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Season 04. Episode 07

## Podcast Title: You're Not the Victim Here

I'm Bruno J.

Do you know someone who seems to become a victim in nearly every situation? It is possible that they have a victim mentality, sometimes called victim syndrome or victim complex.

There is a difference between a victim mentality and being victimized in the objective sense, for when have we not been an actual victim of something that was indeed no fault of our own? A car accident which someone else caused, or a storm which damaged our home, or some other event which hurt us would qualify us as victims in the rational, objective sense.

Then you ask the big question which is the topic of our episode today. Am I, as a loving parent or a significant other, really a victim of my loved one's addiction? I am not the cause of his addiction, after all, so why should I have to bear the consequences?

As a significant other of an addict or alcoholic, you are set up to see yourself as a victim; you start to internalize this false narrative and you then begin to act in accordance with the script which you have written for yourself.

My intention today is not to banish any trace of victimhood living within you. You will discover that that is your job, but I will also do mine today. I will help you find the help you may need, even if at first you say: "I got this".

Let's first start with a more general view of the victim mentality and see if you nod your head to these three general statements of attitude that suggest victimhood.

*1. Bad things happen and will keep on happening.*

This attitude suggests a sense of hopelessness: there is no way out, no solution, no answer, no end to the torture.

Unfortunately, if there is an addict in the house, then the attitude statement may actually be true because the disease is progressive. If anything, "things" could get worse.

The "things", however, refer to the *circumstances*, the external world, and they are likely impossible to change on your own, while internal change is fully within your grasp.

While circumstances may stay bad, or indeed get worse, *internal change is possible, but only if you start to believe in that possibility.*

*2. Other people or circumstances are to blame...for my life being what it is.*

I often hear in my AI Anon meetings someone say: "Why did this happen to me?" This person has yet to fully grasp the lesson that I will address here today: that you are a victim only if you believe you are one and act like one.

Using the blame word means that the victim is looking to avoid responsibility for the consequences of action taken, or not taken, by the so-called victim. The suggestion here is that the victim's life is completely out of her hands and that she (or he) needs to be rescued from this life.

Magical thinking if you will. "If only" is a common refrain that perfectly captures the fantasy world that victims seem to live in. "If only he would stop abusing drugs, my life would instantly become so much better". I actually heard someone say that in an AI Anon meeting.

*3. Any efforts to create change will fail, so there's no point in trying.*

This is the typical victims' idea that implies that "change" is about external things, as opposed to an *internal shift in attitude which is essential to escaping*

*this "victimized" world by facing reality and thinking in a way that aligns with the truth.*

A wonderfully helpful little book of daily reflections published by Hazelden, now known as Hazelden Betty Ford Institute, is called *Courage to Change*. The point is that it takes courage to change things inside yourself, to relinquish cherished ideas that have become a part of your identity, to surrender to new and more constructive truths.

People who see themselves as victims struggle with self-confidence and self-esteem. They might believe, for example, that since they couldn't get their addict son to stop using despite all the things that they have tried, and despite the hundreds of attempts they have made, then what good are they as parents, or as people? If they couldn't do the one job that they should be really good at, it feels like a stab in the heart.

A key myth that needs to be smashed is the idea that if the addict whom you love really loved you and cared about you, he or she would stop using.

That notion contributes to the idea that you, the caretaker, the caregiver, are really the victim here. Here you are giving your all, while the addict whom you love "could care less".

The reality is that love has nothing to do with it. Addicts and alcoholics who are in the active stages of their disease are in the grip of a powerful compulsion over which he or she has no conscious control whatsoever. Nothing short of a bottoming out -a wake-up call induced by lots of pain and desperation (with the exception of an intervention) - will get the addict or alcoholic to get clean and sober.

The disease is much more powerful than love.

I learned this lesson the hard way. My one and only child, my daughter, decided a while ago that she liked cocaine above anything else in this world. Curious thing is that I was in denial about her drug habit; I did not want to know. The fact that she attended college a thousand miles away from me contributed to the illusion that she was OK.

Once in a while, though, crazy things happened. How she needed money to fly back from Las Vegas, when one would think that a round trip ticket would take care of that worry. Or the time she got evicted because her boyfriend didn't

pay the rent. I called her boyfriend, and he said: "Susie (not her real name here) is the worst coke addict I have ever seen, so I threw her out".

It wasn't until I spoke to a counsellor whom I knew that things became oh so clear to me. I asked him how I was doing in light of what I had learned about my daughter. He said: "Bruno, you are doing fine. You are going to your AA and your Al Anon meetings and you haven't flown down to Texas to rescue your daughter. But I want you to remember this: *Don't let your daughter's disease steal your money or your peace of mind*".

That insight, and some prayers, along with talking to my sponsor in AA, gave me the courage to fly to Texas with a mission in mind. That mission had three parts: 1. To let her know I knew the deal and how her addiction explained all of her crazy behaviour, including the lies that led to me sending her more and more money 2. Let her know it was sink or swim time: no more money, or free apartment, or car unless 3. She would check herself into a rehab, and "Here are some numbers you can call". I had done some homework.

You can probably guess the hardest part: I had to be prepared for the possibility that my daughter would deny everything, would turn her back on me and maybe never be seen or heard from again. I was terrified, but I also found just enough courage to *do the right thing for myself*- stop believing that I was a victim and take some positive action that would bust that self-imposed myth.

Three weeks after our confrontation (the end of the month deadline was coming) my ex-wife informed me that my daughter had checked herself into a rehab in Austin, Texas.

Some powerful lessons were learned arising from this episode:

1. Anyone who finds themselves in a relationship with an addict or alcoholic will come to realize that they can make better choices about their role in the relationship, from that of the victim to that of a detached loved one. That can only happen if the so-called victim seeks help from others in an Al Anon, Co-dependents Anonymous, or therapeutic setting.
2. Because "victims" are inherently pessimistic, defeatist, and blaming, they resist taking responsibility for their attitudes and inaction. It is much easier for a "victim" to blame the external for their emotional reality. It's a familiar and

predictable place: there's a payoff to their helplessness - not much effort required to complain. And still cover for the addict.

I stopped covering for my addict after I realized I was in denial about my daughter's disease, and on the advice of my therapist, called her on her lies.

3. The illusion that victims hold onto is the idea that "things" either will never change or that "things" are only about what's outside of themselves. In other words, they are powerless over everything (including their own attitude), when in fact they have not yet changed their perspective on what the "problem" is: their worldview.

I felt so much pity for poor old me, and I therefore played the role of the martyr which helped me avoid personal responsibility and became part of my self-identity, my script.

My job was to change my personal narrative from helpless victim to a healthy view of a person who was ultimately liberated from the bondage of a disease and the addict that it conquered.

Here's what we've learned today:

1. Loved ones, family members where one of you is an addict, are perfectly set up to become so-called "victims" because addictive disorder is imposed upon you without your permission, without warning.

2. The idea that "bad things will keep on happening" says that "things" are outside themselves and overlook the idea that change needs to happen on the inside if there is any chance of a better life.

3. Blaming others or outside forces is a handy way to duck personal responsibility and it has a payoff: not much work is required to hold onto an infantile attitude and have people feel sorry for you.

4. Those playing the victim role will continue to do so unless someone close to them, someone in a 12-step meeting - or if they're in a therapeutic setting - first shines a light on their self-defeating attitude.

5. The victim then sees that she is only a victim if she believes she is. Perception had become confused with reality. The shift from self-pity to self-assurance arising from faith then becomes possible.