fact is that he just wants to get high, today, every day. He is sabotaging his life in a vain and hopeless attempt to escape growing up and facing reality.
5. Although there are other ways of dealing with the presence of addiction in our lives, I can only speak to the sanity-saving power that comes with practicing the principals of the Al Anon program.
6. AA is found at www.aa.org Al Anon is found at www.al-anon.org and we are found at www.safehouser rehab.com/

You can listen to all SafeHouse Podcasts at:

<https://safehouser rehab.com/safehouse-podcasts/>