

The Pain of Addiction
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I was going to write about a significant negative aspect of parenting we all can be vulnerable to called overindulgence and then a light went out in my world. A beloved brother-in-law painfully came to the end of his life after dying a slow death from smoking combined with alcohol and drug use. I am heading to Maine soon to continue my grieving, lending comfort & support to my sister and nieces, and attend his memorial service. I am traveling to do something that I have been developing some skill with over the years, but never gets easier. I am going to say good-bye.

Dennis was a wonderful man and a great spirit. I love him always. He was one of the most creative and hardworking men I have known. For miles around his auto body shop in Cape Neddick where he reconstructed only Saab automobiles, people would have their damaged vehicles towed to Dennis' shop. He was the master. The slogan on his business card read "On the Hill, but on the Level." Fair he most certainly was.

We met over 40 years ago when he became smitten with my younger sister, Judy. After they married and purchased an old school house in a suburb of Boston, Dennis not only beautifully renovated the place, but painted pictures of people and their struggles on the walls. He was an artist, a musician and a master tradesman. Wherever they lived since then Dennis always left his creative mark.

He also left a mark of pain with his addictions. When Judy threw him out of the house years ago because of his drinking and drugging with the demand that he get cleaned up or else, he found Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). For some 18 years he was clean and sober, and then the bottom fell out. Secretively he began drinking in his shop. Not much, just a little, but then came illegal drug use, worse than years before. He became out of control, not mean or violent, but consistently anestitized.

Failed rehab after rehab, individual and couples' therapy and then he almost died in a city he had not a clue how he had arrived after walking away from a treatment facility in Arizona or New Mexico. My remarkably resilient sister became even a tougher wall of tough love, preparing for the possible end of their marriage and even his death. Somehow, with the help of many, he came home and for the last 8 years of his life, was clean and sober, attending AA meetings not once, but sometimes twice a day.

But he never gave up the smokes, becoming incapacitated with COPD and then liver cancer. Through his pain he never lost his spirit, his kindness or his sense of humor. His shop next to his house had been idle the past two years. Simply walking there felt like attempting the Peachtree Road Race for Den. With this back drop it was just two weeks ago visiting the emergency room yet another time and waiting to be admitted that Judy looked at her husband struggling with each breath and said, "I was hoping you would do a couple more jobs for me, Den." "You know, Judy" he began with that quirky smile he

had, “you’re not going to believe this, but I was thinking the same thing!” They both chuckled knowing there wasn’t much time left.

“We must combine the toughness of the serpent with the softness of the dove, a tough mind and a tender heart,” wrote Martin Luther King, Jr. I believe it is from that place in my sister that Den lived as long as he did, so I travel to honor both the dead and the living.