**Gloria Englund**

**Narrator**

**Amy Sullivan**

**Interviewer**

**June 28, 2016**

**At the Narrator’s Home**

**Richfield, Minnesota**

**AS**: This is Amy Sullivan it is June 28, 2016. I’m with Gloria Englund in her home in Edina? Minneapolis?

**GE**: Richfield.

**AS**: Richfield, Minnesota. The awesome Richfield, Minnesota. Gloria could you just state your name and tell me that you give permission for me to record?

**GE**: I’m Gloria Englund and I give permission for this interview.

**AS**: Okay. Thanks. If you could just start by talking about your, just for a little bit, about your childhood, your education and move in to early motherhood, career, things like that.

**GE**: So I was born and raised in Hastings, Nebraska which is a town of 25,000. It was a very safe, wonderful place to be. I had a father who travelled five days out of the week. I had three other brothers, two older and one younger. My mom had her hands full, all the time. I was a tomboy because there wasn’t time for me to be a girl until they left. Finally in high school she started caring that my hair was combed.

**AS**: That’s great [Laughs].

**GE**: My mother was pretty much an introvert, very dedicated to her family, didn’t have a high school education. Her job was mother and homemaker. I thought she did a pretty good job of taking care of four kids without my dad around much. You never really knew. I have more of my father’s personality; he’s more of an extrovert. You kind of know just where you stood with him all the time. When something would happen to one of us kids my mother was like a lion. She was, nobody was going to do anything to her kids. I write about this in the book. I just learned that is was really important to stand up for your kids, let them take their share of what they dish out but there comes a point when the parent steps in. You protect your kids no matter what. I never doubted, I just had a pretty good, I had a good childhood. Except for one thing. I don’t know whether I want you to include this in the interview.

**AS**: Okay.

**GE**: In the written interview.

**AS**: Oh okay. That’s fine.

**GE**: I’d be lying if I didn’t tell you about it. There was incest. One of my brothers and I. I did not remember, and he’s still alive that’s why I don’t want it to get out. Although I have dealt with it with him but he didn’t remember it. I was twenty and it was a writing class. It was a suppressed memory. I did remember asking my mother, when the memory came back to me. When I got up that next day I said, “Did Gale come into my bedroom last night and try to do things to me? Or was I dreaming?” My mother said, “Oh it was just a bad dream.”

It was hid until I was in this writing class and I was asked to think of a time in your life when you feel the safest and secure, in your childhood. For me it was taking a bath on a summer night and my mom had put clean sheets on my bed. I’d always sleep at the end of the bed, next to the window, so the breeze would come in those hot summer nights. Sixty five years ago we didn’t have air conditioning, sixty five years ago. It was one of those times when my brother raped me.So in the class it was kind of a meditative experience. I had never meditated, never been in an altered state. I was in my early twenties. This memory was just like right there. I just didn’t know what to do. I just started writing as fast as I could.

**AS**: How old were you?

**GE**: Early twenties.

**AS**: No, I mean when it happened.

**GE**: I think eight, seven, eight, nine. My brother was twelve or thirteen, just beginning puberty. When I went back then at twenty and asked my mom, that’s when she said, “I thought it was just better to remember it as a bad dream.” You got to understand. My mother had no high school education.

**AS**: I know. I know.

**GE**: She was trying to protect everybody, never told my father. If my father would have found out my brothers, he would never have dealt with it properly; he would have beat my brother. I know he would have. Not beat him but there would have been, nobody would have got counseling. You didn’t do that back then, you just beat them up.

**AS:** Right, exactly.

**GE**: My older brother who also came in because I made noise and my mother and my older brother came in. So he knew it was going on. So I went to him and said, “Remember this happened.” “Yes, Mom said don’t tell Dad.” So I went to therapy. I thought I had dealt with all of it. Then flash forward another twenty years. I am divorced and remarried to Bob who is the kindest, most loving, understanding person there is. Probably the first time in my life [Dog Barks] that I ever felt safe. I do go back and I have this conversation with my brother because we were always very close. [Whispers to Dog]. That’s right, the recorders going I’m sorry.

**AS**: It’s okay [Laughs]. I’ll warn my students. They’ll jump in their chair.

**GE**: So I make a trip back to Nebraska to confront my brother.

**AS**: Wait so this is in your twenties or your forties?

**GE**: This is twenties after therapy.

**AS**: Okay. You were just talking about your husband.

**GE**: I’m sorry. First time I went back, I confronted my brother and he lived back in Grand Island, Nebraska still. He said, “I know why you want to meet. I know why you called me now. You’re right it happened. I don’t ever think about it.” I said, “I just want you to know I forgive you. I hope you’ve gotten help.” He said “I’ve talked to many ministers.” And blah blah. Then he said, “Nothing’s going to change between us. If you lived across the street from me I wouldn’t be any closer than I am to you now.” I mean he just wanted to stay up on the cross. I wanted to forgive him and get my brother back because he and I were like this as kids until that happened. I came back to Minnesota and lived another twenty years. I divorced my…you know it was just kind of gone. I didn’t really have any huge emotional, the memory came without a lot of emotion. It was a very mental experience. The therapy was very mental. Twenty more years of my life goes by, I get divorced, I get remarried, I have two stepsons, Aaron started acting out before my husband and I got divorced. A lot of trauma going on.

**AS**: So Aaron is your biological son?

**GE**: Aaron is my biological son. Jeff is my biological son. Marty and Matt are my two stepsons. Matt and Jeff are just six months apart. Marty is the youngest, he’s three years younger. Aaron was four years older than Jeff. When Bob and I got married Aaron was running away from home a lot. Aaron never lived with us when Bob and I got married. Aaron was on the streets from the time he was fifteen.

**AS**: Okay. So sorry. Twenty years…

**GE:** Twenty years later my brother who raped me gets rectal cancer. That was the way that I was raped. My mother calls to tell me, “I want you to know Gale’s been diagnosed with colorectal cancer. I thought you’d want to know.” I’m finally in a relationship and a family where I have, I guess, total trust. Then I start reliving. I have PTSD and all the stuff that comes along with being raped and incest. What I did after I got my Master’s degree, I got a Master’s degree after I got divorced, was going to work as a psychotherapist so I could make enough money to support my kids.

**AS**: What was your undergraduate degree in?

**GE**: English.

**AS**: Okay.

**GE**: Writing. English teaching. Never had a teaching job either. I couldn’t find one in 1970.

**AS**: You’re going to get your Master’s. So you did get it?

**GE**: I did get my Master’s degree but I couldn’t earn enough money. I found out about this company, Sunrider International because I was looking for an alternative to Ritalin for Aaron. He’d been diagnosed with ADHD. They had a product called Ease that really worked well for him. I did all my homework, I talked to other parents. I didn’t know about all these. Ritalin kind of calmed him down but it stunted his growth, he lost fifteen pounds. It was not a good solution for him. When this worked for him I started…to make a long story short I had a twenty year career in a multi-level marketing company. I supported our family doing that. All that marketing degree, all that marketing experience, all that experience in entrepreneurship was why I had no problems stepping into this other entrepreneurial thing as a recovery coach. All this public speaking training, all this personal development training in this business. I think that’s why, I think all that prepared me for what I’m doing now. I think there was a bigger plan. I started experiencing all this trauma and I go back to my mom and my oldest brother. They deny that it ever happened.

**AS**: Oh my goodness. Even after those conversations twenty years ago?

**GE**: Yes.

**AS**: They’d never heard you.

**GE**: My mom said, “I just can’t do that to Gale.” I said, “I’m not asking you to do anything to Gale. I’m just asking you for some support here.” I couldn’t even think about seeing him. I don’t know when I’ll be able to go to a family event again. I don’t know what I’m going to be capable of. I was in full blown PTSD. I couldn’t work.

**AS**: It was only then that you truly remembered physically what had happened to you?

**GE**: No. None of the emotional trauma…

**AS**: Had emerged. Oh yes.

**GE**: I couldn’t sleep with Bob. We couldn’t have sex for a long time. I couldn’t have people come up behind me and tap me on the shoulder. I just was hyper vigilant about everything. I just told my mom and my brother. I said, “I don’t want to have anything to do with you. I can’t do this. You are not being supportive. I don’t know why you’re lying.”

**AS**: So it was your, which brother is it?

**GE**: My oldest brother.

**AS**: But not the one who…

**GE**: No. No. I never re-contacted my other brother.

**AS**: Did he survive?

**GE**: What do you mean?

**AS**: Did he live through the cancer?

**GE**: Oh yes. He did.

**AS**: Okay.

**GE**: Yes, he did. I’m sorry. Yes he did. That’s the non-support that I got from my mom. Then I realized after about nine months of that that I was losing all these other connections to my nieces. I had grand-nieces and nephews that were being born. I called my mother and brother and said, “You know what? I want to start coming back to family things. But between the two of us we can never speak about this again. I don’t ever want you to bring this up to me and talk to me about it again. It’s a dead subject between the two of us.” They both agreed. That’s how I managed to get back to my family.

**AS**: Wow.

**GE**: My mother did give me; I did go to my mother and ask for a thousand dollars for EMDR treatment. Which in the early nineties, there was one therapist here in town that I heard of. I had all this therapy, all this talk therapy wasn’t working. I thought I’m tired of this; I want to get him out of my head.

**AS**: Did it work for you?

**GE**: Yes it did.

**AS**: It worked for me. It was a miracle.

**GE**: I just recommend it so highly to everybody. Aaron had some success with EMDR. My mother, I had that treatment in February, March, April, May of ’96. My mother died in January of ’97. My brother who raped me was the executor of the estate. I was able to go back to Nebraska and give him a big hug, thank him for everything, no trigger. He is not a triggering person to me in any way, shape, or form. When Aaron died he showed up. I’m very close to both of his daughters. It’s all come full circle. There’s just some things you can’t talk out or change. As long as they didn’t keep rejecting me, we didn’t keep talking about it.

**AS**: They didn’t keep denying your truth.

**GE**: Right. It worked out. As a psychotherapist you’ve got to get the answer, you’ve got to get closure on everything. Guess what? No. [Laughs]. Other than that I had a very lovely childhood. [Laughs]. I don’t know how we would talk about that.

**AS**: In relation to what we’re going to talk about?

**GE**: I mean, yes.

**AS**: Well what it says to me. All I can do is say that I relate completely. My mother was raped repeatedly from very, very young into her teenage years when her brother took over. She didn’t remember any of it until she was forty-one. She remembered the part with her brother. She was diagnosed with Multiple Personality Disorder. She had gone through a suicidal phase, when I was seventeen, and the psychiatrist in the psych ward wouldn’t let her talk about her childhood. He only wanted to focus on her marriage.

**GE**: It takes all kinds.

**AS**: That was in ‘84. By ‘92 things had changed in terms of talking about it. Then there’s also the False Memory Syndrome which set her back a lot. She confronted her father and she lost all of her siblings. She now talks to two of them.

**GE**: Because of all of this.

**AS**: They disowned her. They didn’t even tell her when their dad died.

**GE**: He’s the one that raped.

**AS:** Oh yes, her dad. So I understand very deeply the consequences of what incest does to a family.

**GE**: What my brother asked me with our initial conversation when I said I forgive you and I want to go on. He said, “Are you going to tell Linda and my daughters?” I said, “Gale that’s between you and your wife and your daughters.”

**AS**: Yes. That won’t be me.

**GE**: Not going to be me. I said, “I love Linda and I love your daughters.” [Dog Barks].

**AS**: I jump when the dogs bark. [Laughs]. If I’m standing up I’m fine.

**GE**: It’s the UPS drivers. She thinks she has control over it because she barks and then it goes away.

**AS**: Oh yes. I don’t know Gloria maybe at some point later as we’re talking. I mean to me, the things that you experienced, that incident as a child prepared you. Your attempt at healing from it is what gave you the training and the insight into the kind of havoc and trauma that addiction can reap. Right?

**GE**: Aaron was abused by a babysitter. He remembered it. Of course people thought it’s just a drug. It came up after smoking pot. I begged him and begged him and begged him. He knew, my kids knew what had happened. I said, “You have to get help now.” I think that part of the therapy, after he came back here and tried to recover. When he was in the height of his using he wouldn’t deal with it. I tried and tried. How do you make somebody do something? How do you make your kid do? I mean if I had the answer to that.

**AS**: I mean you don’t. You couldn’t send them away.

**GE**: “I can’t believe after what you went through you didn’t just make him.” I said, “How am I going to make him do that?” That’s all part of my story. You can’t make anybody do anything. You got to love them where they’re at. Remind them. Part of one of the reasons why you may not sleep at night is because of this. They need some help.

**AS**: So he was using…maybe we should back up and talk about Aaron.

**GE**: Aaron.

**AS**: First born.

**GE**: First born. Very ugly baby, very beautiful person.

**AS**: [Laughs].

**GE**: Very pointed head, erratic labor and delivery. I had two miscarriages before him. He would often say, “I don’t know why I wasn’t just one of those miscarriages and just died.” He hated his life, just so much. “Why couldn’t I have been one of those miscarriages?”

**AS**: When did he start saying that?

**GE**: Pretty deep in his addiction when he was trying to recover. He was a miracle baby. One of those vivacious, incredibly demanding, insightful, intuitive kids. Like all people with substance disorders are.

**AS**: It seems that way. Almost everyone describes their child like that.

**GE**: Extremely sensitive and very bright and picked up on, I’m sure, the marital discord. His younger brother when I told him we were getting divorced, Aaron said, “Well I wondered when.” And Jeff said, “What are you talking about?” Totally not aware that there was any problems in there. Probably I told Aaron too much. My former husband travelled all the time. Aaron was kind of my surrogate partner; inappropriately I’m sure at some point. I don’t know. He was pretty aware of the discord. There was always dragging into family therapy, trying to save the marriage. My former husband became the bad guy because he was an alcoholic and wouldn’t give any time to family. Based upon what you know about me I of course had abandonment issues that I think came out that way.

He didn’t have a particularly easy childhood until we divorced. He just wasn’t going to follow any custody arrangements. So he started running away from home. That actually happened, I’m trying to remember. I don’t know how much of the running away from home had to do with drug use. I really don’t know. I never talked to him about that. If he ran away from home so he could use drugs or if that became part of…As he got older and with the ADHD school became more of a challenge, he couldn’t coast. The less he could coast the more disruptive he would become.

**AS**: Where did he go to school?

**GE**: Bloomington. Bloomington Public Schools. Finally we put him in Minnehaha Academy his seventh grade year hoping that a more structured environment would help. He found the element there. His best friend’s name was Aaron also. They started smoking pot and messing around. It didn’t seem to help.

**AS**: Is that when he first started smoking pot, in seventh grade? Do you think it was before that?

**GE**: I would say. Well Aaron, and I have this in the book, Aaron’s first experience with euphoria was accidentally sniffing gas when he was mowing the lawn. He never forgot how that felt. [Long Pause]. I never found that out until he was in treatment. He was in his twenties before I ever heard that story. I think he stole alcohol when he was eleven, twelve and then we started locking it all up. I imagine he was smoking pot then. I know for sure by the time he was thirteen and fourteen it was a pretty regular thing. I think he was doing mushrooms, I think he was drinking. It all started in his early teen years.

I was divorced by then, I was in graduate school, Bob and I had connected. I was madly in love. He was madly hating the whole thing. The divorce, not that he knew the divorce wasn’t justified for me, but he hated, he was mad at the world. I guess the way he chose to act. I don’t know if Ed and I would have stayed married if he wouldn’t have done the same thing. I don’t know. I get really mad when people talk about broken homes.

**AS**: Yes me too because I made one too. I broke one.

**GE**: I broke one too.

**AS**: I’m not making light of it but there’s a stigma around that as well. If you do have a child who has an addiction that is always the reason. We never talk about the children of the parents who are still together; it must be because the parents are still together. I mean we don’t. We never want to talk about what the actual issue is, it’s blaming the mother who…

**GE**: Or the parents, or the divorce.

**AS**: Right.

**GE**: We were always very close. He had probably had a hate-love relationship with me. I tried all the tough love stuff. I was getting child support. He was living away from me and he said, “You’re getting child support for me. That money belongs to me.” I said, “That money is for you if you’re living at home. So if you want to come home and live at home and not use drugs you can have access to the money. Because you’ll be living here right? You’ll have access to everything that you want. You’ll have a life, you’ll have a family.”

**AS**: Where would he stay during all these times?

**GE**: He was living, he was couch hopping, living on the street. I mean he never lived on the street. One of the first places he lived was a block house off of 30th or 31st and Stevens I think. How could I ever forget that? That’s when he got the dog. At one point, I don’t know if you read the book or not.

**AS**: No, I would like to.

**GE**: He wanted to come home and bring the dog. I told him not to get the dog because I said, “I am not taking care of that dog when you decide you’re tired of it and can’t handle it on the street anymore.” And blah blah blah. Well he did it anyway. So guess who ended up with the dog eventually? That’s kind of my amends many years later when he couldn’t take care of the dog. That’s one of the first chapters in the book. It was about how you learn that the hard and fast rules don’t make any sense. Or the black and white rules don’t make any sense. I had a chance to have Aaron come back home when he was fourteen or fifteen if I would have let him bring his dog home. I told him he couldn’t because of the dog.

**AS**: Oh he was fourteen or fifteen? Oh wow.

**GE**: That’s what you’re supposed to do, the hard and fast line.

**AS**: Right. Be tough, be in charge.

**GE**: In charge of what?

**AS**: Right. Well that’s what you’re told or we’re told.

**GE**: Many years later he called me from Portland, Oregon and the dog had fleas. I think he was into heroin addiction then, I didn’t know it. He said, “Mom I can’t get rid of the fleas.” We have become, there are many times when he would come over to the house and bring the dog. We all got attached to the dog, it was a Rottweiler. A beautiful Rottweiler that he had trained magnificently. He fed her, took her to a holistic vet. He wouldn’t feed himself or take care of himself but he took care of the dog. He called me and said. You know it isn’t cold enough for fleas to die in Portland. He said, “I can’t get rid of the fleas. Maeve is really sick, she’s lost weight. If I pay money to send her home and give you money for the vet can I send her home to you? Will you take care of her and get her back on her feet? I’ll be home in the spring and I’ll take her.” He paid for everything, he always paid. He sent the crates and paid for it. He gave me money for the vet. I got the dog well but when he came home that spring he was never able to take her back on a full time basis. That was kind of my amends.

**AS**: How old was he at that point?

**GE**: I’d have to go in the book and look. That was hard.

**AS**: I didn’t realize your book was his story.

**GE**: Yes. The book is a lot of his story and not just my story but what I saw him going through trying to recover.

**AS**: That’ll be useful. I’ll have to buy a copy from you.

**GE**: I think it would be very useful. He must have been like twenty five, twenty six. Early twenties. Let’s see. He was twenty five when he went to Wilmer and that happened after he came back here. I can’t remember. I’ll have to look in the book.

**AS**: That’s alright.

**GE**: That felt like the next best thing to do, to take that dog back.

**AS**: Was this the same dog?

**GE**: The same dog, yes. There was a part of me that it was like if I had her I knew he’d stay in touch with me. All this went on with him before there were cell phones. So Aaron would be gone for weeks at a time. One time months at a time and I wouldn’t hear from him. I wouldn’t know if he was alive or dead. There’d be many times, weeks when I wouldn’t hear from him. He did carry a pager because he dealt drugs to support his habit. Not like the drugs that are available now. Oh my God. I think he did cook meth for a short period of time. Mostly it was mushrooms and pot and I suppose he was dealing heroin too. I don’t know. There’s a part of me that knew if I had the dog he’d stay in touch with me. So I had kind of an ulterior motive. It felt kind of like I had a part of him with me when I had the dog. It all sounds kind of stupid.

**AS**: No it makes perfect sense.

**GE**: Maeve was just such a wonderful dog. We all loved her. I ended up with his cat too. The cat, the dog. The cat died, I had to put the cat down a couple of days after Aaron died. I came home after doing funeral pre-preps and the cat was laying here on the couch, a different couch, in her own urine. Just laying there. I thought I’m getting ready to bury my son; I’m going to have a houseful. The only room where I could contain this cat was the utility room next to the downstairs bedroom, where my youngest brother was going to stay. The cat would be going “Meow, meow, meow, meow.”

So I packed her up, took her to the vet. She was seventeen years old. She’d been missing the litterbox and those kinds of things anyways. I said, “I’ve got to put this cat down.” They said, “It sounds like she could have kidney problems.” I said, “Listen. This cat is seventeen years old. She’s been missing, pooping outside the litterbox. Sometimes she has poop dragging behind her because she doesn’t know.” I said, “My son just died. I want to put this cat down. I can’t deal with a sick cat right now.” “Well, this is not the time to make a decision.” “Well are you going to put my cat down or am I going to have to go someplace else?” It was horrible. She finally euthanized the cat. I never regretted it. The cat was ready to go. It was laying in its own urine. Right?

**AS**: Isn’t that something. When you just said my son just died and I can’t deal with this.

**GE**: Well then she said, “Well this isn’t the time.” Well really it makes logical sense.

**AS**: It makes sense in a textbook kind of way.

**GE**: I said, “I’m going to have a houseful of company. I’m going to put the cat down anyways. I’m going to tell you that. Why do I want to listen to a cat whine for five days? And worry about it.” Yet, I digress.

**AS**: Let’s backup. So Aaron. When does he finally move out? Tell me more about his teenage years. Does he never live at home after age fourteen?

**GE**: When Bob and I got married.

**AS**: Does he finish high school?

**GE**: No.

**AS**: What does he do?

**GE**: He got a GED finally at a Bethlehem Alternative School. Great experience for him. He met a girl, a very bright woman who was six years older than he was. They fell desperately in love. He was sixteen or seventeen and she was twenty five. She wanted to go to acupuncture school and I think she already had one college degree. I can’t remember. She wanted to go to New Mexico. Aaron was going too, they were going to move to New Mexico. I finally had some pictures taken of Aaron when he was eighteen, I didn’t have any high school graduation pictures.

When he went to New Mexico with her we had this kind of ceremony, a family ceremony where we all said goodbye to him. I bought one of these big round candles that had five wicks and then a wick in the middle. We each said something. He cried through the whole thing. We all said something we loved about him and we were going to miss him, that he’d always take the candle so he’d know he’d always be part of us. We each had a candle that we saved then. I was afraid I was going to be really emotional. It was really fun because it was nice to see him be emotional instead of me. I often wondered if he got emotional because I didn’t. He did do some Junior College.

His father bought him another car. He totaled one car, never got a driver’s license until he was twenty. His father bought him a little pickup truck. Which of course was great because he could do drug running with it. But he was under our insurance until he totaled it. Then my insurance was cancelled because he was under twenty five. I said, “If you ever buy him another car, you’re going to have to figure out the insurance. I’m done. I’m done giving him money. I’m done giving him anything. I think you’re enabling him. You gave him a car. At least don’t give him another car.” But he did. That’s how Aaron got to New Mexico. He took some Junior College classes down there. I’d hear from his girlfriend, “Aaron just won’t get a job.” Well he was smoking a lot of pot. It’s kind of hard to work and smoke pot daily right? Then she wanted to finish acupuncture school in Portland. So they went there. That’s when I think he got into the heroin.

**AS**: Around what year is this? The early 2000s?

**GE**: No, this is in the 90s.

**AS**: Oh okay.

**GE**: I got married in ‘91. So this all happened early 90s. Twenty years ago. Twenty five years ago. It was one of those times when we were in Portland when he sent the dog home, after they got up there. She’d call and complain, “Aaron won’t get a job.” She knew he was using heroin. She never told me. Here’s the power of Aaron and relationships. They ended up, long story short; they ended up hating each other’s guts, he and this first woman. When Aaron died she took planes, trains, and automobiles to get back for his service. The woman that found Sophie was his last girlfriend. The other one in between. He had three really long term relationships. They loved him desperately. Of course they were all co-dependent relationships. There was something about him that you just couldn’t resist. The picture of him is very handsome, charming, witty. He was very caring. He could be very emotionally present for women. Which is always a big draw right?

**AS**: What year was Aaron born?

**GE**: ‘73. He would be forty three this October. Finally, he came back and he and Marla broke up. Or did he come back with her? Oh I shouldn’t have said her name.

**AS**: It’s okay. We can take it out.

**GE**: I can’t remember. How can I forget this? He finally said he was coming back. She was staying out there and finishing. I guess he wanted to come back or something. Or they broke up. I can’t remember. He came back. He said, “I found somebody. I’ve got a roommate but they won’t let me have the dog.” It was all very mysterious. Finally one day he showed up with another woman that he said was his roommate. I think they were just friends for a while.

He just looked like hell. He’d always come to visit me. So he’s back in Minneapolis but I didn’t see very much of him. He’d always come to visit me during the day. The kids were at school. You know, I was still doing this business out of my home. He just looked like hell. Finally this kind of went on I think for about six months, for a while. He’d come to see the dog and talk with me and then he’d vanish for days. I get this call. We’re doing this big seminar for my business and Bob’s father had just died. I get this call from him. He says, “Mom I’m really sick and I’ve got to get to the clinic. Can you give me a ride? I’m up in Northeast.” I just, it’s seven thirty in the morning, and I’ve just gotten out of the shower. I’m putting on this big thing; Bob’s brothers are in town because his father just died. I’m saying, “Honey if you’re really sick but I just got out of the shower.” “The clinic closes at nine o’clock. I’ve got to get to the clinic to get my medicine before.” I don’t know nothing about Methadone. I don’t even know he’s a heroin addict.

**AS**: At this point.

**GE**: So this is before GPS or anything. I say, “Give me the address.” I put it into MapQuest, I print my directions. “You be standing out there on the corner, out in front of the house so I can get you.” It’s up in Northeast. I get in the car, I go pick him up and he gets in the car. He looks like somebody who’s had the flu. He’s in withdrawal right. He’s got on somebody else’s holey sweater. I said, “When is the last time you bathed?” He said, “Mom just don’t talk to me. Can you just get me there?” I said, “Where’s the clinic?” He says, “Burnsville.” I said, “What are you doing going to a health clinic in Burnsville?” “Just get me to the clinic.” So your kids sick, you haven’t seen him for days. The last time you saw him he looks like death warmed over. Now he looks like three deaths warmed over. So are you going to take him to where he wants to go? Sure.

I get him out there and there’s this non-descript clinic. There’s no name on it or nothing. He said, “I need five dollars for the co-pay. Can I borrow five bucks from you?” I said, “Sure. Don’t worry about paying me back.” So I get out of the car he says, “No, no, no. You don’t need to come in.” So he goes in, he comes back. He gets in the car and about twenty minutes later and it’s like he’s in a stupor. He gets in the car and kind of slumps down in the edge of the corner and I said, “What is going on?” He said, “Just drive. Can I come home and cleanup? Can I just come back to the house and just cleanup? Just drive.” So I start driving down Cliff Road from this. It’s clear he’s nodding off and on. I’m thinking I took him somewhere to get high, right? I don’t know what’s going on. I stop at this park, I pull over and I said, “Tell me what the hell is going on. What is going on? You’re high!” He said, “I went to a Methadone clinic.” I said, “Meth-o-what?” He said, “Methadone. It’s something they give people when they’re trying to get off of heroin.” That was the first time I knew he was a heroin addict. I just went nuts.

**AS:** Do you remember what year this is?

**GE**: It’s in my book. No. I don’t.

**AS**: Is it long before he dies?

**GE**: Oh yes, yes. Long time before he dies. This is ten years before he dies.

**AS**: Oh okay. That helps.

**GE**: I just start pommeling him with questions. He said, “I’ll tell you everything. I know I’ve got to get off of heroin. I’ve been trying. I’m hoping this is going to help. Can we talk later?” It was always can we talk later. I drove home. He said, “Can I just go to bed? I haven’t slept for days.” I tucked him into his bed upstairs and just held him, hoping. You know how you hold your kid and you think it’s going to make it all better? That was the beginning of my journey with heroin and opiates and watching him go through treatment time and time again. And try to make Methadone work and abuse Methadone and sell Methadone and not be on Methadone and use pot when he was on Methadone. Until his last gallant effort with Dr. French.

**AS**: What was that? Tell me that.

**GE**: He went to Wilmer and went through treatment. Back then it was all, complete abstinence when you were in treatment. When he went to Wilmer, he was court ordered to Wilmer. He went into a pizza place high and they found opiates on him.

**AS**: There were like cops in there or something?

**GE**: Yes. He was probably visibly high and the cops happened to drive by and they caught him. There were a lot of times he would be thrown in jail. He wouldn’t have any on him but because he was publicly intoxicated. He’d call us for bail and I would bail him out. One time afterwards, he told me this years afterwards, he was thrown in jail for public intoxication and he was on opiates so he was in withdrawal by that time. He had, at times he had large amounts of cash because he was dealing. He hired this feisty lawyer to bail him out. He had no car and his girlfriend didn’t have a car. It took him five hours to crawl home because he was in withdrawal.

**AS**: Oh my Gosh.

**GE**: Because I wouldn’t come pick him up.

**AS**: Had you picked him up before? What was your process like as a mother with this?

**GE**: I never when he was jailed. I was all wrapped up in it being about…it was not declared a brain illness until 2011. Aaron died in 2007. All of my training as a psychotherapist was this is a behavior or a personality disorder. Although the American Medical Association declared it an illness in 1956 so you could get reimbursed for it as a disease. Treatment centers still treated it as a behavior disorder or personality disorder. They didn’t treat it as a brain illness.

**AS**: It was a personality flaw.

**GE**: It was all cognitive behavior therapy. We’ve got to learn to change your behavior, there’s something wrong with your behavior. You’re broken.

**AS**: So would you say that when he’s called to get out of jail you’ve already been dealing with him since he was thirteen, fourteen. You’re still in your kind of tough love thing?

**GE**: He broke the law I figured he needed to…

**AS**: Right. Live with the consequences of what he was doing. Right. He was using illegal drugs.

**GE**: Right. It wasn’t until…So I went to Wilmer.

**AS**: What is Wilmer?

**GE**: Wilmer Regional Treatment Center. He was court ordered there. He spent a month there and then he went to Prodigal House which had a pretty good reputation for repeat opiate offenders of being the right place to be. Unfortunately, Aaron teamed up with four guys in treatment and they all went to Prodigal House together. They were the band of brothers. He got out of Prodigal House and got a job driving cab but started using. As long as he was working I said he could live at home. So he did come back home. He lived in our basement. I had other kids at home but he was driving cab. Well then I found vodka in there, I found vodka in his room. He smashed up cars and couldn’t drive cab anymore because he was using. Where are we in the story? I don’t know. Then he hooked up with this last girlfriend, the one that found Sophie. She supported him for a long, long time. So he didn’t live at home. She would constantly call me, “Aaron this, Aaron that.”

**AS**: How many years were they together?

**GE**: A long time. I’d have to call her and ask her.

**AS**: That’s okay. Ten years?

**GE:** Maybe not that long. She finally broke up with him before he made this last gallant effort. She couldn’t take it anymore. They were maybe together five or six years. She was not around the last three years of his life. He wrote her letters to let her know that he was really trying. Not to try to get her back but, “I just want to let you know…Mom’s even let me drive the car. I’m starting to get my parents trust back.” When he died she just hated it that she never got in touch with him. It’s her biggest regret. She still loved him. She was in another relationship but nobody ever loved her the way that Aaron did. When I finally grasped…after he died, I didn’t really grasp this whole idea of addiction as a brain illness until after he died.

**AS**: Yes, that’s what I’m thinking.

**GE**: It was through my continued training through MRC as a recovery coach and all my continued investigation. There were just so many things about Aaron that didn’t add up. There wasn’t anything that kid couldn’t do when he set his mind to it. When he wanted to recover and couldn’t. I’d see him try treatment after treatment after treatment after treatment and be so self-deprecating and not get it. Why can’t you get this? Then when I started reading it’s a brain illness characterized by compulsive drug seeking despite harmful consequences. I thought that’s what’s wrong with him, it’s his brain. It’s not Aaron. It’s not his personality, it’s not his character.

I’m telling you there was not a more loyal. Yet he’d lie to me, he was deceptive in his illness and all that. I’m talking about loyal to the core to his family, to his siblings, to me. He had an incredible relationship with his stepdaughter. He just idolized Bob. He finally saw what a marriage was supposed to be. He saw somebody that loved his mother the way that he wanted his mother to be loved and respected. That’s what really made me really want to write the book and tell other parents. There was somewhere along the line before he died. Like about five years before when I got the lightbulb that I’m not going to fix this.

**AS**: Five years before.

**GE**: About five years before.

**AS**: What was that moment?

**GE**: I don’t remember what did that. [Long Pause]. It was this realization that I wanted a relationship with him no matter what, whether he was sober, whether he was using. I couldn’t stand it when we were at odds. How could I take care of myself in the relationship and still maintain a relationship with him? But make the boundaries about what I needed in the relationship not about trying to control his use. That wasn’t going to work. When Bob and I made that whole switch about, no you can’t be in the house when you’re using we’ll still see you, we want to stay in touch with you, blah blah blah. When you’re in recovery and you come to any family event but you come high I’m going to take you home. All these things. What I needed to feel safe. You can’t stay in the house when you’re using because I don’t know who’s going to show up at the door. I don’t sleep when you’re using in the house. It’s not a good thing for me. It’s not about trying to control you, this isn’t good for me.

**AS**: How did you come to that? Did you go to any meetings?

**GE**: No, it was like Einstein’s Theory of Relativity. It was like God finding. My higher power finally sent me a message: you are not going to change him. What do you want to do if he dies, how do you want to remember your relationship with him? It really Amy, it was like…I write about this in the book. It was the reading. It was the July 5th reading in the Al-Anon Blue Book.

**AS**: The Nar-Anon Blue Book?

**GE**: No the Al-Anon Book. I never went to Nar-Anon meetings.

**AS**: Oh okay. There probably wasn’t one.

**GE**: One day at a time. Is that what it is? Oh yes, there was Nar-Anon.

**AS**: Oh there was.

**GE**: It said, here it is this was the turning point for me. I’d read this a million times right. “The non-alcoholic in the family doesn’t seem to realize that the alcoholic is in a terribly vulnerable position, he must be constantly be on guard because he knows, deep down inside how much trouble he’s bringing to the family. He knows he’s wide open to criticism but did it ever occur to you that your tantrums and harsh words are like whipping a sick dog. Remember he’s lashing himself all the time. If you apply more lashes you’re inviting him to transfer some of his guilt to you. This can keep him from reaching his bottom and realizing how much he needs help to find sobriety. Today’s reminder: I will try to understand how desperately the alcoholic suffers from guilt. I will not yield to impulse to kick him when he’s down. We both suffer in different ways from the alcoholism. I who have God’s gift of sobriety must be the one to realize his dissatisfaction with himself no matter how defiant and defensive he may appear. If I were unfortunate enough to be an alcoholic how would I hope to be treated by the person I live with? The golden rule is a useful tool in all our personal relationships.” I realized I would treat a street person better than I was treating my own son. That did it. I just said, “I don’t know what’s going to happen here but I’m going to start having a little compassion for the fact that he is sick.” The whole illness concept hadn’t even come into being yet.

**AS**: But you saw it as a mom?

**GE**: I was picking it up on some kind of collective unconscious self.

**AS**: Well you’re also just watching it.

**GE**: Yes over and over. Right.

**AS**: You saw him trying and failing and trying.

**GE**: He never tried and failed at anything else in his life. He was a very resourceful drug dealer. He honestly never carried a gun Amy. I want you to know that my son was an honest drug dealer.

**AS**: That’s great.[Laughs].

**GE**: You’ll have to read the book.

**AS**: Oh I’m going to, tonight.

**GE**: Bob and I just started changing. We started being compassionate and it was all about where we were and what we needed, when we can help support your recovery. Aaron would call and ask me for help and the question was: is this going to support his recovery or is it going to enable his using? Those were my questions. That’s all in the book. “Oh God Mom I missed a doctor’s appointment. It’s too late to catch the bus; can you give me a ride?” Well, doctor’s appointment, I’ve got to get him to the doctor. “Well what’s this appointment for?” Was it going to interfere with my work schedule and destruct the rest of the family? I had to decide was helping him going to be as good for all of us as it was for him? Now if it was a matter of life and death with him that’s a different matter. I also started basing every circumstance on what was going on now not all the shit that went before. That’s where a lot of parents, well I’m not going to trust him now because…

**AS**: Because of all this other…

**GE**: You know what? If he was going to make me untrustworthy I would know and then I couldn’t trust him again. So what? Nobody was going to lose a life or if my property wasn’t going to be damaged. You know what I mean? You’ve got to start building trust again somewhere. Start it and see what happens. The more we trusted him the more trustworthy he became.

**AS**: Even in his addiction.

**GE**: Even in his addiction, yes. Then he started talking about, “You know Mom I’d read about these ultra-rapid detox.” That sounded a horrible, horrible, horrible experience. Except for the fact that I didn’t go with him, his father, his birth father stepped up and went with him and paid for it. It was the only time Ed was ever completely responsibly for Aaron’s emotional and physical well-being. He told me it was the best time he’d ever had with Aaron, it was the best $10,000 he ever spent in his life. They finally connected emotionally before Aaron died. I said to Aaron, I said, “If you want to do this you can come over to the house, you can use the computer to look at websites, use the phone to make long-distance phone calls. But I’m not going to go through that with you.”

I watched him withdraw from heroin, opiates so many times. I heard the vomiting and the constant dry heaving. I was in Post-Traumatic Stress watching him withdraw from heroin so many times, and opiates, trying to go down on his Methadone. I said, “I can’t do it Aaron. I can’t do it.” So then Jeff thinks that he’s going to go. You’ve got to drive to Chicago, you spend a night in the hospital, and they do a physical. This was a reputable place. Then the procedure is this, the Naloxone I think it’s now Naloxone, but it’s an opiate antagonist that is intravenously run through your body while you’re sedated, intubated.

**AS**: Oh I’ve heard of this.

**GE**: It’s supposed to make the withdrawal shorter. Then you get in the hospital the day afterwards and supposedly stabilize and then you get in the car and then you drive home from Chicago. So Jeff thinks, Aaron’s brother, thinks he’ll do it. I said, “So when Aaron is vomiting and having diarrhea all the way home from Chicago what are you going to do?” “Well I’ll pull off at a rest stop.” “How long are you going to be able to stay there? How many days you going to take off work?” I said, “Jeffery he’s going to be violently ill.” “Well this is supposed to not…” “Trust me.” So finally Ed stepped up to the plate and said, he was retired, and said, “I’ll take him.” I just had to ask Jeff all kinds of…I said this is really valiant of you to do this but I don’t think you have any idea. You’ve never seen anybody in opiate withdrawal. You have no idea what you’re getting yourself into.

**AS**: So what was going on with Jeff this whole time?

**GE**: That’s a whole chapter in the book.

**AS**: That’s another story. [Laughs].

**GE**: Jeff and I finally have made amends. It took a long time, and he still doesn’t trust me when I say I’m going to show up for him. And he’s thirty eight. It’s just that the sibling fallout. You’ve got to understand Aaron abandoned Jeff.

**AS**: Oh yes, at the divorce.

**GE**: So there was such a love-hate relationship and all the addiction. Jeff had his own issues. Aaron was never there for him. It just took a long, long time for us to heal. I just kept saying to him because of that last five years with Aaron and the positive experience I had, instead of trying to fix him I just kept saying, “Jeff I know that you’re not yourself.” He was just angry after Aaron died. You couldn’t even talk to him. Oh my God just angry, angry. “Something’s going on. I don’t know if you’re using drugs. I don’t know what it is. You are not yourself. I love you, I care about you. I can’t help you. You need help. When you’re ready to get help I’ll support you. I’m not going anywhere in between. I can’t help you with this issue. When you are screaming and yelling you’re going to have to leave the house or I’m going to call the police. I’m not going to take that kind of behavior in my home.”

**AS**: Was he screaming and yelling at you?

**GE**: Oh yes, everything. He just totally…Jeff was the most easy-going, lovable, teddy-bear. Everybody loved Jeff. Man it totally changed.

**AS**: What were the circumstances of Aaron’s death? Where was he?

**GE**: Well he got back from that ultra-rapid detox process and my former husband was supposed to leave him at his apartment. He was still violently ill but he had medical marijuana stashed. He thought he was going to smoke his way out of the after effects of the thing. Ed left him off at about seven o’clock and Aaron called me at nine thirty or ten and said, “Mom I can’t stop vomiting. I’m really worried. I don’t think I should be alone. I think I need to go to the hospital.” I picked him up and took him to Fairview South and so there I am watching him in opiate withdrawal anyway. I got him admitted to the hospital and he proceeded, and this is all in the book, he proceeded to continue to vomit for ten days. Even rectal suppositories, he was on the IVs, he had this terrible taste in his mouth from the Naloxone or whatever that antagonist was they did intravenously. He couldn’t keep anything down. He was continually swishing his mouth with sodas. The hospital complained so I had to bring in soda.

**AS**: Oh because he was drinking too much of their soda.

**GE**: Yes, right. Get this. He called an AA and asked for a sponsor, asked for somebody to come to the hospital to talk to him. They said, “Do you have a sponsor.” He said, “No.” “Well we can’t help you unless you have a sponsor.” He reached out. He was so sick and I had a lot of friends in the program. I don’t know why I didn’t think about just calling. It’s like well they said that no one can talk to him unless he has a sponsor, must be true. Finally the doctor up at Fairview, at the hospital, said, “I’m going to put him…” You know he was just aghast that we ever did this ultra-rapid detox thing. He said, “The only way we’re going to get any homeostasis is to put him back on a small amount of Methadone.” Ed was supposed to fly back home. When Aaron was so ill and I put him back in the hospital I called him and said, “I don’t think you should go home.” So Ed and I and Bob took turns being up in the hospital with him.

Finally the doctor had a meeting with all three of us and said, “I’m going to put him back on Methadone.” We just like jumped out of the chair because in order to get him to detox they had to switch him from Methadone to Dilaudid. The ultra-rapid detox center said, “Well we can’t detox him directly off of Methadone. He’ll have to be on Dilaudid for ten days.” Aaron knew it would work. He was wondering if it would work. He’d used Dilaudid on the street enough. So it kept him stable, kept him in withdrawal enough. He just wanted to be off of Methadone. He just couldn’t stand going to the clinic. He was becoming very black and white, again no education. “You know what Aaron? It would be ok to be on a small amount of Methadone for the rest of your life.”

**AS**: Right, nobody said that?

**GE**: He knew some guys that were but I had my own stigma about it Amy. The only thing I got was this pamphlet and I write about this in the book, called “About Methadone.” It explained. He said, “Mom I want you to read this.” He was trying his best to get me. All I saw was how he abused Methadone not how useful it was. I’d see him kind of get stable and then they’d take him down. Then he’d start using pot or heroin along with it.

**AS**: He needed to stay stable.

**GE**: For a long, long, long time. Right? He could never get his life in order. He was always either in withdrawal or using on the street. You know what I mean? There was never a period of stability on Methadone.

**AS**: That was allowed to happen.

**GE**: There were a few times but every time he’d get there, he’d want to start tapering again. He’d say, “I can’t be on this anymore.”

**AS**: There’s jitteriness and an anxiety.

**GE**: “I can’t be on this.” All the stigma and lack of education about medication, treatment is. Now I know that Aaron’s disease had progressed to the point where he could not recover.

**AS**: Without it.

**GE:** Without it. It wasn’t available to him in the way that it should have been. I kept trying to make it about he was dishonest, I write about this all in the book. I stigmatized him for even years after he died. Big book says he can recover if you keep him being honest. Aaron was always a little liar as a kid.

**AS**: Wow, Gloria that’s tough.

**GE**: I’ve got a whole chapter in there. I mean when somebody dies there’s got to be a reason. I had to have some…he just couldn’t work a recovery program. He just wasn’t honest enough to work a recovery program. When in fact his disease had progressed to the point where he couldn’t recover with what was being offered him. It was somebody; I went to speak at St. Joe’s, which was the last treatment center he was in. Anyways, I digress.

So he goes to ultra-rapid detox. They put him back, finally we agreed, puts him on five milligrams or twenty milligrams of Methadone and “Bam” he is well. He hasn’t eaten or kept anything down for two weeks. The guy says, “I got a bed for you at Fairview Riverside, now. Do you want to go?” Aaron said, “How can I possibly go through treatment? I haven’t eaten for days.” He wasn’t hardly stable. He said, “Hey Mom could I just come home and just get some good nutrition in my body and get stable? Then I’ll go.” I truly believed this was the truth. I said, “Fine you’ve got two weeks.” Then I knew he would be put on the proverbial waiting list. He didn’t take the bed then.

He came home and I kind of nursed him back. The longer he was on Methadone the craving, you know he went to recovery meetings to begin with and then the cravings would increase. He didn’t get into treatment in two weeks. I said, “You’ve got to go back to your apartment.” I’d given him the two weeks. He went back to his apartment. He finally got into Fairview Riverside. They started taking him off the Methadone and the step down was too fast. He got sick all over again. Riverside was abstinence based no Naloxone. So he couldn’t go from Methadone to Naloxone. That’s usually what they do now. If you’re trying to get off Methadone you get on to fifty milligrams of Methadone and then you go on Naloxone. They tried to step him down too quick and he got sick and couldn’t finish treatment. So he went back to his apartment and started doing research. He found David French at St. Joe’s. He was one of the first doctors to use Clonidine. Which helps with, it’s a blood pressure medication that helps with.

**AS**: Was he? My daughter used that.

**GE**: This was like 2007. He read about French and didn’t really like the program at St. Joe’s because he’d been through one before but he liked French. His insurance was so short. You left treatment there’s no way you’re going to get back in treatment again.

**AS**: Even though he was sick?

**GE**: If I go score some heroin, shoot up, go into the emergency room, and say I’m suicidal and that I’m drug addict they’ll have to admit me. So he got back into treatment at a hospital. It’s in the book. That’s how desperate he was. So he gets into St. Joe’s.

**AS**: He totally understood the system by this point.

**GE**: Oh yes. He gets into St. Joe’s. He loves Dr. French. He is only supposed to get three weeks of treatment. He gets a social worker to petition. He gets another week of treatment but he is told, “You will not get any more money. You won’t be able to go to treatment for another two years if this doesn’t work.” This has got to work. He tells them when he goes in, “I do not want to be on any medication at all. When I leave here, Mom I can’t be a controlled addict. I want to be off of all medications. I don’t want to be on any anti-anxiety medications. I don’t want to be on any antidepressants. I want to be off of everything when I leave here. I said, “Aaron let’s just deal with the Methadone. Let’s just go through treatment.” He’s an adult, right? He’s thirty three. So they do what he wants.

By the end of the third week he is going nuts. He can’t sleep. So all these emotions that have been suppressed for all these years by the anti-anxiety medications and the heroin and the pot are coming to the surface. We’ve got the angry addict back again. He said, “If I don’t get out of this place I’m going to kill myself or somebody else.” I said, “Aaron this is the time you need to stay. I really implore you do not go off all your medications. Just worry about the Methadone.” We used the term opiates then. “Let’s just worry about treatment of opiates.” “I’ve got to get out of here. I’m going to see how soon I can get out.” I called the nurse and said, “He is threatening himself or other people. He threatened that he was going to kill himself or other people. You cannot let him out.” “Well he hasn’t said that to us.” Right? See he knows. He’s agreed to an out-patient day program. “Since he’s been in treatment so long, so many days we feel that.” I said, “He needs to be up on the psych ward. Put him on a seventy two hour hold.” “We have no basis to do that. You can do that. You can commit him. I’ll give you the paperwork. You can commit him to the psych ward for five days.”

**AS**: As his mom.

**GE**: The one thing that Aaron has always said to me, he signed release after release. I was always privy to any information. He said with one caveat, “Never ever commit me. I don’t know if I could ever forgive you.” My codependency bought into that. I saw him committed by another doctor one other time. I saw him on a seventy two hour hold in the psych ward. He talked his way to the social worker, the psychiatrist, and the psychologist. I knew that if Aaron didn’t want the help he wasn’t going to get it. Was it worth damaging my relationship, our relationship? No.

In the end, when he went through this last effort I promised him I would support him in whatever he wanted to do treatment his way. I was going to let him do it. I was the support person not the mastermind. I had always been the mastermind. It was the one regret I have, that I didn’t commit him. Maybe something could have been different for him.

**AS**: So he gets out?

**GE**: He gets out. I pick him up on Tuesday and I take him back to his apartment. He’s really agitated. I say, “Can I get you some groceries?” I know he wants to go back to his apartment because he’s going to smoke pot. “Can I do anything? Do you need food?” He said, “No, get me home.” I said, “Okay.” I had a meeting at the Woman’s Club the next day which is right down the street. His father was furnishing him an apartment. It was a nice one-bedroom apartment. I helped him; I was with him when he signed the rental papers. He was in school at the time. He got it and his father kept it up. Anyways, I said, “I’ll be back on Wednesday.”

So I come back on Wednesday. He said, “Hey Mom, I want to change everything around in the apartment. I don’t want anything to be like what it was when I was using here. I don’t want it to look or feel the same. When can you and Bob…” He was on the last part of his medications. He’d gone to outpatient treatment. He really liked it. He could get on the train and get there and get home. He had it all figured out. He was happy with the arrangement. He was in a very good mood when I saw him on that day. His brother Jeff was going to come over and watch movies with him that night. I had this big event I was putting on for my business on Thursday night. I said, “I can’t do anything until the weekend.” Then his stepbrother’s birthday party was Friday night. I said, “Saturday we’ll come over. We’ll help you move everything around.” He said, “Great.” “You need anything?” “No, I’m fine.” So Jeff came over and watched movies with him that night and he gave Jeff a copy of William Burroughs book. What is it?

**AS**: *Junkies*

**GE**: No not *Junkies*.

**AS**: *Chronicle* something. Yes.

**GE**: He said, “Here, I think you’ll find this good reading.” Aaron and I, I got him a cell phone. Put him on our cell phone plan a long time before that, when he came back to the cities. The deal was that he got four hundred minutes and he had to pay the ten dollars that it cost me to add another phone. I said, “You go beyond the minutes I’m cutting off your phone and I want that ten dollars every month.” Never missed a payment. He went over once. He called me and said, “I’m going over minutes. I understand my phone’s going to be turned off.” Never did he ever abuse it. People say, “You’re giving a drug addict a phone?” I said, “He’s going to make drug deals anyways. I have access to him this way.” The other deal was that he call me every morning at seven thirty and let me know he was okay. Every day, seldom if he was late, and he always ended it with, “Goodbye Mom. I love you.” He called me Thursday morning to check in after this great experience on Wednesday. “I’m not doing well. But I don’t want to focus on me. Let’s talk about Matt’s birthday party. Should I ride the bus out to your house and go out there? Or should Bob pick me up?” I said, “How about we figure that out on Friday. I’ve got this big thing.” I was very preoccupied with this event. I said, “Are you sure there isn’t anything you want to talk about?”

The day I picked him up from the hospital on Tuesday, I called to make arrangements to pick him up. He said, “I had this dream, the strangest dream. I dreamed I was a Tibetan monk and I was coming out of a cave. I said in a language that I don’t know but I understood what I said to the guy next to me. ‘It’s been twenty years and it’s time for me to go home.’ Don’t you think that’s odd?” I said, “Wow Aaron. Maybe its twenty years it’s time for you to recover. Maybe that’s what it’s all about.” I think he had a premonition of his own death. I said, “Let’s be in touch on Friday.” I kept trying to call him on Friday. He didn’t call Matt and say he wasn’t coming to the birthday party. His sister-in-law had had surgery. Very close to his aunt, very close to Bob’s sister-in-law. Didn’t call and check with her. There were times when Aaron decided at the last minute, “I can’t do a family event.” So he just wouldn’t communicate with me. I didn’t think that much about it.

We got to the birthday party. “Where’s Aaron?” “Well he must have decided not to come. Matt did you talk to him? Did he call you?” “No.” Another really weird thing. On the way home Bob and I are having this silent thing. I just had this odd feeling, this premonition. We were both just exhausted because we’d gone to this big business thing and I just kept trying to call Aaron. No answer, no answer. I woke up at one o’clock. Came home, went to bed. I said, “We’re going to go down there Saturday morning if I can’t get ahold of him.” I woke up at one o’clock in the morning and couldn’t go back to sleep. For some reason when we had rented the apartment I kept the super’s, the caretaker’s card. I threw it in my desk somewhere. I spent a couple hours finding that card. It was in a secure building. I started calling her at seven AM. I finally got ahold of her. She was showing apartments other places. I said, “I’ve got to go check on my son. I’m afraid something’s happened to him.” We found him at one o’clock. It was clear that he was dead; I think he overdosed on Thursday night sometime. That was the last time anybody had contacted him. Now they confiscate cell phones and all that trying to find out who they got the drugs from. Bob and I took his phone and started calling people. We couldn’t find out. Nobody cared that he died of a heroin overdose, in 2007. No. He was a junkie.

**AS**: I’m sorry.

**GE**: I know you are. I know you understand.

**AS**: I do.

**GE**: We did have a great relationship the last five years. He came over here. He was on Methadone take-outs once a week. He got his Methadone on Tuesday morning and he’d come over here and spend Monday night. He’d take my car to the clinic. He was gone with the car just for exactly the right amount of time. He was supposed to come back and then he made me breakfast on Tuesday mornings. That was our time together.

**AS**: At what point did you start on the journey that Aaron, you said that for a while you stigmatized him, you did things to try to explain it to yourself. Then what was your turning point?

**GE**: I needed a reason for him to die so I could go on I think. I needed to blame something. I’ve been a writer all my life. I just have tons and tons of journal stuff. He died in May; I went to grief groups in the fall. They were just horrendous experiences. There weren’t very many people that were dying of opiates back then. It was just starting to come about. Nobody understood, like the majority of people now, that addiction is an illness. The underlying thing was, number one: my son was a drug addict but what did I expect? Of course he’s going to die. His life doesn’t have the value of my son who was a college athlete. That died of something else or you know what I mean? Almost seventy five percent of the parents I was in with, whose children died of accidental deaths were drug or alcohol related. Right? One girl stepped off a platform and went through to the tracks because she was drunk, on a platform in New York City, and got hit by the subway. It was because she was drunk, she was high. It was because that platform was not made correctly and he sued the city of New York. Which is probably, anybody probably could have stepped off. I just found myself educating them about addiction and trying to defend my son. I thought I am here for support.

**AS**: This is not working.

**GE**: This is not working. I went back to my Al-Anon group and got support there. They understood addiction at least. They could understand the double loss, the ambiguous loss. They got that. That was just killing me. You’ve got to understand, I was a person who did motivational seminars. I was the person that taught people you can do or be anything you want. I was the symbol of hope eternal. When he died it died. I didn’t know, I had no idea who I really was. I felt like I lost my own identity. I couldn’t practice what I preached. That you can do anything you really want.

**AS**: You must be a fake then.

**GE**: Right. That shit doesn’t work. A friend gave me a book. I can’t remember exactly. It was about a kid that committed suicide. Her son committed suicide because he had mental illness. He purposely drove, created an accident. She was a person like me. She’s in a coffee shop and she’s hearing two people talk about, “You know, I drove around the block and I just envisioned that a parking place was going to appear and it did.” What her experience was after losing her son and listening to a conversation like that. Boy could I relate to that. I wrote a poem about it. I just started all this journaling about grief. I just have reams and reams. What this was like for the last twenty years.

I got out of the car one day. In network marketing you can continue to earn income, I mean if it’s a real buyable company, without continuing to build. I was just living off of residual income. I just couldn’t do anything after he died. I just didn’t have that. My soul was gone. I got out of the car at Zumba one day. I was praying, “God show me where I’m supposed to go and what I’m supposed to do now.” I get out of the car one day and God said, “You need to write. You need to write a grief book about this. You need to put all this stuff into a book.” So I started that whole process and kind of got this huge conglomeration of stuff together. Part of it was sort of like; the first part was sort of like the first part of the book that you’re going to see. The rest of it, the middle was about a different kind of grief about the addiction. The rest was these meditations that were connected to quotes that I found.

My editor, God bless her, said, “You know there’s two different books here, two different audiences.” By now the opiate epidemic is in full swing. She said, “People need to know what you learned in twenty years. So they don’t make the same mistakes.” I’d had an editor, who worked also for Hazelton as a freelancer, do a lot of editing of my books. So I could get the languaging down and all the medical terminology. She helped me with some of the medical research. I have a lot of research in my book to back up my own personal theories. So then I had this editor look at my book once the one editor said, “You have two books.” The opiate epidemic is going on, people need this. I chopped off this other part about grief and put this together and then this other editor, my final editor looks at it. She said, “I can’t keep track of this stuff. Are you going to just market this in the recovery community or do you want the general public to be able to understand this?” I said, “I want everybody to read this.” “You’ve got to have a glossary. You’ve got to do pull outs with lessons. I can’t remember all this important stuff. You’ve got to do little pull outs. You’ve got to list them on the back. You’ve got to have a glossary of terms. You’ve got to have resources. This is what people need now. Do it this way.” God bless her.

My book ended up being much more. It’s not a memoir. It’s kind of a handbook of resources. Don’t do what I did, do what I learned. The grief book is waiting. The first support groups I did were the grief groups. Once I went through Minnesota Recovery Connection and got a website up. I did that before I started really working seriously on this book. Then I just got really involved in advocacy. I work with Minnesota Recovery Connection and still toy with the idea of becoming a non-profit. I don’t know if I want to do that. Probably would look better. That involves a board, all this other stuff. I think I just want to focus on my speaking and my advocacy and another book. Maybe. I’m doing a lot of partnering with Rose McKinney. God bless Rummler Foundation. They gave me a little seed money to get my groups off the ground. I got a little bit of a grant. I got a thousand dollars and managed to start that. Other people said, “Well do you have groups for people that are still in active addictions?” So I started my Courageous Caregivers group.

**AS**: You mean for families of people who are still?

**GE**: Or significant others. I had my Courageous Caregivers group. Did you ever hear of the Opiate Coalition that started? She helped me do a pilot. She and I piloted the first Courageous Caregivers group to see if people would show up. They showed up. She didn’t want to have any more to do with it.

**AS**: Who is this? What was her name?

**GE**: Mary Kay Forstrum. She and I piloted that. Once there was an interest she said, “You just take them and run them out of your house.” I did that so I can keep the cost down. I had my first few groups at my church. But then I had to charge more. I moved them back here. People like coming to a home, more relaxing. This is in the book; I kind of became a follower of Chuck Hilger. He would come and say, “You need to write a book.”

**AS**: He told me that too.

**GE**: There you go.

**AS**: There’s a thing about how you feel…Sometimes I think that isn’t there enough out there. I said that to Chuck Hilger who I met through the Steve’s Law lobbying day. I told him about this project. He was really excited. Two years later when I’m finally able to get to it. I was like, “Chuck do you really think I should go forward with this?” He was like, “Are you kidding? We need this. Please keep going.”

**GE**: I think you ought to get ahold of the Minnesota Historical Society.

**AS**: I talked to them.

**GE**: They’re not interested?

**AS**: When I’m all finished they might look at it and they might decide to house it. I couldn’t believe it.

**GE**: There’s stigma for you right there. This is a major health crisis. This is a health epidemic.

**AS**: Of historic proportions. The way I think about it is like AIDS. History of medicine is one of my fields. That’s how I’m starting to realize it. It’s following the same trajectory.

**GE**: The effect it’s having on doctors and the way they prescribe. Absolutely, positively and the backlash of people who are on pain medication, using it responsibly and need it because they’re on MA. They can’t afford acupuncture or meditation or any of the other stuff, massage. They want to stop prescribing it.

**AS**: To people on MA only.

**GE**: Yes.

**AS**: Thank you very much right? So there’s a racial component to it and economic. It’s a class issue.

**GE**: Right. She’s my best friend. One of my best friends is scared to death that she’s going to get her opiates taken away from her. She has angioedema which are extremely painful. They never found out why she has those.

**AS**: That’s the backlash that you talked about.

**GE**: There’s a lot of backlash.

**AS**: Where you go to the extreme instead of the more balanced approach.

**GE**: That’s kind of the way the United States does things. Maybe that’s just the way life is. I mean, that’s the way I did with Aaron, from one extreme to another.

**AS**: I did that with my daughter. I didn’t understand it. She was using heroin for two years before I ever knew. I only knew when she nearly died. I found her.

**GE**: I didn’t know until I took Aaron to the Methadone clinic.

**AS**: What would you say about your…can you talk a little bit about mothering? I know you already are talking about it. Is there any last things you’d want to say?

**GE**: Aaron had some good friends in Oakland during one of his more sober periods. Though I think he was using medical marijuana when he was out there. I had to call them all when he died. Thank God I had their phone numbers. He was in contact with them. The young woman, he’d tried desperately to go out to her wedding but had so much anxiety about carrying Methadone on the plane, even though it was a legal prescription. Was so sure something was going to go wrong that he didn’t go. He hated that about himself. That he never went to her wedding.

When I called her and I said, “Mary I don’t know. I tried.” She said, “Don’t you ever doubt that Aaron ever loved you. Or that he didn’t know that you did everything that you could to help him. You were his angel.” That’s what I would say to parents. That sometimes the person you’re trying to help can’t relay to you how much you do. Or how much they appreciate or maybe they are very self-absorbed in their own illness. They could never had as many chances, had the quality of life while they were alive if they did, could never have had as many chances to recover. It just comes all back to parenting; it’s just a fucking thankless job. [Laughs]. You have to remember that whether you have an addict or not. I think that’s the other thing. So many things that I made huge issues about I always made out because Aaron was an addict. There were a lot of things, issues that go on with teenagers and young adults with parents in their lives. It’s all part of growing up. Issues happen.

**AS**: It’s not always about the addiction.

**GE**: It’s not always about addiction.

**AS**: Unless your child is an addict.

**GE**: Then parents get blamed and then there’s a lot of thanklessness that goes on. I think they’re all angels. No matter how many mistakes they made. They did it because they loved their child. I do a lot of coaching my Courageous Caregivers group and they’ll say, “What do you think I should do?” I ask them, “What’s going to support their recovery? Or is it going to support their illness? You know what if you’re not ready to drop the gauntlet on this particular issue that’s your choice.”

**AS**: Right, maybe don’t.

**GE**: “I don’t want you saying, ‘Gloria said.’ You need to make up your mind about this.”

**AS**: You have opened yourself up to, and put yourself in a place where you can be supportive of other parents who are going through what you went through, with the benefit of hindsight. The things that worked and the things that didn’t. That is a way to continue mothering in a bigger picture.

**GE**: Yes, it is. I have my own supervisor as an unlicensed healthcare professional. I don’t have to. I’m not a licensed psychologist or therapist. I’m only a certified recovery coach. But I belong; I’m registered with the board of unlicensed healthcare professionals. I do have a supervisor that I check in with if I feel like I’m getting hooked by my parents or some of my clients or my grief clients. It brings up my own grief issues. Like you said, you’re never over it. There’s no closure. It’s all good for me until it’s not. There was a thing in the paper, an editorial in the paper about mental illness, a whole story in the paper about how we’re not taking care of those who are mentally ill. It could have been about addiction. I wanted to write a letter to the editor so bad Sunday morning. I just couldn’t do one more thing about it that day. You know what I mean?

**AS**: I do.

**GE**: That’s why I’m going up North.

**AS**: To take a break.

**GE**: It’s really my whole life, in a lot of ways.

**AS**: Do you think you’ll stick with it? What’s your energy like for it? What do you want to achieve?

**GE**: I really want to put this grief book out. I would love it if some other publisher would pick up *Living in the Wake of Addiction.* There needs to be a second edition, I already have some updates. Like this whole thing about implied consent which is in the chapter but it’s mostly all around Dr. French. You’ll read it. That needs to be driven home. I have a whole chapter on alternatives to twelve steps because Aaron never... It was a long time until I accepted that he’s not going to recover in twelve step recovery, start supporting him in something that he wants. He loved health realization.

**AS**: Oh right. My son-in-law, Brandon that totally connected for him.

**GE**: Right. One meeting in 2007. One meeting in the Twin Cities, no car, they didn’t have the light rail. We were living in Chanhassen so how was he going to get to meetings?

**AS**: There’s so much about access that I just find astonishing. In that way it does remind me of the AIDS crisis. There’s certain people who have access to the treatment modalities, or happen to be at the right place at the right time for it. Then there’s always people who are on the fringe and they could be from middle class families, educated middle class families or they could be out in Dassel where I talked to another mother this week. They’re so isolated and alienated just because of the lack of access to resources. Then you add stigma.

**GE**: And then you think about the lack of Methadone clinics in the outer suburbs. Not just the outer suburbs, out state. The opiate crisis is live, and living in rural communities. No access.

**AS**: It’s criminal.

**GE**: I mean I’m sure you’ve seen the anonymous people right? You remember the breast cancer survivor? What can we do to help you recover? There’s a whole recovery program that’s free for you.

**AS**: Just because you have breast cancer. You walk in and it’s beautiful, you go into these Methadone clinics and they’re just, they’re not welcoming places. My daughter won’t bring her infant to them. She’s like no way. I’m not going anywhere near those places with her. How’s that? What does that do to a young mother? Who doesn’t have the option to have someone stay with the baby?

**GE**: When you’re standing in line at the Methadone clinic with the same people you stood on the street corner with.

**AS**: And there’s people dealing, twenty feet away I saw so many drug deals. Twenty feet away in Brooklyn Center.

**GE**: Aaron told me. It was really funny. I believe one of the treatment centers when he found out about health realization was Cedar Ridge, was one of his most positive experiences. That was the first time I ever got any kind of amends letter from him was after there. He really wanted to get off the Methadone. They wanted to keep him on a small amount. When he was leaving Cedar Ridge he said, “Mom I think the same people that own Cedar Ridge own the Methadone clinic. What do you think about that? I think you and Bob should invest in a Methadone clinic.” Then he got into, “You ought to buy a sober house. Do you know what the state is paying me to have this crappy little room, with a crappy little roommate? You guys ought to run sober houses.” I was thinking all the shit that goes on. Here I am. For me to be advocating and writing blogs. He’s just laughing out of the other side of his mouth and saying, “Oh I wish we could have done this better together. Oh Mom I wish we could have done this better together.” I do a lot of nurturing. It’s totally changed my relationship with my other kids. I could be a pretty harsh, you follow the rules or you’re not okay with me. I’m just not like that anymore. Whoever you are, as long as you’re kind to me, you’re kind to other people in the family, kind to your own children you are okay by me.

**AS**: That’s a pretty big transformation.

**GE**: It happened because of Aaron. I could never have supported Jeff’s recovery through his death the way that I had if I hadn’t gone through that experience with Aaron. I could never have been as patient.

**AS**: You mean Jeff recovering from his brother’s death?

**GE**: Yes. His anger and drawing the boundaries what I wasn’t going to take from his anger. I don’t know the answer for it. I could never have taken that approach with him if I wouldn’t have. He and I would have been like this the whole time. Like, “What the hell’s wrong with you? You need help. Go get help. You’re broken.” I think it’s mostly about me. Shoving aside what happened to him because I was trying to save Aaron.

**AS**: Well thank you. That’s powerful, a very powerful story.

**GE**: You know what’s really sad? There’s a million stories like mine out there. That’s when that first book review, the editor what’s her name?

**AS**: Julianne.

**GE**: I wrote a book review for her. She said, “Do you want Aaron’s picture?” I said, “This isn’t about Aaron or about me. This is about all the other people. This is about all the others. It’s about us and Aaron. I don’t want to make Aaron’s death the star.”

**AS**: Right, the star sad story. That’s the part that’s not being communicated very effectively.

**GE**: That’s what I try, that’s what happened in two or three interviews.

**AS**: That’s what I’m trying to counteract. We need to get Rose on our PR committee.

**GE**: We’re valiant; Aaron was a valiant hero, all those people that tried so hard to recover. The ones that make it, they’re valiant. Aaron isn’t any less valiant then they because he died. The parents that stick by them, valiant, valiant, valiant. Talking about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder various things will trigger and I will just lose it.

**AS**: Mine has been for a couple years the people with the signs.

**GE**: On the street corners?

**AS**: That are showing up everywhere because it’s what my daughter was doing the summer that I just knew she was going to die. Here in Minneapolis she was doing it on 94.

**GE**: Did she ever want to come home?

**AS**: She did, I let her and then she overdosed in the house again. With her little sister right there, the foaming mouth. We had to call the EMT.

**GE**: You didn’t have Naloxone?

**AS**: I had just lobbied for it two months before but I didn’t, there was no access yet. It was in that period between March and the middle of May. It was available as of June or July. She came to before they, we made them take her to the hospital.

**GE**: How did she come to? What did you do?

**AS**: We moved her and then there was a lot of noise.

**GE**: She came around.

**AS**: Yes. I’m going to stop this.

**GE**: I didn’t know any of that.