**Nancy Espuche**

**Narrator**

**Amy Sullivan**

**Interviewer**

**June 5, 2016**

**St. Paul, Minnesota**

**AS:** Alright, this is Amy Sullivan. I am recording an interview with Nancy Espuche, did I say your name right?

**NE:** Espuche.

**AS:** Espuche. E-S-P-U-C-H-E. in her apartment in St. Paul on June 5th, 2016. Nancy, will you state your name and your address and then that you give me permission?

**NE:** My name is Nancy Espuche, I live in St. Paul. I give Amy permission to record and document any way she like, whatever it is we talk about today.

**AS:** Thank you.

**NE:** You’re welcome.

**AS:** Okay can you tell me a little bit about yourself and where you grew up, your childhood, family, your education?

**NE:** I grew up in Long Island, New York. We originally lived in a place called Great Neck, if anyone is familiar. I am the youngest of two daughters, I have an older sister Lisa who actually turned 63 on Thursday. I am 60, she is two and a half years older than me. We then moved to Jericho, Long Island. My dad was an educator, he was a teacher, and then became a principal in what is known as Bedford-Stuyvesant, a very tough area of Brooklyn and was pretty beloved, and is still a pretty beloved man. He ran summer camps for [unclear] every summer, a sleep away camp for kids five months old until twenty. I think it was there that I really learned who my dad was and learned to appreciate him and my sister and different aspects of her being. I had a tough mom; pretty critical, pretty, you know it’s her way or the highway, not nurturing in any capacity. I’ve learned a lot about her life which was pretty traumatic too. My development as a person really circled around the need for good mothering. Which, I did not have. As my sister and I both say, we raised ourselves. She did it very differently than I did. My sister now has leukemia, and we are watching that. If it wasn’t for my dad, who is kind and thoughtful and nurturing to a degree, I think life would have been very different for me. I went to school… do you want more?

**AS:** Yeah, keep going.

**NE:** I graduated from Stony Brook University with a psychology degree. I did start my masters at Hunter College in New York City. I was married at the time very briefly to someone I went to highschool with and he became an abusive husband, and I was lucky now thanks to him to get out of the marriage really quickly after a year, and then proceed with my studies. Then, I got a job that I was at for 31 years on. Moved forward, met my husband when I was 31. We have a funny story that I will reserve not for here [laughter]. Raymond is from France, he was visiting New York at the time. We ended up getting married shortly after, and we were married for 20 years. I am divorced now for eight. We had Lucas when I was just 35, I had just turned 35. Mothering was the one thing that I was desperate to do then in my life.

**AS:** When do you remember having that feeling?

**NE:** Yeah, very young.

**AS:** Before you had a child?

**NE:** Yes. I really wanted to be a mother. I really wanted to be a good mother. A nurturing mother, an available mother [laughter].

**AS:** How was your experience mothering when it actually happened at first.

**NE:** Well, Lucas was a sick child. So it tainted everything. We didn’t know it at the time, but at three months old Lucas was a very collicky baby. We now can contribute that to his illness, we just thought he was collicky at the time. But, at the age of about three months, and I was nervous, I was a nervous mom at the beginning, when he was making noise about because he cried so often. And at about three months Lucas started to throw up for a couple of hours, but it started to happen pretty regularly, once a week, but continued to increase over the course of time. We then realized after, you know, he was in and out of the doctors and the doctors kept saying it was stomach flu. And I said, “this isn’t the stomach flu.” I don’t remember exactly when it happened but about a year in a half we rushed him to the hospital. They thought he had twisted intestines, but they couldn’t even get him off of me because he was clinging like a monkey. He calmed down and we went home but that accelerated pretty rapidly my... his dad was in the restaurant business and he wasn’t home evenings and weekends so I was really left to Lucas’ illness, or what became an illness, and it was horrifying because I didn’t know what was happening and he would be up for hours screaming in pain.

Finally, after I don’t know how long it took we changed doctors, but Lucas was about three. We rushed him up to the hospital. He had been vomiting profusely for hours and was really sort of out cold in my arms. The surgeon that came in at the time, the pediatric doctor on call, of course won’t look at a baby without getting all the bloodwork done, and realized that all of Lucas’ pancreatic enzymes were off the charts and that he was suffering from pancreatitis. And the only reason my baby would ever have pancreatitis is they have a pancreatic tumor or something pretty deadly. So, that’s when the reality of what we were facing really took hold. From that point forward Lucas was, every week, monitored, blood tests, sonograms, restricted with food, knocked out for six hours with other tests, it was constant; insane. It was a week, it was in January, one month shy of his fourth birthday they ended up doing an endoscopy because something was really obvious. They hadn’t done one, and they found what the surgeon always thought was the case with Lukey. He had a cyst called choledocal [unclear] cyst it was common bile duct. A congenital cyst between the gallbladder and the liver and he couldn’t digest any of his food. He had probably been struggling with pancreatitis from the day he was born.

So, he went in and they said once it burst it would be gone. And from that point forward... he had surgery for 7 hours, he was cut pretty open, they also removed his gallbladder. We thought he would be in the hospital for 14 days but, I think this is one of the most telling and most important things to note, when he woke up with tubes everywhere, because he had a bag at the time, I went down to bend down to kiss him and the surgeon was there and with all his might he took his hand and he slapped me in the face and said, “Stupid mommy, stupid mommy.” And the surgeon pulled me and Raymond out.

**AS:** Who slapped you?

**NE:** Lucas. The surgeon said, “I want you to hear me. Children who have this kind of medical trauma, an intervention from birth, grow up with rage, anger, inability to listen to adults. You need to get him into therapy as soon as you can.”

**AS:** Wow.

**NE:** And we got home and I don’t know who Lucas would have been. Maybe he would have been the same, but he apparently became really belligerent, hostile, tough. Really tough.

**AS:** Just as the doctor had…

**NE:** Yes. And then he had more medical problems. They thought he had turrets, he started to tick terribly and we were running everywhere. It ended up he had what’s called PANDAS which is from all the stress that he had. There is a correlation now between stress and ticks and it looks like turrets. So then he had his tonsils and thyroids out and was in the hospital again. Then after that, he was hit in the head in kindergarten and was knocked out for twelve hours with a severe concussion.

**AS:** My goodness.

**NE:** Then after all of that I got very sick, and he watched me because my autoimmune system just went berserk. So I got very sick for five years and was rushed to the hospital for at least once a week and he would witness that and it was for trauma. So to answer your question in a very long way, motherhood for me from the very beginning was all about crisis. From birth, it was crisis after crisis. And, it was difficult from day one.

**AS:** Did you feel supported by your husband?

**NE:** Not enough. No.

**AS:** Were you working full time?

**NE:** Yes. Now, neither of us could sleep in the middle of the night, when either I needed to get to the hospital for myself because that’s when my problem really would occur, I would wake up and my tongue would be this big. Or, Lucas was not well. And there was no waking Raymond up. “Leave me alone, I need to sleep.” So I was pretty exhausted, I was working pretty… ten hour days and, with Luke all night and on weekends.

**AS:** Would it be fair to say you were... you raised Lucas on your own?

**NE:** Yes, it would be.

**AS:** A single mother with a man in the house.

**NE:** Yes. In many instances.

**AS:** Yes.

**NE:** Yes. He didn’t take an active role with… Lucas was a remarkable athlete. He was like a superstar kid. He is so bright, beyond bright. And, he got into remarkable schools and ended up at the University of Miami and he wanted to go there because they had a good business school. He was a super-star athlete, he couldn’t play nice in the sandbox, but he was recognized for his academics and athleticism. He played for the Junior Olympics... but Raymond is an artist. And Lucas is an all-American kid.

**AS:** Right.

**NE:** I was a sports junkie [laughter]. So… And we were very tight, and we still are. I am really Lucas’ go to. I’m his universe. I don’t want to be his universe. I want to be his mother.

**AS:** Interesting.

**NE:** But not his universe.

**AS:** Do you think you played a part in that?

**NE:** I think I did. I don’t think I’d do is... play the same role to the degree which I had. But, the habit has been formed.

**AS:** Can you back up and tell me when Lucas was born, what his birthday is?

**NE:** February 18, 1991.

**AS:** So he’s 25.

**NE:** He started experimenting very early.

**AS:** Yes, let’s move on to drugs.

**NE:** You know, he was a risk taker. Lucas was a really big risk taker. I remember at a birthday party he was dared and the police showed up. Nobody knew why, and they said someone from this location called the police. The kids had dared Lucas to call the police and say there was an emergency, and he did [laughter]. I almost had a heart attack, but he said…

**AS:** Wow.

**NE:** He was a daring kid. And he had a lot of anger. A lot of anger. We tried therapist after therapist.

**AS:** So beginning from…

**NE:** Four...

**AS:** What point… Four years old?

**NE:** People, therapists would say to me, you can’t break him. He’s not breakable right now.

**AS:** What did they mean by that?

**NE:** He… they couldn’t get into him, into his heart and his head.

**AS:** They couldn’t reach him

**NE:** They couldn’t reach him. He had such a wall built from all this trauma. The only thing that Lucas would say is that he felt really different: “Why me?” is still, or, “Why are you doing this to me?” is still a line he uses to this day. And, it was what he said from the minute he could talk. “Why are you doing this to me, mommy?” with his bellyache.

**AS:** Oh, because, oh right.

**NE:** ...Why are you doing this to me after his surgery.

**AS:** ...his physical problems, he connected those with you, and with other people being in charge of his body and mind.

**NE:** Why are you doing this to me. And to this day, when he is blue, or even when I was putting him in rehab, “Why are you doing this to me?” And how do you explain to a three year old that I tried, I said, “I tried to help you. This isn’t to hurt you.” I don’t think it registered. I’m sure it didn’t.

**AS:** That is fascinating. So, he’s a daredevil, he’s ten, and then when did you notice that he was starting to experiment or…

**NE:** I think he started to smoke pot at 13 or 14. Yeah. I didn’t realize it at the time. And, I don’t want to say I thought it was cute, I didn’t think it was cute, but I thought it was acceptable.

**AS:** Yeah.

**NE:** But, it was a big mistake. I now know it was a terrible mistake. And I never had pills in the house. I never took them.

**AS:** Back up. What was a big mistake? That you just let that slide?

**NE:** Yes. That I was easy about that.

**AS:** What would you have done differently? I’m thinking in the context of our culture where marijuana is being legalized and the 60s generation.

**NE:** It wasn’t legal then.

**AS:** Right. It wasn’t legal then. But what would you do differently?

**NE:** I wouldn’t drink in front of him the way I did. Not that I was… I mean socially we had parties and a lot of people were drinking. That would not be so cool today for me today at all. I would tell him that pot is illegal, and you can’t smoke it, and you can do what you want when you are out of this house. But…

**AS:** So he would smoke at home?

**NE:** Not a lot, but I really put the kibosh on it. He was going out every night and I knew what he was doing. He would come home stoned out of his mind.

**AS:** Right. At 13, 14?

**NE:** No, more like 15, 16. Tenth, eleventh [grade].

**AS:** Any other substances?

**NE:** Yes.

**AS:** Before then?

**NE:** In eleventh grade I called home, which I always did, and I asked the woman who took care him…. Lucy. “What’s going on?” And she said, “Lucas is in his room with a girl.” And I said, “I want to talk to him” and he could barely talk. He was slurring, I had never heard him like this. And he said “I’m really tired” and I said, “Lucy, what is going on in that room. He’s not tired.” And then I spoke to the girl. And I said, “You are not to leave my house. I want to know what you both took.” And they said nothing. And I said, “Well here is the deal I’m in New York City and you are not to leave the house I’m calling the police.” Because at that point Lucas had fallen asleep. I called the police, the ambulance showed up. Both of them at this point were out. They were driven to the hospital, I called my friend…. with the ambulance at my house. I was working. I was able to get back to the Island. By the time I got to the hospital, a couple of my friends were there.

Lucas had Xanax, alcohol, cocaine, and marijuana in his system. The girl who was really in big trouble, I don’t know how she was talking to me, the way she was at first because he was the one who sounded really bad. It was awful because when he woke up he was awful to me. Disgusting. And we had somebody come to the house then that wanted to take him away, you know, like…

**AS:** To a residential treatment?

**NE:** And Lucas was leaving three weeks later because he had gotten to an exceptional program in London, for the summer, at a bank. And Raymond and I were very conflicted. Raymond wanted to send him and I didn’t.

**AS:** Send him where?

**NE:** To London. Let him go to London.

**AS:** Instead of to treatment.

**NE:** And he went to London.

**AS:** Was he 16 at this time?

**NE:** Eleventh grade, 16 I guess. Then, it was twelfth grade. He was never home. He was getting high all the time i didn’t know what he was doing. A week before he was leaving for college I got a call that he was in jail for a DWI. He was completely stoned out when we showed up to court on Xanax or something. And I said to the judge…. “I don't...” I was separated at the time and, I don’t know what I was thinking, wishing, hoping, praying. I couldn’t really grasp the seriousness of what was happening. I couldn’t. I think I was in such disbelief and such shock. I didn’t want to look.

**AS:** Tell me about your experience with other mothers around this time. Did it shift or change over time? When he was small did you have a lot of interaction with other mothers?

**NE:** I had my good friends. But I didn’t have interaction with people who were struggling the same way. And honestly at this point everybody in the high school's mother looked at me like I was a really bad mom. And I was… a lot of the women in Long Island don’t work. You know they [unclear] very wealthy men. I worked a lot of hours. I wasn’t home a lot because I worked so much. I had a tough, youngster as my child. Lucas was a fighter. So, I was so uncomfortable there and I didn’t trust people there to share my life with. Except one very good friend who is still a very good friend of mine. But it was tough. It wasn’t until, really, Lucas’ freshman year of college that I got really involved because I had moved back to the city, saw my house. I moved back to Manhattan and I got very involved in something called the Freedom Institute in New York. Which is… there was a parent’s group there for people whose children were using a lot of drugs.

**AS:** Was he at school at this time?

**NE:** He was in college. Almost kicked out supposedly. I mean, lots of problems in college with drugs. He came home... that summer I found needles and steroids. We reentered therapy, there was a lot of back and forth with this. Lots of Xanax. Back and forth. But I promise, I promise I’m finished, I’m done.

**AS:** Oh, this is what happened. Get caught and...

**NE:** ….over and over and over again. And then I realized there was a lot of money missing. A lot of money. He had cashed a 5000 dollar check.

**AS:** ...took your checkbook?

**NE:** I had a check. Somehow, I don’t even know how he cashed it but he did. 5000 dollars. I had no idea at the time. I had no idea until 2 months later. Money was always missing from my wallet and I’m going, “How much money did you spend today?” Thousands of dollars he took. More car accidents. And this lasted a long time. And the first month of his junior year and that was it. I don't know I woke up. Something had happened. I called an interventionist, I was in New York, I found somebody in Florida, just a therapist, and I read him Lucas’ bio because I had written a story. And he said, “Nancy I’m good, but I’m not this good.” He said he needs to get away. And I flew down the next day. Lucas thought we were going to therapy together. I had already called the school and pulled him out. I had already called where he was living and cancelled his lease. And, I don’t know, I said, “It is up to you but you don’t have a place to live and you aren't enrolled in school. Take it or leave it.” And that was the beginning.

**AS:** Is this what the therapist recommended that you do or did you do this kind of on your own? The cancelling thing?

**NE:** It was coming. That I did on my own but it was coming. I was at the Freedom Institute, I was getting help myself in New York. I was talking to other parents. And at that point in time something awoke in me that said “he is going to die if you don’t do something.” And of he went the next day.

**AS:** So he agreed.

**NE:** He agreed. I had his friends call me: “We will watch over him, don’t do this.” I said, “if you really care about Lucas, don’t call me again.” And I hung up the phone. I don’t know how I did it. But that was the first, we had three more after that. He went to four treatments.

**AS:** Ok. So how long did he stay, he’s only 25 now, so he must have been what 20, 21 by this point?

**NE:** Yeah, 20.

**AS:** Ok.

**NE:** I guess. He went... he was there for 12 weeks. He then went to sober living in Atlanta, from North Carolina to Atlanta, the day he showed up in sober living he bought drugs and left, hitchhiked back to Florida.

**AS:** Wow.

**NE:** I told him to call me when he was ready to go back but not to show up in New York. He called me intermittently, we would chat about nothing. He would say no, whatever, and then he showed up. He hitchhiked to New York. Oh no, somehow he kept me credit card number and bought himself a first class ticket to New York.

**AS:** Oh, first class.

**NE:** First class and showed up at my door.

**AS:** [laughter].

**NE:** That went on.

**AS:** Did he go to treatment again after that?

**NE:** Not immediately. He stayed with friends in New York City. He got a job, passed his real estate license in New York. Got a job and then I started seeing him. He needed to leave that apartment, he came back to my apartment, and then same thing. He just nodded off, was spending time in the bathroom. I called the police and had him kicked out. I got the interventionist. He didn’t show up. I went to Breakthrough. And then he agreed to go to treatment. He stayed at the house the night before he was leaving and i woke up at 1:30 in the morning and he could barely move but i saw him snorting opiates. How we got to the airport…. If it wasn’t for this guardian angel….

**AS:** Why the airport?

**NE:** He was flying to Florida.

**AS:** Oh, for treatment.

**NE:** But he could barely move. Screaming and cursing me out in the middle of Laguardia airport with the entire airport looking at me and him. He would fall down, I mean it was... and a transit person saw me, a woman, and said I think you need help. And got me through, I don't know how because he couldn't walk. Got him on an early flight and had him sit first class with the stewardesses watching him. But it was a horror scene at the airport for two hours. He was there for 3 weeks, 3 months. Unbeknownst to me, he was in touch with a criminal. He showed up…

**AS:** While he was in treatment? What kind of a criminal, what do you mean?

**NE:** I don't really know what kind of criminal, a really bad criminal.

**AS:** Oh oh. Like a drug dealer?

**NE:** A drug dealer or I think worse. Or a mafia or I’m not sure. Showed up at my apartment at Christmas, I said you have two days to get back to Florida or you are on the streets. He introduced me to this guy who said he wanted to meet me and I told the guy that he was bad news to his face. I told Lucas that if you left with him then he could write me off. Lucas was driving out to Las Vegas with him to do something supposedly, and he left. And I got a phone call three days later. Lucas was picked up in Utah, on five federal accounts.

**AS:** Federal?

**NE:** Federal. He was in jail. I was... I don’t even know what I was. I called my sister, she got their friend who is a lawyer here, who said to me, “You gotta get him out of that jail, it is one of the worst jails in the country.” And I said, “He can’t come back to me, I can’t take him back, I can’t do it.” And my sister and Eric, her husband, agreed while he…. we got a lawyer from Utah to come to Minnesota. They took him in while we were waiting to get him into Hazelden. He did not, was not guilty of any of the….

**AS:** Charges?

**NE:** Charges. Except for possession which he agreed the Oxycontin in his pocket belonged to him. Everything else in the trunk he had no idea was in there.

**AS:** And he was with the guy that was at your apartment?

**NE:** No, that guy flew to Utah, and he probably knew what was in his car, he was criminal.

**AS:** Oh, a different guy.

**NE:** Who had been in jail before for possession and dealing. Lucas went to Hazelden and was there... but he wasn’t doing the work at all. Dr. Lee, the head psychiatrist at Hazelden said, “He’s a tough kid Nancy, and he’s a danger.” And what will be will be. He lived here, he worked here, and he relapsed real bad. And he had never done heroin before. I didn’t know he had done it, he did it twice, he didn't shoot it he snorted it, and he got violently ill actually. But I saw him and he was…

**AS:** He had been using pills?

**NE:** Big pill user, big oxycontin guy.

**AS:** Ok.

**NE:** Oh, and in college he had a grand mal seizure from the Xanax and Adderall. I got a phone call and thought it was him. I was walking in New York [to my] home and I said, “Hi Lu” and they said “It’s not Lucas, it is blah blah. We are waiting for the ambulance, we think he is breathing. We don't know if he is breathing.” Of course I flew to Florida the next day. He was disgusting then too.

**AS:** When he would see you after these episodes?

**NE:** Yeah. And his brain fried from all the Xanax and the Adderall and it didn’t know whether to go up or down. It was shortly after that, no, that was the end of his sophomore year. Then he had the summer and then the first month of his junior year. I must sound like a lunatic right now.

**AS:** No. You don’t. Not to me.

**NE:** I can’t, like what do you, like hello. When I listen to it.

**AS:** Yeah, that’s true. When we hear the list of things we have been through, there’s our trauma. It’s our trauma that’s… that makes our brains do that I think.

**NE:** Yeah.

**AS:** Yeah. Because not very often do we list these stories in a chronological way, because it’s too painful. Right? Our brains, our traumatized moments are trying to protect us from that.

**NE:** And you can’t really believe that you are living this.

**AS:** No. It’s so true.

**NE:** If anybody would have ever said to me, “You ever worry about your child growing up and becoming an addict?” I would go “It’s not even on the radar, what are you talking about?”

**AS:** Right.

**NE:** It would have never even occurred to me. Yeah.

**AS:** So he had a bad relapse after Hazelden?

**NE:** Yes and my sister…

**AS:** Was he living with your sister at the time?

**NE:** No he had an apartment with friends here. And his roommate came to me and said “We’ve got a problem.” That night my sister, Eric... I spent the whole day and got somebody here, was trying to help us get him somewhere. And Lisa, Eric, and Trevor, his roommate, went to the Mall of America where he was working and did an intervention. He was pretty high, really high.

**AS:** At work he was high?

**NE:** Yeah. The police had been involved with him a couple of time at the Mall Of America. And he was on probation mind you, for two years. We got him to Fairview. Or Alina? I don’t remember which one. Because he had to detox. He was there for 48 hours and he tried to tell me, it was the next day, that he was ok now, but he left that night for California.

**AS:** For treatment?

**NE:** For treatment. He was there for 3 months.

**AS:** So by this point he has been in treatment for an entire year

**NE:** At different times.

**AS:** Yeah. A total of a year in treatment. Right, that’s what I meant. In totality.

**NE:** Right. A year. And he was in sober living for three and a half months. And he’s not involved in a program. He’s never been.

**AS:** Interesting.

**NE:** Never. But he’s been sober for 17 months.

**AS:** And he was living on his own?

**NE:** With his roommate, someone who goes to Pepperdine [University] who doesn’t drink or smoke. He is actually home with his folks now in China. He is Asian. He got his real estate license in California and is working. Lucas is a serious worker. He is very driven. Oh man he really wants to be successful but he is very driven by the externals. But he is in therapy now. I don’t know what kind of work he is doing there. But he is different. He has matured to a degree, he has. He is not the same person he was. But I did for a long time talk about community. I can’t write his story.

**AS:** No. Not at all.

**NE:** But I live with that uncertainty, as we all do.

**AS:** Right.

**NE:** As we all do.

**AS:** So, how do you live with that uncertainty?

**NE:** Well, I’m very engaged in my Wednesday night parent group. It is true though that when your child gets sober after a certain point you start pulling back a little bit. I think part of that is I don’t want to hear all the bad stories so much anymore. I want something else, you know, but I do go very regularly, I do go very regularly to that. I read a lot, I read a lot. I stay very connected to my women. To other mothers, I’m very connected to other mothers because that support has been a godsend, lifesaving for me.

**AS:** And you found those other mothers in….

**NE:** Program.

**AS:** In programs.

**NE:** I mean the people that I met when Lucas was in Florida, Caron, three years ago, were still some of the... they live in Ohio, they live in Pennsylvania, but we are very connected.

**AS:** How about the Freedom Institute. Did they use a twelve step program?

**NE:** No, not for us, no. And it was a very intimate program. No. It was much more of an interaction. We really spoke, the mothers, really spoke.

**AS:** To each other?

**NE:** To each other.

**AS:** Just...

**NE:** With a therapist. It was led by a therapist.

**AS:** And it was all women?

**NE:** This was. But, I found that more women go to these things.

**AS:** Well, that’s true.

**NE:** A lot of times… Yeah, I mean there aren’t a lot of men who really, consistently come. But it was led by Michael Noth. If you ever watched Sex and the City you know Mr. Big? Christopher Noth. This is his brother believe it or not. He is an addiction specialist. He ran this program at the Freedom Institute.

**AS:** Interesting. So what, if you had to describe to someone what it is like to be, not the mother of Lucas, but the mother of an addict. What is mothering addiction like?

**NE:** Well, in part, I don’t feel like I have been part of the living for a long time. I don’t. There is an elephant in the room and a monkey on my back from the minute i wake up to the minute I go to sleep. It has really forced me to take a real hard look at how I show up every day for myself and in the world. I don't know if I would have done it the same way had I not been the parent of an addict.

**AS:** How so?

**NE:** I don’t know how I have contributed or if I have contributed. I don’t. But I certainly wanted to invest in understanding if what I was doing would continue to contribute, or not help Lucas. I didn’t know if changing me would change him, but I knew that if what I was doing was certainly not helping him than I wanted to change that.

**AS:** Ok, right. Is it about, then, taking a chance and looking at yourself?

**NE:** Totally.

**AS:** Regardless of what your addict child does?

**NE:** Totally. Totally. Because I knew that whatever I was doing, that may not be working I was doing to myself too and was doing in my relationships with men. Because…

**AS:** What are those things that you were doing and how do they relate to mothering and your relationships with men?

**NE:** I couldn’t tolerate the thought of Lucas being uncomfortable in any way.

**AS:** As a mother.

**NE:** As a mother. So I gave in a lot. A lot.

**AS:** Would you trace that back to his illness? Or would you say that even with the consequences of addiction, the illegal behavior, you didn’t want him to be uncomfortable then either?

**NE:** I did not…. I did not want him to be uncomfortable that’s for sure, but not to the same degree. I could tolerate him being uncomfortable more. I could not tolerate what I felt like and I’m not even sure what that really was. I could not tolerate the insanity and I needed to sort of make it ok. I needed to quiet it down, I needed to… because part of the insanity was Lucas’ incessant craziness around all of this. He was verbally abusive, he was loud, he was aggressive, he was lying, stealing, cheating, and I just wanted to attenuate that horror. I got, my anxiety was so high from all of the insanity, that I wanted to quiet that down. I also didn’t really understand, I wasn’t disciplined enough. I didn't have the discipline, to say I don't care how uncomfortable he is. It is better than being a drug addict. And not that anything could ever be worse than being a drug addict. But I thought if I did that maybe it would help him. I thought maybe, you know what, it is too Amy? I thought I would be able to get to him. I thought that I was going to be able to show him the light.

**AS:** Yeah. Through all our love and sacrifice and...

**NE:** I did.

**AS:** ….efforts.

**NE:** I thought that with enough effort, if I tried a little bit harder and a little bit harder, he would wake up.

**AS:** How do you connect that to good mothering?

**NE:** Well…

**AS:** Do you know what I’m getting at?

**NE:** Maybe. I think Karen… was all about bad, you know, thrown to the gutter, thrown to the walls.

**AS:** Right.

**NE:** I never bought that philosophy. And I knew that if I didn’t continue to show up in Lucas’ life depending... and how I showed up, of course, the chances of it really would have gone off the deep end. It would have gone worse. I knew that loving him was still really important. I knew that I was not going to disown him. I did throw him out multiple times and I did say “I love you, call me when you are ready, but I can’t have you in my life or my house unless you go get help.”

And it’s been different at different times, but I never disregarded him. I never said “I hate you,” even though I did hate him. “Don’t ever show up in my life because you’re you're out. I can’t push you out of my life.” Is that what you are getting at?

**AS:** yeah. Because mothering…

**NE:** How do you go to bed at night having birthed a child… For me, and now, you know, like, I don’t have one? I’m going to pretend they don’t exist?

**AS:** Right.

**NE:** It’s almost crazy making, Amy. For mothers. For me. Because, I was really conflicted. Because having Lucas around made me crazy. And not having him around made me crazy.

**AS:** [Laughter]. And then there is that constant uncertainty of their…

**NE:** Wellbeing.

**AS:** ...wellbeing and their actual death, impending death when they use the way that they use.

**NE:** Right. Right.

**AS:** Would you say it is more extreme than worrying mothers anyway?

**NE:** I don’t think you can compare.

**AS:** Like a normal kind of worrying of a mother versus mothering an addict. For you what was that like?

**NE:** I knew what it was like to watch my friends when their kids were first driving saying “I can’t sleep until they get the key in the door.” I understand that. That is normal worrying. I couldn’t sleep because I didn’t know if my phone was going to ring and my son was going to be dead.

**AS:** Right. Exactly, that’s the difference.

**NE:** I, and this is every day, for years, and years, and years, I don’t live with that same thought every day now, but it’s not too far away. And, if I call Lucas now and he doesn’t call me back for an hour, it is the first place I go. Where is he? What is he doing? Why isn’t he responding? Is he back there? Is he doing that again? It is where I go immediately. Where most normal mothers would go, “Oh, he’s probably out with his friends, he could be at a movie...

**AS:** He’s 25, he’s an adult. No.

**NE:** I don’t think those thoughts I think oh my god what is happening. It’s like the Sword of Damocles is over my head all the time. Waiting to just [noise that connotes death].

**AS:** Right.Would you say that you have, because one of the things I am thinking about is the double meaning of mothering addiction. Right? So there is mothering addiction or addicts, and then there is mothering addiction. And I am wondering, in the program we talk about the twelve steps and our work and our own recovery and do you have... have you ever pulled those apart at all in yourself thinking about because I have been traumatized by my sons addiction I can’t, I’m kind of addicted to mothering? Have you ever… We talk about being addicted to our addicts, but I want to take it a little bit out and think about that in terms of how does that relate to mothering?

**NE:** Well, I’m really aware that my mothering has really been about saving Lucas, or fixing Lucas. And it’s only very recently that I am even able to say to Lucas when he’s got a problem, “What are you doing about that?” or “What are you going to do about that?”

**AS:** Versus…

**NE:** Well, “have you thought about this and have you thought about that and da da da da.” Coming up with fourteen different ways that he could look at it. So, in terms of mothering addiction, all I want to do is mother addiction to keep my addicted child away from addiction.

**AS:** Even though you know…

**NE:** I can’t.

**AS:** ...You can’t.

**NE:** Even though I know I can’t. But, every mother, I think, that’s probably not accurate. Many mothers I would bet, know that and would give up trying. The thought of really letting Lucas fly on his own really? I’m not there yet. I’m not.

**AS:** Does he know that?

**NE:** Yes. I am proud to say that I have made enormous changes and strides in the last three years in my life. Probably more than I have made in the last 59, 60 [years] because I really, in my heart, have not truly accepted that maybe there is just a little bit of me that can’t make a difference.

**AS:** Because that is the mothering part.

**NE:** And that’s what brings me back to, that is the mothering part. You know, I think people who have children who have problems can show up for them differently. They can offer their ideas or assistance. When it gets to addiction the message continuously is “Don’t do that, it’s not helpful.” It is probably not helpful for mothers to do that when their kids reach a certain age. I think the whole acceptance thing is still, hasn’t been taken completely.

**AS:** What…

**NE:** I haven’t accepted… I don’t really wake up to Lucas’ addiction until I call him and he’s not home and he doesn't call back. It’s like I’m right there, I can’t explain it. I’m not separate from “Oh I wonder what he's doing?” and I’m still mothering the addict. So much less, but I’m still mothering my trauma.

**AS:** Yeah.

**NE:** That’s what I’m really mothering. It’s like that feeling in an instant: where is he what doing? And it's like, “Okay Nancy, what do we need to do for you right now?”

**AS:** So you have shifted that?

**NE:** Yes.

**AS:** And through work, a lot of work.

**NE:** A lot of work.

**AS:** What have you done? What do you do recently?

**NE:** I have spoken at a couple Hazelden meetings. Do you mean in terms of relation to addiction?

**AS:** How have you…

**NE:** I’m actively engaged in therapy. I’m in therapy. A wonderful woman who I see weekly. I got to lectures all the time whoever is speaking I listen, I participate, I talk about it all the time, I’m not reticent about it, I will tell anybody that I am the mother of an addict I don’t keep it secret.

**AS:** When did you start doing that?

**NE:** Immediately.

**AS:** His first time in treatment? When did the shift happen then, let’s go back a second. When did the shift happen between the mother who didn’t feel comfortable at school to you knowing that just being willing to say that?

**NE:** That it was time to go to treatment?

**AS:** Yes, well not just to send him to treatment but often we don’t admit to very many people when our kid first goes into treatment. So I’m wondering at what point were you willing to just put it all out there and tell people? Did you have a moment… Did you live in shame and stigma?

**NE:** I still have shame. I still have shame.

**AS:** But you don't feel the stigma?

**NE:** I don’t pay attention to it. I don’t know what people say or think. I mean I’m sure people maybe say what happened in that household. I’m sure they do. I was willing to talk about it with my friends and my family immediately. I was never quiet about it. I was really willing to go really public with it. The minute that the therapist in Florida said to me “I’m good Nancy, but I’m not that good” I went “Oh my god.” And it was at that moment that I said, let it rip, Nancy.

**AS:** Interesting. And he was 20.

**NE:** He was 20. But it wasn’t like people didn’t know.

**AS:** Oh right. But, yeah I was just looking for that moment when you realized…

**NE:** I think I realized it when I really saw the steroids, the needles. But, I think I didn’t know enough because I think I would have done something. I think you do something when you really know. When something becomes really clear to me there is no wavering. It was at that moment when I knew. It’s now, Nancy, that’s it. It's now or never. It's do or die. I had a do or die moment at that moment. And that’s when I started to engage. Oh, and then I was very involved in the Caron [unclear] parent meetings in New York. Up until the day that I moved here. And the first thing I did was look for parent meetings. I was first going to the Hazelden meetings. And then I… I don’t know how I found…

**AS:** Our Nar-Anon group?

**NE:** Maybe through the internet. So, I listen, I engage my friendships. Many of them are around parents of addicts.

**AS:** It’s our community.

**NE:** It’s our life, really. So, I mean, every day I do something related to this world. Whether it is helping someone else, listening to someone’s story, reading something, watching something, showing up somewhere, speaking.

**AS:** So you have done some speaking?

**NE:** I told my story, to a degree, in Hazelden and in New york.

**AS:** When you’ve gone back?

**NE:** No, when I was at Caron.

**AS:** Oh, okay.

**NE:** Up until Hazelden, because I was in New York when Lucas was in Hazelden. I didn’t move out here until he was out of Hazelden.

**AS:** And then he was up here.

**NE:** And then he went to California. But, I would do anything. It’s not that I want to live… People would say to me “Don't you want to get away from it, Nancy? As a mother. Don't you want to start thinking about life differently?” I don’t really. I really don’t. Because I would rather be able to show up for other people. Other mothers.

**AS:** right. Mothering other mothers through addiction.

**NE:** Yeah.

**AS:** Through their child’s addiction.

**NE:** I am going to say I don’t know how half of us mothers are standing. I don’t. I really don’t. I'm surprised more of us haven’t have nervous breakdowns, emotionally collapsed, ended up in the hospital with some horrific illness. Cracked up, or became addicts. [Laughter] I mean honestly, I don’t, I really don’t, Because once you know where you are you are in such a spiral. Your life is never the same as a mother.

**AS:** No. It's true.

**NE:** And I didn’t have other children so I don’t know what it would have been like to be the parent possibly of a second child that may not have been an addict. And what that would have looked like. I only know mothering in relation to addiction.

**AS:** Would you say that you are more, well you already said this, nevermind.

**NE:** I am much less judgemental.

**AS:** Okay. Do you want to talk about the shame and judgment?

**NE:** You know, I remember too as a younger woman and looking at somebody’s disastrous child and thinking what is happening in that house? What is the mother doing what is the father doing? I am too educated now to know that we are not responsible for that... it is complete addiction. I don’t judge. I may have thoughts and feelings if I’ve witnessed something, saying “I don’t think that’s serving their child.” Out of all the education I’ve gotten. But, if I see a child who is down and out my immediate thought next is not who is their mother and father?

**AS:** Right.

**NE:** I often admit people think that about me though. I do. And it’s hard. It’s hard you know I’m not a Facebooker anyway but you look at all these blissful youngsters graduating, getting married, blah blah.

**AS:** In your son’s peer group, yeah.

**NE:** And it is very piercing. It really is. But, I have to tell you Amy, and I don’t know if any other mother feels this way, but I am a big believer that we will get exactly what we ask for in this lifetime. And I know in the deepest part of me that Lucas and I were meant to be together because we both had a lot to learn. He has been my biggest teacher. My biggest teacher and my best teacher because I’ve had great teachers and I’m like “Ok yeah I don’t need to learn that.” I needed to learn about me and parenting and how to show up and be educated on this whole thing too. And that was because of Lucas.

**AS:** Do you consider yourself a good mother?

**NE:** I’m very judgemental about myself. I could not answer easily. Yes, I would consider myself a good mother. I can’t say that affirmatively. I can say that I have given my best to Lucas, possibly some of my worst. I think if Lucas would sit down and really think about it that he would say he was very loved by me and is very loved by me and that I was his biggest champion. He will remind me of all the gifts I gave him. But, if I were to take an aerial view, I have a lot of would’ve should’ve could’ve. But don’t we all? Even the healthiest parents.

**AS:** Oh yeah, no matter who your kids are.

**NE:** I feel proud to have showed up this way now. I do. So I think my parenting has really gotten better.

**AS:** Would you say you were the mother you aspired to be when he was little?

**NE:** Often. Often. Not all the time, but often. Yeah. This thing called… There was something on TV yesterday about mother’s and sons too. But I think it is this thing called Mothers and Children. It’s different. I mean that’s the big joke and one of the first words out of their mouth: my mother. I think the rivers go so deep for all of us, every single one of us with our own mothers. And I think the same is true for being a parent.

**AS:** Yeah, with our children.

**NE:** With our children.

**AS:** This is really wonderful.

**NE:** Was it helpful?

**AS:** Yeah. Do you have any other thing that you want to share?

**NE:** No, we just need to keep on keeping on. Keep doing the work. Ourselves. Because like anything else you can learn something and then unlearn it very quickly.

**AS:** And then have to learn it again.

**NE:** And this really is a process. A never ending process. I think the biggest secret for mothers is to learn how to love themselves as much as they love their children.

**AS:** Right.

**NE:** I think that is the big crucial piece that we are… because it is easy to not do that as a person but it is harder to do that I think as a mother who has a child who is suffering.

**AS:** One thing we didn’t touch on was, at what point did you learn that addiction was a disease, or did you hear that, or what did you think about that when you first heard it. What was your process?

**NE:** Here is the thing. I have a problem with that. And I just bought this book called *Unbroken Brain*. I don't know if you have heard about it. I think there are so many factors that go into addiction. But, I have not adopted the philosophy or the belief that addiction is solely a disease and that is the problem. I think it has components of that, like everything else. But, *Unbroken Brain*, and I’ll be very brief. [Unclear] put it on our website actually. She was an addict, a woman who has been studying addiction for years and years and years and years. She believes that addiction is a mental illness in adolescence. And that almost, if not all, addicts, and I haven’t started the book yet, and people who become addicts lives had some serious trauma in them. Could have been medical intervention, could have been crazy household, could have been sexual abuse, could have been physical abuse, could have been verbal abuse. But some… the way in which their brains embraced whatever their experience was and what their perception of that, and when they got high for the first time the relief that their brain felt from the trauma and that it is a very learned behavior. Eventually you physically become addicted, no question. I believe more along the lines of her. And, I think it has a component that there are just some people who can take opiates for two months because they have a broken pelvis and then it is over and they don’t think about it again. Then there is another person who takes them with the same surgery and they become a full blown addict. I do believe it is about brain chemistry a lot. I have always had trouble with this whole disease model.

**AS:** Good, I’m glad I asked you that.

**NE:** I am very timid sharing that a lot because I think people judge me for that, you know. [laughter]

**AS:** Well there is just a shift happening right now. There’s so much...

**NE:** And the truth is none of us know.

**AS:** That’s right

**NE:** We don't know.

**AS:** That’s right.

**NE:** We also don't know why it is happening to so many people.

**AS:** Right.

**NE:** I mean it’s hard for me to believe that thousands and thousands and thousands of youngsters have this same disease. Like why are all of our generations’ kids have this disease called addiction?

**AS:** Right if it’s a disease.

**NE:** If it’s a disease. Did we drink too much coffee when we were pregnant? I mean I don’t know.

**AS:** Right, that’s interesting.

**NE:** Because really, I mean not that there aren’t a lot of addicts. But now 50 year old women are becoming addicts. There is a big thing now for women in their fifties. Menopause, divorces, loss of money, vitality, feelings of womanliness, losing your period, the whole thing. Drinking more and more. Taking pills. Why? Did they have a disease?

**AS:** It is more complex is what you are saying. That’s interesting.

**NE:** I mean they’ve drinking their whole lives, and suddenly they have a disease they haven't had the last thirty years? I don’t know. I don’t know. But I do know we are supposed to be doing something about it. Because that is what the world is telling us.

**AS:** Yeah, clearly.

**NE:** Because that is why it shows up this way. I don’t know if you heard, if you were at the meeting, but [unclear] and [unclear] went to the meeting and there was Federal and State people there. Minnesota has the fifth lowest population of addicts who have died of overdoses in the country. Lowest. I thought we were the second highest here.

**AS:** Wow, no it’s... Yeah.

**NE:** Fifth lowest of all the states, and ten people a month in Hennepin county alone are dying of an overdose. That’s why how can mothers forget? How do we forget?

**AS:** Right. Because it is around us all the time.

**NE:** People are sober and then they are dead. And that is what mother’s live with.

**AS:** Yes.

**NE:** Well, at least that is what this mother lives with.

**AS:** Thank you nancy.

**NE:** You’re welcome. Was this helpful, was this what you wanted?

**AS:** Yes.

**NE:** Was it? You didn’t have a sense of something else or..?

**AS:** No, it was perfect.