**Nancy Espuche**

**Narrator**

**Amy Sullivan**

**Interviewer**

**March 20, 2017**

**St. Paul, Minnesota**

Nancy Espuche -**NE**

Amy Sullivan -**AS**

**AS**: This is Amy Sullivan with Nancy Espuche at her home in St. Paul. It is March 20, 2017. We are back together for part two, as Nancy called it, to discuss what happened in the last few months of Lucas’s life and what Nancy is doing now. We will just take this as a conversation. Can you say you give me permission?

**NE**: I give you permission, Amy.

**AS**: Where would you like to start?

**NE**: Well, honestly I don’t know where I am right now because I feel so lost. I feel very lost. I think what is starting to happen is the shock is wearing and the reality of the finality is really in my face. Not that I ever thought Lucas would come back, but I guess I did. There was so much action and sorrow that I didn’t make room or allow myself to really think about Lucas. Now I want to think about him all the time and I want to push it away all the time because I am afraid to think about him.

I think one of the big challenges for me -- actually, I’ll tell you the challenges my grief therapist told me on Saturday. My situation is a little different in that I had so much trauma for so long. I’m also solo flying. I’m single; I don’t have a partner to really go through this mourning with and Lucas is my only child. I say ‘is,’ I don’t know what to do with that ‘is’ versus ‘was.’ That’s a big one.

I felt left. I really feel left. I fought so hard. I’ve never worked so hard on anything in my life.

**AS**: To keep him sober and safe.

**NE**: To keep him alive. And nothing. There is nothing to do. There is nothing to do. I can’t do anything else. Lucas had a hard life and a life filled with a lot of suffering and that feels really horrible. That’s where I am, sort of. Every morning when I wake up and often when I go to sleep there is a new song in my head every day. Last night it was John Legend’s “They got nothing on you, babe.” Lucas and I listened to that music a lot. I think maybe that’s a message somewhere. The lack of form of Lucas, of his body, evaporating -- I don’t know. It is so hard to digest. For three months I cried. Who knew you could cry so much?

The other piece is the confrontation of the part of me that says you’ve got to go on and the part of me that says I don’t want to. That battle. There is a part of me that doesn’t give a hoot. It doesn’t. About anything including my future. The healthier, higher vibrational part goes, “Come on Nancy, you’re still part of the living. You’ve got to find a way to live.” That snake rears it’s ugly head and goes, “Really? Why?” That’s scary. That lack of desire for anything is scary because all I have been living with for the last number of years was the desire to keep Lucas alive. He consumed all of my thinking, my finances, my activity, my sleep.

**AS**: The last interview was the beginning of June of last summer. Some things happened since then. I thought fall was pretty rocky. Are you able to back in time a little bit?

**NE**: I think in July it was rocky. His acceleration of sadness really started in the summer. He was calling me constantly crying, “I’m scared, I’m scared.”

**AS**: What do you know about what he was doing?

**NE**: I did not know in July. In August Lucas called me to tell me that he had been arrested. I don’t know if he called me or his father called me. Evidently he was driving on something. He told me he had a wobbly tire and there was a problem with the tire. All the same stupid stories he made up his whole life. He was in jail. He called his father, not me, knowing I wouldn’t bail him out. His father said to me that they gave him a breathalyzer that came up clean, but they hired a lawyer. I was thinking, Hold on a second. If his breathalyzer was clean and it was just his tire they don’t put you in jail. What was he doing in jail?

Well, then Lucas proceeds to tell me he had a scale in the car and it was his friend’s scale. Somewhere Lucas must have really thought I was stupid. He really thought I was going to believe this garbage. I called Michael Knoth, one of my contacts in New York who Lucas loved. We had a session and he said, “You need to get to California.” I said, “When?” And he said, “Today.” I flew out that afternoon.

**AS**: Was this a therapist you had worked with?

**NE**: He was the man that I mentioned at Lucas’s service. I called Lucas from the plane and said, “I’ll see you in four hours. I’m on a plane.” I learned at that time that Lucas was doing Xanax which he had a grand mal seizure from in college. Supposedly he got Suboxone. I don’t even honestly remember what it was. He was withdrawing and I had to take him to the hospital one night.

**AS**: You got him out of jail?

**NE**: No, he was already out. His father hired a lawyer. Lucas and I really lay in bed for two days and watched television and slept and ate. I knew we were in trouble when I left, but I didn’t realize how much trouble.

In September Lucas came in for the state fair. Lucas won me that giant bear in the corner. The day that he was leaving he really didn’t feel well. I didn’t connect this because he wasn’t high. I said, “You need to go to a doctor.” By the time he got to California his legs and feet were so swollen -- he sent the pictures to his father -- but I told him he had to go to the hospital. He had a really horrific infection. Almost deadly. If it would have kept spreading it would have killed him.

**AS**: Like sepsis or something?

**NE**: Yes. But I didn’t know people shot in their feet. He was walking around in his underwear in front of me and there’s not a mark on him. That was September.

The beginning of October he called me one night screaming at me that he needed my help and he was vomiting profusely. He couldn’t stop. I said, “Lucas, I’m in Minnesota. You’ve got to call an ambulance.” I didn’t ask him what drug he had took, although that was the turning point for me. That’s when I knew we were in serious trouble.

**AS**: You knew he was using heroin?

**NE**: No.

**AS**: But you knew he was using drugs again?

**NE**: I thought it was Xanax. I ended up calling the Santa Monica police, but they told me he had already called and they were already on their way there. He made up some cock and bull story that he had a kidney stone or appendicitis. I said, “Really? I don’t think so.” It just accelerated from the beginning of October -- crying, screaming, “I’m scared.” I went to see my friends for the party in October -- for Monica’s sixtieth -- and he was high as a kite. I still didn’t know it was heroin, and I had a breakdown.

**AS**: Had he not used heroin before, Nancy?

**NE**: He had, but he had never shot before.

**AS**: Was he using pain pills?

**NE**: He was an OxyContin guy.

**AS**: But now he was shooting up. When he would say he was scared would he ever explain what he was scared of?

**NE**: “What are you frightened of?” “My future, my life.” I said, “Lucas, you need help and I’m here to support that. Tell me what is happening.” He wouldn’t. He just called me everyday, “Don’t stop talking to me. Please keep talking. I need you, mom.” I said, “Lucas, I’m here.” But when I wouldn’t give him money he would say, “You’re abandoning me.” I said, “I think you are confusing money with abandonment. I’m right here. I haven’t gone anywhere. My bank is closed. It doesn’t exist anymore.”

**AS**: Plus, you didn’t have a job at this point.

**NE**: He didn’t care.

**AS**: Right. But you actually had reached a hard place.

**NE**: Correct. It was all about money. He was getting jobs and losing jobs. When I was there at the end of October I was down on my hands and knees. I thought I was having a nervous breakdown. So did Kim and my friends Sierra and Jane. They thought I was having a nervous breakdown. I was pounding on the floor in the garage: “Stop. What’s happening? You have to tell me. What are you doing?” He just stood and watched me. He was void of emotion. It was like I wasn’t there. He didn’t come to the party with me. He lost his wallet, he lost his phone, and his computer was gone. He was aimlessly walking. It was horrendous.

I called the psychiatrist and said, “How did you give him Xanax without knowing his medical history?” He was referred by his therapist. I went berserk on him. I said, “Don’t talk to me about HIPAA [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act], I know all about HIPAA. Everyone has always called me. Lucas has always signed a release. Xanax?” Anyway. It just accelerated. The sobbing, the tears, the fear, the pain. I talked for hours, Amy.

**AS**: How long did you stay in California with him at that point?

**NE**: In October? A few days.

**AS**: Didn’t he come back for a meeting? When did he visit our meeting?

**NE**: Was that before you interviewed me the first time?

**AS**: I thought when he was trying to get clean after he crashed his car.

**NE**: July.

**AS**: That was in the summer? He came and visited and he came to a meeting.

**NE**: He did. He did.

**AS**: That’s when he told us that it wasn’t about us.

**NE**: Yeah. That must have been the summer, I think. He came in September for the State Fair. That’s what it was, it was September.

**AS**: He came with you to the meeting even though he was using.

**NE**: That’s right.

**AS**: He hid it well.

**NE**: He hid it well. But he didn’t want to do the recovery walk.

**AS**: That’s right, but he had done it a year before.

**NE**: I didn’t know he was using then either.

**AS**: He was using during that first recovery walk?

**NE**: When he got arrested I asked him how long he had been using and he said for the last year. He told me he was withdrawing on the recovery walk. Outside of Lucas being swallowed up -- everything came so easy for Lucas except this. Everything. He didn’t have to try at anything. He was exceptionally smart. He was talented in every aspect of creativity. He was a superstar athlete. He was charming, he was funny, he was handsome, and he thought he could do this on his own. He couldn’t and I don’t think he could believe it.

I came back October twenty-sixth and I held on for dear life. I would talk to him and the minute he said, “Hello” I could tell if he was high. He didn’t even have to say a sentence to me.

**AS**: Was this because you had spent that time with him in October?

**NE**: No, I always knew when he was high. Always. I would say, “What are you doing?” He says, “I’m going to work.” I said, “Really? You’re high as a kite. You’re going to work?” This was his response: “Okay, mom.” That’s what he said when he knew that I knew and he didn’t want to admit it. “Okay, mom. I’m going to go now.”

Amy, I knew somewhere. I did. I never really allowed it to penetrate my consciousness, but I knew Lucas wasn’t going to make it. I knew it. I couldn’t own it. I couldn’t take it in. I couldn’t accept it. I couldn’t look at it because who can look at that? It is horrifying. In the depths of my soul I knew it. My awakened mind knew it. I couldn’t hide it from myself.

**AS**: At what point would you say you knew that?

**NE**: Probably four years ago.

**AS**: Really?

**NE**: Yeah. I just kept watching him spiral and do nothing.

**AS**: He couldn’t get a grip on anything to pull himself up.

**NE**: And believe me if he had a fall he had such a net to fall into. He had so many people rooting for him there, available. He couldn’t do it. I hate to say he couldn’t. I also hate to say he didn’t want to. I don’t know what is true. I don’t know which part is true. Maybe both. I don’t really think that Lucas knew how to live on this earth plane. He wrote me some remarkable stacks of letters and poems. He could present and express when he was ‘locked up’ if you will. In a treatment facility. Not towards the latter parts. He fought them; he wasn’t interested. But, the minute he stepped back into the real world he couldn’t do it. The world was too scary to him. He couldn’t find ground. He couldn’t find a way to really participate. He didn’t want to play by the rules here. He wanted to set his own crazy standards.

I think the thing that is so hard for me too is that he became like a thug. He was like a split person. He was the person you met, and he was that, and then he was this thuggish, hanging out with sludge, garbage, awful people.

**AS**: I keep thinking of the road trip story with the drug dealer. They are driving across the country.

**NE**: Yeah. I saw a picture that he had sent me in November. In November he was going to see Tony Robbins in Nevada with his roommate who is very spiritual. He was trying to influence Lucas to the best of his ability. I never really looked at the picture because I didn’t like it. I looked at it not too long ago and it looked like Lucas had a broken nose and a black eye. I was so horrified. I think -- and his father thinks too -- that he was in trouble. I think people were after him for money. I think everything that started to come out of his mouth was a lie to everybody.

I don’t know if you know this. He called me one night at the end of November: “Mom there is something mentally wrong with me. I’m not right. Help me.” I said, “I’m here Lucas. Tell me what.” I said a lot more than just that. I said, “What thoughts are you having? What is in your head? What are you hearing? What are you believing?” He goes, “I don’t know.” He was sobbing. I think he knew how far from reality he was going and that he was living in a very dangerous world. He wouldn’t say it. I said, “Come to Minnesota. Let’s get you out of California. I’m here I’ll get you on the next plane. I’ll come out there.”

**AS**: Because he had lived here for a while.

**NE**: Yeah, but it was a really bad place for him. Then he called me the first week of December at six in the morning and said, “I got it. I had an epiphany.” I went, “Okay, what happened?” I had heard that before that people suddenly had these epiphanies. He said that he understood what this was all about. And what life was all about. I said I wasn’t following. He said he was talking to my father and that my father was on the other side and my father isn’t on the other side. He understood his addiction and what purpose is here in life. Anyway, it was all very confusing, but for me it gave me such a sense of hope in the moment. I thought he had an epiphany.

Now, I think one of two things happened. I think he had a near death experience. Or I think he had a premonition and maybe he was on the other side.

**AS**: Maybe he had overdosed.

**NE**: Yes.

**AS**: He would just not be straight with you.

**NE**: Never.

**AS**: Even around something like that.

**NE**: No.

**AS**: You would get the final statement but you wouldn’t get anything that led up to that.

**NE**: Raymond thought he was cracking up. I thought it sounded like he maybe had got his footing. He was talking to me like a sane person.

**AS**: Sounding like he might be ready for recovery. Is that what you are saying?

**NE**: Yeah. Three weeks later he was dead.

**AS**: Let’s go through December. That was the first week of December?

**NE**: About. Then he swung back into, “I’m so scared. I’m so sad. I want to be happy.” That’s all Lucas said often. I went, “If happiness is your end goal you might as well give it up today. That’s not how the world works.” I couldn’t do it anymore. Every time the phone rang I had a heart attack. It continued like that through December. Maybe that’s when he was with Tony Robbins. The first couple of weeks. Then I saw the epiphany. I don’t remember the dates.

Then at midnight on December nineteenth when the clock was swinging into the twentieth I woke up out of a dead sleep having a severe panic attack. I didn’t know what the heck was happening to me. I was up for four hours. I finally fell back to sleep. My mother called me the morning of the twentieth. We went out to breakfast, and I was crying saying, “I think something is terribly wrong, but I don’t know what.” I texted Lucas that afternoon and never heard from him. Lucas always responded to me. Always. This was about my dad, and he would have definitely responded to me.

**AS**: When was the last time you talked to Lucas?

**NE**: The day he died. The nineteenth.

**AS**: He died on December nineteenth.

**NE**: Around midnight. Around the time I woke up. He was crying hysterically that day. That day I went and paid four thousand dollars for his rent. My father did because he said he was going to get kicked out. It was a horrible day. He called his father and told his father I didn’t give a shit about him because I wouldn’t give him money. I haven’t really thought about that conversation. But, I did say to him, “If my name wasn’t on that lease you can rest assured that you wouldn’t be getting a dime from anybody. I’m only doing this to safeguard myself because I’m the cosigner. It’s not for you, Lucas. It’s for me.” I know I said something like, “You are such an ass. I can’t even stand it.” When we hung up I texted him and said, “I apologize. You are not an ass. You’re behavior is ass-like and it is very hard for me to watch it and to be witness to it and to be on the other side of it.” He wrote me back, “No, mom. I’m an ass.” That was our last communication.

I did learn also that his ex-girlfriend from Hazelden [Betty Ford Foundation], Audrey, who he liked a lot. I don’t know what happened. She was in California, too. They hadn’t spoken in a year. I did learn that she -- and I saw it on his phone too -- she contacted him that night and wanted to see him. He went to see her and she never showed up. He died four hours later. If you think I don’t want to call her and kill her I do. If that’s okay to say here. I wouldn’t do it.

**AS**: It’s just a feeling.

**NE**: She never showed up. The text was, “Audrey this is not a game.” She called him. I haven’t read through half of it. I can’t.

He didn’t call me back or text me. My anxiety was so high.

**AS**: So twenty-four hours later is basically when you wake up or later that night?

**NE**: I woke up for some reason that morning after having fallen back asleep with a feeling of doom. My mother goes, “What are you talking about?” I go, “I don’t know, but something with Lucas. I know it.” When he didn’t respond that day my agitation really heightened. I spoke to a bunch of my friends including Kim and I said, “I haven’t heard from Lucas.” She goes, “Nancy.” “No, Kim. I’m telling you right now.” People think you’re crazy because you’re kids disappear. Lucas never disappeared.

**AS**: Right. You know what their patterns are.

**NE**: I know what his patterns are.

**AS**: Some people might not expect their kid to text back.

**NE**: I went to bed thinking he was really busy and I’ll get a text the following morning. I woke up Wednesday morning and nothing. I texted him again. Nothing. I just knew. I called Raymond at about four o’clock that afternoon and asked if he had heard from Luke. He said he had been trying to get a hold of him for two days. I flipped out. I was hysterical. I said, “I’m telling you something is very wrong.” He said to call his apartment and I said I was too scared. I was afraid to do anything. Really, I froze in time. My friend Jane from New York called and said she was my sister. At this point Raymond also posted something on Facebook unbeknownst to me: Has anyone seen or heard from Lucas?

The building never called Jane back. They said they would try to reach him. I called back at about five o’clock and they said they couldn’t reach him. I said, “You need to go open his door.” They said that the only people that can do that are the police. At that point my brother-in-law called me and said, “What is happening? Raymond posted something on Facebook.” I said, “We hadn’t heard from Luke.” He said, “Lisa and I have been trying to reach Lucas for two days.”

I then called the Santa Monica police. The dispatcher was getting two police to the site. I called my friend Michael and I called my friend Kim. Michael came down; Kim was coming over. The police called and said that no one was answering the door. “We are leaving. I guess he is not home.” I said, “You are not leaving. You’ve got to open that door.” “Why?” “Because he could be behind that door.” They then had to get permission from the building, from me. At which point now Ann is here. It is now six-thirty, a quarter to seven. The police called to say they were entering and they would call back. Nothing. Of course if he wasn’t there they would call me and tell me he wasn’t there. I call back a half hour later. The dispatcher said they were still on site and they would get back to me. Forty-five minutes pass.

It is now eight-thirty and my sister is here. She said, “Nancy. It is a crime scene.” But I didn’t hear anything, Amy. I called back. The dispatcher went, “Oh, Nancy,” and I went, “Yeah?” She said, “They are still on site and they will get back to you.” I said, “You’ve said that now for two hours.” At nine-thirty Lisa called and asked to speak to a sergeant. She said that this was borderline abusive. We need to know what is happening. I went downstairs to have a cigarette with Kim and I came back upstairs. My sister just looked at me and I fell to the floor. He had been dead since around midnight the morning of the twentieth. They were waiting for the coroner and the medical examiner to show up and that was why it took so long. Ann explained that, although I didn’t hear anything. All I did was scream.

I couldn’t get a hold of Raymond that night. He must have gone to sleep. It was a quarter to ten here, which is a quarter to eleven in New York, you know, Eastern Time. Lisa stayed here and called Raymond the following morning. We got him on a plane here. My friends Jane and Emily flew in. In the Jewish religion they don’t do an autopsy. I would have done it anyway, but with the crime scene they automatically do it. They never even asked me. Lisa did everything. She got in touch with the coroner, the medical examiner, I don’t know who. She got in touch with the funeral home in Pasadena. Palisades is about a half an hour from Los Angeles. Raymond and I booked flights to get out there. We left Christmas day. They told us they were doing a brain and a full body autopsy. I didn’t know what an autopsy really meant and then I looked. You’re like a shell after that. That was it.

Raymond and I went out there. I didn’t think I wanted to see Lucas, but Raymond definitely did. We asked the head of the funeral home if he thought we should see Lucas. He said, “Yes.” There was a towel around his head because of the autopsy. I did see some hair. He had a sheet covering him from the neck down, but it was Lucas. It looked just like Lucas. I couldn’t get off of him. We went to the apartment and did work and then I had to leave and Raymond finished it without me. I’m talking as if I’m not talking about my child because it’s too much. It’s just too much. Some days I think I could take those ashes over there and put him back together. I do. Did you see this? Some of his ashes are in here.

**AS**: Wow. That’s beautiful.

**NE**: As a matter of fact I was in New York at the camp and then his soccer team did a beautiful memorial for him. It was amazing.

**AS**: Where was that? New York?

**NE**: You have no idea the outpouring from all over this country. Yeah, his soccer team did a thing. His coaches. Thirty kids showed up.

**AS**: Was this high school or college?

**NE**: It was high school and traveling. Some of his friends from high school had films of him playing soccer. They gave me that picture. They had two blown up pictures of the team they mailed to me. The team was called the Galaxy. They had a Galaxy ball that everybody signed. The coaches were sobbing. The kids spoke and were crying. It was probably one of the nicest nights of my life. His camp friends and his ex-girlfriend came.

**AS**: His high school girlfriend?

**NE**: The one from camp. The only girl he really ever cared about besides Audrey. When I saw Brooke I was like, “Oh my god.” So many people showed up. Brooke just sent me pictures of her and Lucas two days ago. I got an email two days ago from this kid on his floor that said, “I just learned. Lucas used to play with my dog all the time. I loved your son.” We talked.

**AS**: Was this in California?

**NE**: You can’t believe how many people in California reached out to me. I had no idea. His lawyer wrote me: “Lucas changed my life. I’ve never had this experience with a client. He was a remarkable young man.” I mean hundreds. I had over a hundred and fifty cards up there. I had no idea the impact. None. Teachers, the owner of the camp, coaches, my babysitter who was with us for years. Loved Lucas; came to the soccer thing and the camp thing. He either didn’t feel it or couldn’t feel it.

**AS**: He had an addiction, Nancy.

**NE**: I know.

**AS**: It just hijacks their brain.

**NE**: I know. It is a very hard thing for me to accept. I can’t really embrace -- and I do, up here -- but I can’t embrace that he couldn’t do it. You know what I mean? I thought he would do it for me. I did. I thought he would do it for me. I really did. Even though I knew.

**AS**: Even though you know scientifically and intellectually and spiritually that you have to do it for yourself.

**NE**: We were that close. Having lived with so much trauma and insanity for so many years I also didn’t think that God would let my story end this way. I didn’t. I thought the ending would be good. Somewhere down the line. I didn’t know where that would be.

**AS**: That’s what kept you going through the struggle. Is that what you are saying?

**NE**: Yeah. I did have hope. Lucas always talked about how he wanted to get married and have five kids and he really did. I thought he would. I thought I would be a grandmother and have a daughter in-law and watch my son change other people’s lives the way he did unbeknownst to me. People wrote me that, “He saved my life.” There was a mother at the service who flew in from Chicago because Lucas saved her son’s life. I didn’t even remember her. She remembered me from the family program at Hazelden.

**AS**: What did he do? Did she tell you?

**NE**: She said he was just there one hundred percent for Joey all the time. And Joey had no idea that he was struggling. People asked me, “Why didn’t he share. We had no idea.”

**AS**: So it wasn’t just you.

**NE**: No.

**AS**: That’s pretty powerful.

**NE**: He had so much shame. He couldn’t admit that this was who he could be and this is who he turned out to be. He couldn’t bridge the two and the devil won. Evil won. I’m actually afraid to get back his toxicology report. They told me it would take six to ten months. The state of California once they get it back they send it to a secondary firm. They want to make sure the two match. I don’t even want to know what was in his system. I’m sure he had Xanax, I’m sure he had heroin. I mean they found the needle. There was one needle that was empty and one needle that was still full, which makes me think the first needle had a lot of Fentanyl in it.

I don’t get it. When I spoke the neuroscientist, I said, “How do you explain it?” He said, “We really have no idea yet.” I have a theory because listening to Gabor Maté and how he said things often skip a generation. I don’t know if all of our drug use impacted our kids. Everybody now, including this doctor --

**AS**: Do you mean people who use drugs -- parents who used drugs in the sixties and seventies?

**NE**: Because Maté said to a degree that epidemiology now -- that layer that lives above the genetic level that everyone is talking about now.

**AS**: Epigenetics?

**NE**: Epigenetics. That everything is stored on the cellular level. That we pass everything on on a cellular level. I wasn’t a huge druggie, but I drank plenty of alcohol and I partied. I certainly had my share of cocaine. I don’t know. I don’t know. Certainly I have plenty of friends whose kids did plenty of pot smoking. Some of them have problems.

**AS**: Yeah, but some of them are fine.

**NE**: Yeah, but the population that is not fine is so big. How come? It’s not just -- I don’t know. I don’t know if it is technology, I don’t know if it is a breakdown in humanity and a lack of the family unit. I don’t know.

**AS**: I think that opioids have a different impact on the brain because we have opioid receptors and our body wants it. We have a place in our brain for that particular plant chemical.

**NE**: Once you start doing them it naturally turns off your own --

**AS**: Right. And then you need more and more and it changes your brain. That’s what Bob Levy was talking about the other night at the meeting when he came. He was reiterating how different opioids are in the brain than other drugs. Opioids actually can take over your frontal lobe, but the part the opioid is responding to is your old brain, your amygdala, which takes over your frontal lobe. All the lying and the cheating and the stealing and hiding, all that stuff that it does.

One thing that might be interesting to you to hear -- because he didn’t say this the first time -- he said they are finding now that genetics and addiction have about a forty percent correlation. If you are related to someone who is an addict or was an addict you have a forty percent chance of becoming one yourself. But one of the things some of this research is talking about is this kind of shield, and this is kind of like the epigenetic idea of the switch, and they are trying to understand why some of us are so susceptible to addiction and other people just aren’t. The analogy he used was a shield: we all come into the world with a shield, but some of us have a really thick shield. Things can happen to us that don’t prompt addiction. Other people come into the world with a much thinner shield and it is very easy for that shield to be penetrated. That to me puts together all of the things we have been learning about and that we have talked about, you and I, and in our group. It is a shield. What we give to our children and what they get from the world and what they get genetically and experientially, who they come into the world as with their own personalities. I think that shield metaphor really makes sense to me and it fits with Maté’s thing about how trauma can create a tendency towards addiction.

**NE**: What’s interesting though is what the addiction really does is it tries to thicken your shield.

**AS**: You try to protect yourself, which is ironic.

**NE**: It is so ironic.

**AS**: The very thing that makes you feel safer is actually killing you.

**NE**: Right. They do say that people who really do struggle with addiction are heightened. They are more sensitive. They are thin skinned that way.

**AS**: And often don’t feel at peace in their body or in the world.

**NE**: That was Lucas.

**AS**: I think we know a lot of kids like that.

**NE**: Yeah. This very, very sensitive -- where you could touch and it could feel like a punch. Also, Lucas, I may have mentioned this to you, had a lot of neural sensitivity. As a kid he would say, “Get this shirt off of me.” “Why?” “It is itchy and uncomfortable.” He was heightened. “I don’t like this sock. It doesn’t fit me right.” You know? He had neuro stuff, body stuff that was sensitive to whatever it is. That’s what this doctor was saying. He said your brain is completely rewired from opiate use.

**AS**: Levy said that the other night. He said there are parts of his brain that will never heal from his own drug use.

**NE**: They have found, I’m sure you’ve heard this, in mice -- have you heard this about mice and cocaine? Mice who became highly addicted to cocaine they found a place in their brain that they can zap. They zap it and they put the mice back in the cage with mounds of cocaine and they won’t go near it. That is what they are trying to isolate and identify in humans. Neuroscientists at the University [of Minnesota] are studying the brain and addiction. I said, “How close are you?” He said, “We are closer, but we are still very far away. There are different transmitters for triggers, cravings, and memory. Even though you can get control of one the triggers still remain. It’s not like the cravings ever fully go away. We are trying to study the exact part of the brain where the cravings, triggers, and memory come together. Mice don’t have a complex brain so we were able to identify the craving or the addiction part.” That is what they are trying to understand: what actually happens to the brain. What gets rewired and what gets activated. Certain parts of the brain get turned off. Look, we hear a song and we think of our boyfriend from four hundred years ago. [laughs] We smell something and I go, “Oh my god, that smells like camp.” We hear a noise and think of our crazy father. People say, “That reminds me of my father when he went to work.” You go immediately to fight or flight.

**AS**: I think those are things that -- the song you are waking up with everyday, the songs that are coming back to you as part of that memory bank. It is healing you, it is coming back, it is flooding you with memories that will comfort you in some way. It seems like it is part of the grieving process.

**NE**: It may be part of the grieving process, but it doesn’t comfort me. It makes me sob non-stop.

**AS**: I don’t mean -- just some things become alive again.

**NE**: Yes.

**AS**: This happens to me in yoga or something when you aren’t thinking of anything and suddenly something pops in your head and you are like, Where did that come from? Just some random memory.

**NE**: It has been resonating. That is the interesting thing about epigenetics. Is everything really stored on a cellular level?

**AS**: And maybe a lot is stored that is never really needed or accessed. The shield idea. If you don’t ever come upon drugs if you had a thin shield it might not matter. It just seems so random. What Maté was talking about with grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. Why do they have these high levels of depression?

**NE**: They do. They do. I also know the parents of those people and the parents were the children of the people. They have such heightened levels of anxiety. For one woman if there was less than one gallon of milk in the house she would have a complete nervous breakdown. She would always have to have two gallons in the house just in case they ever ran out. She was anxious; the kids end up with depression. I don’t know.

**AS**: You came back and you had the memorial service, which was so beautiful.

**NE**: I haven’t listened yet. It was. That’s what happened. I went into action.

**AS**: That shielded you for a while.

**NE**: It shielded me. It kept me in shock.

**AS**: I think we stay in shock for a while after trauma like that.

**NE**: I had other friends that came out. I went to New York. I have these silos, these different compartments of emotion. It’s like that jack-in-the-box. They come up and go, “Ah!” And the other one comes up and goes, “Ah!” All of them are very different than what I want to have in my heart, which is compassion, and understanding, and adoration, and love for Lucas. But I have so many other things going on right now. I don’t like that.

**AS**: Like what?

**NE**: Like, “Why did you come here?” I feel tortured. I do, I feel very beat up. In that Nar Anon room people say, “My child is coming back to me, they were who they were.” Lucas was tough from day one. He wasn’t an angelic, perfect little kid. What he had was what he had, so naturally had everything going for him. He had a lot of rage and a lot of anger. Last night that’s all I could feel in my head. All of it banging in my walls, telling me where to go, the stealing, the apologies, and then the stealing. You might have been there when I said my therapist in New York said, “Nancy, love is a verb.” When I remember that I feel really bad, too.

**AS**: Why?

**NE**: Because Lucas told me all the time how much he loved me. But he acted contrary to that very often, and before he did drugs he was tough. I was really a single parent.

**AS**: You loved him. Does the rage make you feel like you didn’t love him enough?

**NE**: You know Amy, the rage was tough.

**AS**: Can you hold those two things together: the love and the rage? Or does that not feel --

**NE**: I think it was safer to have those two things when he was alive. He made it hard to love him sometimes. Sometimes I felt like I didn’t love him at all. There were times that I thought if he wasn’t my child I would want nothing to do with this person. They don’t feed my soul. There is no give and take here. There is no gentle kindness consistently. Who I am and what I am going through doesn’t matter. I’m left with a lot of output. There was so much output.

**AS**: You were feeling empty.

**NE**: I’m empty. I feel empty and left. I do. Some people say, “Things were so good for a month or two years or five years and then they relapsed,” but they had a period of time where there was rejuvenation. Sort of a resurrection of a healthy relationship.

**AS**: You didn’t have that.

**NE**: No, never. Lucas walked out of the first rehab and bought drugs. The second one I went down there and left early because he was doing drugs. The one at Hazelden -- he walked out and did drugs. He never really got sober I don’t think.

**AS**: Would he tell you that he was sober?

**NE**: Yeah, he would.

**AS**: Was his dishonesty part of the rage, too? Was it all just mushed together?

**NE**: That’s an interesting question. Now that you say that maybe that’s why I feel so left because he didn’t leave me with any truth. If he would have told me he was struggling -- I feel used. I was the one he called all the time. I was the one who heard it all, but I didn’t hear the truth. I was trying to help somebody who was being completely dishonest. And he was counting on me, calling me, and expecting me to be there. And I was for years. And he wasn’t even standing on his face. You know when they say ‘standing on your mat?’ He wasn’t even standing on his mat. He was lying. He was not true. Even when I asked him. Even when I said, “Lucas, you are high as a kite right now.” “Okay, mom.”

**AS**: You never got any acknowledgement that you knew what was going on from him either. That would make me enraged.

**NE**: That’s why I think I almost had a nervous breakdown in October. I said, “Do you think I’m a freaking idiot? Look at you! What do you think I’m seeing!” It is crazy making. It’s like having a sociopath in front of you.

**AS**: I don’t know any sociopaths, but it might be worse. Someone who is trying to make you crazy.

**NE**: I started to feel crazy. I am watching, listening there and, “You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

**AS**: Right. Slurring his words and nodding off.

**NE**: Completely. Maybe that’s it. Maybe all the work --

**AS**: With no acknowledgement of the truth of what was happening.

**NE**: Why put me through that? Why count on me that way? Why make me privy to all of your misery, your heartache, your suffering. For what? So I should suffer, too? And I suffered, and he knew it. When I came home from that trip he called me. He said, “I’m glad you broke down.” I said, “You’re glad I broke down?” He said, “Yeah, because you had all of that stored inside of you and you really needed to let it out.” He didn’t say because it was legitimate, he didn’t say, “Because I’m using heroin.” He didn’t say, “Because I need help.” Yeah. Maybe that’s it, or a big piece of it.

**AS**: I don’t know anyone who would deny you the right to feel angry in this situation. Even with the great loss and sadness. The anger about addiction and what it does to people is completely justifiable.

**NE**: And as I said he was not easy or the most honest person to begin with. This just exacerbated an already obvious tendency. I wanted him to plop himself on that chair and say, “I’m going to make it all up to you.” The way he used to say. “I’m going to show up and I’m going to be the son you want me to be and the son I want to be for you.” Okay, well you know what? You took that away too. My head goes to that spiritual side. Lucas and I were meant to be together and this happened for a reason and I do go there. I do. Even though my faith is in the garbage right now I still have that sense of myself and know this was for something and it wasn’t for nothing.

There is a woman who is in my grief group who is also in our Nar Anon group, and the other day she said, “I feel so peaceful.” I’m like, “Really?” She’s way ahead of me in this game of time, but she said, “Every day I wake up I know I am closer to seeing my son again.” I’m going, “Really? Every day I get up my son goes farther from me.” The juxtaposition of those two thoughts. She’s happier than me. She’s finding peace. Not peace, but that’s the way she holds it. I have too much rage right now.

I did speak to a medium, I should tell you. Yesterday. She told me that Lucas was really good, and that made me really angry. He’s good and I’m sitting here miserable, suffering. She said what another psychic said to me in October: Lucas was not from this earth plane. He could not find his way on it. He came in like a warrior and was never comfortable or safe here. But that didn’t help me. She said, “Are there a bunch of people that he knew?” I said, “Yeah, he lost a bunch of friends.” “They are all doing this Buddha chanting and talking about what they did.” Because he lost a lot of friends to addiction. She said it was with a bunch of people. She asked who the Russians were around him, and I said it was my grandparents. My mother’s parents. I don’t know if it was them or not, but she said he was good. It didn’t help. I wish it did. I want him to be peaceful.

**AS**: You want to be peaceful.

**NE**: I do. Being his mother I want him to be peaceful first. She says he is.

**AS**: But you just said it didn’t help.

**NE**: It doesn’t, but I wish it for him. It doesn’t yet, maybe it will. I don’t know, Amy. I never thought at sixty-one I would be facing my parents who are eighty-nine, my sister who has leukemia, my dog who is fifteen, and not have Lucas. And not have a mate. Time will tell. Was this what you wanted?

**AS**: I have another question. I wondered about the follow-up to when you had his phone and you told me you called the number he had been calling. Did anything ever come of a drug dealer or anything in LA?

**NE**: No. Did I tell you he got a text? It said, “Got Roxy?” I called the Santa Monica police. That was the second time I spoke to the Santa Monica police. They asked for Lucas’s phone number. I think they were trying to pin people. I don’t know what happened; I never heard from them. I was very tempted to follow up with them. There was a woman there -- I know who she is through these texts. She said, “You’ve got to get off drugs.” But then she was giving him drugs and is an addict herself. I said, “You could call about Cat.”

**AS**: Is that her name?

**NE**: Her nickname or something. I went, I don’t know if I want to put my energy here.

**AS**: Someone said you could call and report her?

**NE**: The sergeant from the narcotics bureau said, “Call me anytime.” I didn’t want to spend my energy there. I was going through emails and everything and I never heard back from them. California is different from Minnesota, too. They go after the dealers much more actively here. No, nothing was put to rest. I see what Sam is going through. Now they changed the court date. The defense attorney now is trying to separate all the cases. Of course he is. He is working on behalf of his client. If they find something out and they let us know, great. I told them I want to know. I don’t want to go fishing.

**AS**: Yeah, you don’t want to dig through all of his stuff.

**NE**: I have it all on his phone and his computer. I have stayed away right now. I look through the texts. There are over two thousand I have to read. I said, No, Nancy. You have your whole life to read this stuff. Some of it is really going to hurt you. He was suffering. The night he died he was really suffering. I saw those texts. He was vomiting profusely; he was very sick. That’s horrible to learn. It’s such a crazy thing. I think about the Nar Anon group and I think it is a beautiful thing that I can show up there and other people that have lost their child. I’m not there.

**AS**: How is your grief group doing for you?

**NE**: It only meets once a month. I have a grief therapist that I started with and I see once a week that I like a lot. Even the grief group is a little hard for me because people are talking about their gratitude. I don’t have it. And I’m the only one with an only child.

**AS**: That would make a big difference I would think.

**NE**: For me it does. My cabin is empty. I don’t know what I am going to do. I am proceeding with Facing Addiction; I’m proceeding with Cardboard House.

**AS**: What are you doing with Facing Addiction? What are your thoughts on that and why that group?

**NE**: I don’t really know yet what I’m doing with them other than I’m collaborating on different things. I’m trying to formalize in my head what I’m trying to do with them and find out what they want to do with me. I don’t really know where we tie the bow.