**Janise Holter**

**Narrator**

**Amy Sullivan**

**Interviewer**

**June 14, 2016**

**St. Paul, Minnesota**

Janise Holter -**JH**

Amy Sullivan -**AS**

**AS:** This is Amy Sullivan having an interview with Janise Holter on June 14th, 2016. Janise, will you state your name and address and say you give permission for recording to be used?

**JH:** My name is Janise Holter. I give permission for Amy Sullivan to use all the contents of this interview.

**AS:** Thank you. Could you tell me a little bit about your upbringing, aspects of your childhood that formed who you are, and a bit about your education and career? Whatever you say is totally fine and whatever direction you go off in is fine. If I want to bring you back I will bring you back.

**JH:** Okay, perfect. I’ll remind you to bring me back if I get too tangential. [laughs] Well, I grew up about two miles from where I live now, which is in Crystal, Minnesota. My parents were very young. My mother was seventeen when she had my sister and nineteen when she had me. My dad, we later discovered, suffered from bipolar. He had a lot of bouts of depression growing up, so that was a pretty clear memory of dealing with his quietude or quietness.

My mother came from a family of ten and was very connected to her family. They were southern baptists. My grandma was from the South; my grandpa was from Sweden. So, I had a lot of cousins, went to church a lot, loved going to church. Loved being in the really vibrant community. I admit we got a little too vibrant and my mother left before I was baptized. My sister was dumped and I was not because my mother left the church. We got a minister that was actually from Mississippi. He was a little bit too much of what the church was, so my mom left. We stopped going to church when I was thirteen.

I was kind of an odd kid. I was in the middle. I have an older sister, younger brother. My parents were married to each other three times. They divorced and married to each other three times in my childhood. So there were periods of time when my parents didn’t live together. I have an older sister who is breathtakingly gorgeous. So, that was an interesting thing to be second to. She was very, very beautiful. I have a younger brother who is four years younger than I am and he actually had an episode when he was twelve where he tried to commit suicide and was hospitalized for a number of months. My mother chalked it up to him having a concussion, but there was clearly some mental illness or something going on with him.

My parents owned a store, and I worked in the store. My mom is a folk artist. She paints scandinavian folk art [laughs]. She owned a craft store. She got into that and bought a store in Osseo, Minnesota. Small, little store, and I worked in her store with my dad. I worked in her store from the time I was fourteen until I was in eleventh grade. I got a job at a nursing home, and worked at the nursing home for the rest of my high school career. I worked with my parents and I helped my mom teach classes. She taught a lot of classes in different types of folk painting and ceramics. She was very crafty.

So, middle class. My dad worked for the highway department until the store kind of started to make some money—he decided to quit the highway department, and he worked at the store and helped my mom. My parents finally got divorced for the third or fourth time depending on how you count it, when I was thirty! [laughs] I always thought of the Woody Allen line: “My parents got divorced, or stayed married even though we begged them not to.” That’s how I felt when my parents finally got divorced because my dad was clearly mentally ill and my mom was keeping it together and they were both being pulled down a hole that was not good for either of them.

So, once they divorced, my dad just progressively got more and more—cycles of depression and mania and addiction. He was diabetic, and he had heart attacks. He didn’t keep taking care of himself. He died at seventy-two. My mother remarried a guy who was as mentally ill as my father, but the other end of the spectrum. Very, very, religious, fundamental religious. My dad was funny, and bigger than life, and sloppy, and everything, you know, was just sloppy. And my mother married this guy that is very rigid, and very neat, and very religious. She has been married to him for about sixteen years. She is very religious, very fundamental, very right-wing, very judgmental.

My parents were very hands-off. That was how I was parented. I mean, maybe it was the time or maybe it was because they were young. My mom was thirty-eight when I graduated from high school. We just did whatever. I remember playing softball and my parents never came to the softball games. They worked at their store all the time. There was no discussion ever that I would go to college. Never was it even considered that we would go to college. Neither of my parents were college educated.

**AS:** How did you end up going to college?

**JH**: I got out of school and I worked for a couple of years. I started off by going to community college and paying for it all out of pocket. My first round in college was all out of pocket. I always worked full time. I went to school, I worked full-time, and paid all my tuition out of pocket because I was raised that you did not go into debt. My dad was German, and that’s stereotypical German frugality. You don’t go into debt. You don’t go into debt for education. You go into debt for a house, but education is not worth going into debt for. It wasn’t outwardly said, but it was definitely an attitude that, you know, I would go to college and my parents would be like, “Do you know what you’re going to do? Why?” They had to see the ends. In my family I am the only college educated child.

They had a really interesting reaction when I stopped going to school to be an accountant and decided that cultural anthropology was what I was going to study. [laughs] That was interesting. My mom could not get it right, the whole, you know, whatever turned out being over four years I was in school. She kept telling people I was going to school to be an archaeologist. I had to just let it go. So that was not a value in my family. In school I did really well. I mean it was valued that I did well in school, but my parents were really hands-off.

I want to come back a little bit because I had my own addiction issues in high school. The first two weeks of my tenth grade year, one of my very good friends committed suicide, and that was a very difficult thing for me. I started using a lot of speed to go to school, and smoking a lot of pot. And it was 1976. Everybody smoked pot, but I started smoking a lot of pot. Like smoking pot on my way to school. My parents didn’t know how to address this. I didn’t know how to address this. I was fifteen and I had had this really close person—it was the first person, yeah I guess it was the first person that died. It was a person my same age. It turns out that it was probably because he was gay. I had glimpses of that and I kind of knew that, but it was 1976. It’s It was forty years ago. It was not a part of what you told people. But you knew, and anyways he committed suicide.

I responded to that by using drugs and started smoking cigarettes. My biggest lifelong addiction was with nicotine. My parents were both smokers too. My grandfather was a very serious alcoholic. Many of my uncles were alcoholics. I later had an uncle that committed suicide. So there was a lot of denied mental health issues in my dad’s family. If that wasn’t a family of people who suffered from serious depression—it was a dark and gloomy family.

My senior year in high school I kept fairly decent grades, but I smoked a lot of pot, took a lot of speed, took a lot of speed. That was my drug of choice just because it was, you know, it wasn’t a depressant. I think I was probably depressed and that was how I dealt with my depression.

When I would talk to my parents about how depressed I was it was kind of a “get over it” kind of thing. It was: “You know it has been two years since this person died. You need to get over it.”

**AS:** Did you ever go to treatment of any kind? How did you end up managing your—

**JH:** My addiction?

**AS:** Or ending your drug use?

**JH:** I started getting serious migraines when I was seventeen. I thought I was killing myself. I thought it was all the speed I was taking that was causing this to happen. It scared the shit out of me.

**AS:** It scared you.

**JH:** It scared the shit out of me. Because I was having all these weird things going on and I thought, “Oh my god, I am going to die.”

**AS:** Like those aura things?

**JH:** Not aural, but yeah. My fingers would go numb and stuff like that. It was all coinciding with these amphetamines I was taking. My children do not know this [laughs].

**AS:** They don’t know you used?

**JH:** Not to the extent to which I did. It’s just interesting because I am telling you and it’s like I mean I could tell Allison this, but—and I would but—

So anyways, I quit using amphetamines, got a job, and moved out of the house at eighteen. Got a job, lived uptown, worked at a record company, and had a blast. Did advertising. It was the late ‘70s early ‘80s. I was just kind of going to school part time, thought okay, I’m going to be an accountant because that is really practical and that’s what I should do. So, I went to Minneapolis Community College because I could afford it.

Then the plan was I would do the first two years there and then I would, you know, go on and get a degree in accounting and be a CPA. I did it for about a year and a half and I thought it wasn’t—I actually, do you know who Norma Rowe is? She was a University professor. Anyways, she is an Anthropology professor. I think she is dead now. She was a professor at Minneapolis Community College and she taught a class that was called Cultural Anthropology. I thought, “I’ll take this as one of my electives,” and it just blew me away, she just blew me away. It was my introduction to feminism, and you know, I was like, “Oh my God, this is what interests me! This is what I want to study. I want to study culture. I am interested in this.” [laughs] I’m not interested in spreadsheets! This was 1970—this wasn’t on the computer it was on paper!

So, I stopped going to—I’m just like I’m going to go to the University of Minnesota. She taught there, her husband taught there. That’s what I did. I worked at the record company, I became a waitress, I had worked for Republic Airlines for a little while. I always had to work full-time. I could never just go to school. I just couldn’t. Because I refused to go into debt.

**AS:** How long did it take you then to finish your bachelor's?

**JH:** I never did finish. I quit. I quit the U of M. I was about thirty U of M credits short of graduating. I quit to make some more money so I could—that’s how I would have to do it. It was a cycle. I was about twenty-six at this time. So, I was about seven years into this cycle.

**AS:** So no one talked to you about how affordable student loans were?

**JH:** I had such a fear based mentality about that that I wouldn’t even consider it. I didn’t consider it until I went back and got my teaching license. That I was able to break that kind of thing. So, I quit the last time, and I got married for the first time [laughs]. I married someone and was married for about a year, and then got divorced. Carey, the father of both of my kids, and were friends for a number of years, and I started to realized that I was gay. I started to realize that very early on. I started to realize that I could actually—I guess I didn’t because I went on to marry this person and have two kids with him. I think I was still trying to have that not be the truth.

**AS:** Married Carey?

**JH:** We didn’t get married until—Andy was in first grade by the time we were married. We were together for fourteen years, but we were only married for—actually I just recently got divorced, legally divorced, last year. The year before. He was an addict. He is an addict.

**AS:** Did you know he was an addict when you married him? When you two got together?

**JH:** I met him when I was twenty-one and then I had Allison when I was twenty-nine, and we were friends for eight years. He had a girlfriend during that time, for months, and he’s older than me by eleven years. He was at the U [of M] attempting to get his Ph. D. in philosophy. I had gone back to the U—I was trying to finish up doing nights. That wasn’t working either.

Anyway, we smoked a lot of pot. That is a conversation I have had with myself a lot. You don’t know that when you are with someone who is smoking pot and they are smoking pot daily, but all these other things are… they’ve got a job, it’s not affecting their life. You don’t realize it. Oh, they aren’t ever going to be able to stop. I’m going to stop. I could take it or leave it. I was always that way with alcohol, drugs, marijuana. Take it or leave it. I always could just take it or leave it. I was a smoker though. That I couldn’t take or leave. I was a smoker. I smoked from the time I was fourteen until the time I was fifty-four. A long time. So, the addiction was there. When we had kids—it wasn’t a planned pregnancy. Allison was not planned.

**AS:** And she’s your oldest?

**JH:** Yeah, she was not planned.

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

**JH:** 1989. So I was twenty-nine, Carey was thirty-nine, almost forty. He turned forty the year she was born I believe. The summer after she was born. So, that happened, and I have always been someone who has been like, “This is the road my life is on.” I never had this clear, “This is the way my life is going to turn out.” It is going to be like *this*. I am just going to go to college.

**AS:** You just kind of—how do you describe it? Go with the flow?

**JH:** Follow the road.

**AS:** Float along.

**JH:** I don’t know that I floated along because that sounds so passive, and I don’t think I was passive.

**AS:** Right, that does sound passive. So when you got pregnant you decided you were going to keep the baby. I mean did that solidify your relationship?

**JH:** Yes, yes. Carey is a really good person. He is a really good person. I have to say if there’s ever been anyone I have been connected to in life it has been him. It has been hard because the addiction and mental illness started to really kick in and that takes a person away from you. At that time, and during that period of time, I would say from that time until the next ten years, I felt really connected and really safe. We had a great relationship and there were some underlying things going on. He was an addict and I was gay! Aside from that! [laughs]

I have to say, I never thought I would be a mother. I am not very maternal. I am not one of those—surprisingly enough I wanted to be an early childhood teacher and a mother.

**AS:** But you didn’t have a mom.

**JH:** My mother was a very, very good mother to us when we were little. She likes little kids. Once we got to be old enough where we could take care of ourselves she started having her own life. And so she was a little bit absent. In her defense, she is one of the oldest of ten. She had taken care of siblings from the time she was… and she had us when she was seventeen. So her whole life had been taking care of little kids. I think as soon as she saw a glimmer of taking something for herself she did. So the downside of that was that we all really still needed her and she was doing her own thing. She really was dealing with my dad’s mental illness and trying to do that. Happiness, with religiosity in the background.

**AS:** Back to your early mothering—

**JH:** I loved being a mother to my kids. I loved it. I was surprised at how much I loved it. I quit my job, I had a paper route, I worked for a non-profit, I worked part-time. Carey had a pretty decent job. I own a house in northeast Minneapolis, which is tangential, but it was my house. Carey moved into that house and we just did what I am doing now. We decided that this is the life we wanted. I wanted to be home with Allison at the time. He would go to work and we became really, you know, standard model of a family. I stayed home.

I went back to school, took classes. I did some odd things. I went to school to be an upholsterer. So I did upholstery out of my house. Then I got pregnant with Andy. Then he was born. I was a seamstress for a while, I did seamstressing. I made dresses and stuff out of the house. Did a whole bunch of things like that. I had kind of a really mellow, hippy existence that I really enjoyed. On my deathbed when I’m harkening back on my life that will be my period of bliss. You never think that it’s going to go away. I don’t know where that has come from. But, anyway,

**AS:** Do you want to stop?

**JH:** No, I’m good. So, that surprised me that I enjoyed mothering as much as I did because I didn’t intend on being a mother. I was struggling with the whole living this life that didn’t seem to fit in so many ways, but did fit. When I finally did decide that I couldn’t live this heterosexual life anymore my kids were in middle school. People asked me, “What happened? How?” Have you ever had a pair of underwear that just doesn’t fit and... it's okay. It’s okay, you can wear it. You’ll get through the day with this underwear on but God, you want to take it off! You know? That’s what it was like living. That’s how it felt for me. I was in this life that wasn’t bad. Carey was so kind, he’s a kind person. The addiction started, those things started to happen too.

**AS:** Around that time?

**JH:** Around that same time. I had to take some sort of step away from this. I could have waited, maybe should have waited. But I didn’t wait.

**AS:** How far apart are your children?

**JH:** Twenty-two months. So Andy was in sixth grade and Ali was in eighth grade and I moved into this building in northeast Minneapolis and met Jill, a woman I had a nine year relationship with.

**AS:** Did your kids live with you?

**JH:** They lived with their dad. I moved away from the house because Carey did not want to leave the house. That was my house, and I didn’t want to disrupt the kids and the house. They were born in this house. They had fourteen years in this house. I was going to do whatever it took to keep stability in this house. Carey gave me money. We figured out the equity of the house and he gave me enough to go buy something else and I put that money into this building.

It was 2000 and the housing market was really hot. It was right before the crash. So, all I could buy was this building, and I bought this building and there was a part of me that was like I have this chunk of money. I just started going back to school to get my teaching license so I went back to Augsburg [College]. I knew that if I didn’t buy something with this—it was only $35,000, it wasn’t a huge chunk of money, but I knew if I didn’t buy real estate with it, it would not stay. It would be gone.

So I bought this building. It had been a convenience store. It was open space. Forty-two by forty-two. It had a little bedroom in the back. It had a kitchen. It had some nice architecture features. We lived in it… the kids had tents. Jill moved in, she had a child, and each child had a tent instead of a bedroom. They talk about that. Fondly and not fondly because I think it was a real transitionary period for Allison. As she entered the end of middle school started to show some really serious signs of depression. She started cutting. I found that out in ninth grade. I didn’t know she was doing it and the school counselor called me. I knew she had been having some depression issues, and then talking her to a therapist. So that started her whole therapy. Dealing with her depression. Andy was a very quiet child. Very introverted. Allison is loud. Any space she is in is all about her. She is also very attractive, very articulate, and very intelligent. It is all about her. If she is good or if she’s bad. Andy is very quiet.

I could talk to Allison with what was happening with my sexuality. With Andy I kept thinking I would wait until it seemed like he could handle it. And I never really actually talked to him about it until recently. I just kind of tried to make it okay for him. So Allison started having some really serious mental health issues. Andy was just quiet and he seemed okay. He seemed like he was okay. He got into video games a little bit. He had friends. Never missed a day at school. Sweet. A little bit fearful of things. He was afraid of the water, he was afraid of a lot of things. Didn’t like to be outside as much as I did. Jill had a cabin and we’d go to the cabin and he didn’t want to go to the cabin. I would make him sometimes and coax him by saying, “You get to ride motorbikes,” but he didn’t want to be outside. He didn’t want to go swimming.

I didn’t recognize that as anxiety, partially because Allison was taking up so much. I was going to school, and I almost didn’t make it through Augsburg because I was like a quarter away and then I was like, “Oh my God. I’m working full-time, I have two teenage kids, and I’m in school full-time.” I was signed up to do the Masters. I was going to just do the Masters program. It would have been just another nine months. I thought, “I just need the license.” That helped. I knew that if I didn’t get the license that I would… I did go into debt for this. It was like $25,000 in debt. Luckily, because I hadn’t graduated from the U and hadn’t gotten the degree I was eligible for a grant, so I got about $6,000 in grants to pay for that. So that was pretty good. I only had to do the education. So I had everything else. And religion because Augsburg is… and those were actually kind of fun. So I just had to do the education portion and two religion classes so it took me almost two years. It was only supposed to take eighteen months. I ultimately didn’t get the Masters because I knew I just had to start attending what was going on with my children.

**AS:** At this point Ali is about sixteen, seventeen?

**JH:** Almost sixteen.

**AS:** Is she using at this point?

**JH:** She is not using. Carey quit his job and is trying to be a writer. I was supportive one hundred percent. That was also the background. He had worked for a place for a long time that had gone out of business. He is now fifty-five years old, and he has decided that since his skills are fairly obsolete he doesn’t want to go back to school and he is going to be the writer that he has always wanted to be. At first I was kind of like, “You know what? You deserve to have a year to kind of—” because he supported the kids. I stayed home when they were little and I thought “Okay, I’ll do this. I’ll pick up the slack.” That coincided from just graduating from Augsburg, getting my teaching license, getting my first teaching job. So, I paid. We were used to living very small anyways. So it was like “Okay, if you need this time it’s cool.”

When it stretched into ten years and there was no child support at all, that was kind of a lot. You can’t just halfway through your kids’ childhood decide you aren’t going to work. That is kind of part of what played into—and part of what happened was that his pot smoking, I saw that his addiction was having an effect on him, me, and the kids. That coincided with me… you know the underpants thing [laughs]. The whole Carey and I separating from each other came down to “Let’s split up because she was gay.” It never had anything to do with his addiction. That’s the story, it was always the story, and it’s not the whole story. It’s absolutely not the whole story.

**AS:** How was that for you as a mother? Were you fine with that because your children needed another place to go? Was his addiction affecting them?

**JH:** Yes. Absolutely.

**AS:** Was there a protectiveness for you that you just let that story be about you being gay because you didn’t want to have to disrupt their lives even further by addressing his addiction?

**JH:** Yes. That hits the nail. I knew that I didn’t want to take it out on them.

**AS:** Right. So the story was okay with you at the time.

**JH:** It wasn’t okay with me internally.

**AS:** But as a mother it was okay with you in terms of what you were trying to provide your kids?

**JH:** I don’t know if I want to use the word selfish but that is the first word that came to my mind, so I’m going to use it. He was selfish. I felt tremendously guilty. So much so I couldn’t stand it. So it was easier to not even stir it up partially because I didn’t want to face how guilty I felt because this was part of the reality of who I was.

**AS:** You felt guilty about your…?

**JH:** Breaking up my kids’ home because of my sexuality. I knew there was so much there, but also a lot of it just came down to, “What do you have the energy to do? You just have to live.” Now, I’m in a relationship that’s not easy for either of us because we are both navigating this coming out late in life. Jill had a child. I was coming out to my family. My siblings were okay with it. My dad was okay with it. My mother was... [laughs] was okay with it. Was not going to ever accept it. Was trying I guess. It was a new identity. I had been this heterosexual hippy mother for fifteen years in this neighborhood. The neighborhood in Northeast—I was very connected with people in that neighborhood. People had opinions about what I had done.

So I was trying to get through school, and trying to finish it, and be responsible. Then Allison started cutting. There was just so much going on. Addressing Carey’s addiction was very low on my—I knew it was going in the direction it was going. All I could do was do my best. This is the kids’ father. They love him. He is a very lovable person. I wanted him to stop being an addict and be a better father, but I wasn’t going to be able to make that happen. I wasn’t going to take them away from him, but I did try to protect them from the reality that he was an addict. When they were older and in the car as if I’m not even there driving having a conversation about their dad being stoned. They knew the whole time.

**AS:** But you still somehow as a mother thought you could protect them.

**JH:** Absolutely. I have protected them by not telling them. What a mistake. What a mistake. I can’t undo that. I protected them by keeping them with me. And he, come to find out, started giving Andy pot when he was in high school. I didn’t know Andy was smoking pot, and he got busted at school. And I was like, “Where are you getting pot? You don’t have a job.”

**AS:** Would you say he loved his dad?

**JH:** He loves his dad. Both the kids love their dad. Andy has something going on with his dad right now, and my dad died all during that. Is calling it a shit storm okay? [laughs] I have a mixed CD that is called “My Fucked up 48th Year in Music.” Because I was forty-eight when all of this happened.

Allison went off to college. She went to high school. She went to Sweden almost for a year as an exchange student and it was really challenging with her depression. She was having bouts of depression there and that was really hard because she was away. I could see that her mental health was really just starting to go on this really teeter tottery thing where… she had stopped cutting for a couple of years. This whole, “I want to go to Sweden as an exchange student,” was her whole motivation. She came to me one day and she had this interest in ska music. She is Swedish—we are Swedish. I said, “If you want to go to Sweden make it happen. I’ll help you make it happen.” She had a job—she worked at a nursing home. She saved up $2,000 dollars. I paid for the plane ticket. Took out a loan. Which was really big for me. Took out a loan for about $3,000 so I could pay for the plane ticket and pay for her fees, so then she went to Sweden. She was sixteen. She came home and turned sixteen. She was fifteen when she went. And it was really brave.

She came home and was struggling with high school, struggling finding her place in high school. She is really smart, and that was hard. We had a couple years when I thought she was doing really well. Was really interested in linguistics. Very gifted with language. Allison is very gifted when it comes to language, writing. She spoke very fluent Swedish when she came back. She learned Korean, Spanish. She wanted to be something in linguistics. Either writing, being a translator. She thought she would want to be a person who did the subtitles in movies. When she was a senior she did post-secondary at the U. So, her whole senior year she went to the U of M.

That summer got on Abilify. That was working with her bipolar. She was having some bouts with serious depression but we were hopeful that they were getting better. She was doing behavior therapy, and that was helping. She got accepted to McGill [University] in Montreal. That was exciting. And she didn’t send any of the paperwork in. And so that all fell through. At the time I was really disappointed because I was worried about the idea of her going to Montreal. She was like “I want to go to McGill and speak French there. This is this great university.” Of course as a mother I don’t know how we are going to pay for it and I’m just going to let go and we are going to figure it out. But she didn’t send the paperwork in.

I found out later it was intentional. She just got really scared and wasn’t ready. I’m not ready I’m afraid to be away. I think she knew that her depression was not okay. She wasn’t well enough to go. I was like, “You know what? Go to the U of M. We’ll try again next year. If you still want to go to McGill next year.” So, she went to the U of M and studied linguistics and started working at a pizza place on campus. Stadium Village. And met this young man named Andy. I liked him. He was from the Iron Range. He seemed like a nice guy. He was going to school to be a teacher. A little older than her. And I was really relieved because I was kind of like, “Okay, she’s got somebody who is watching over her.” Because she is seriously bipolar. But it turns out he was an addict. It turns up he had broken his back in high school in a skate board accident and was an opiate addict. And had been since high school.

**AS:** Was he using pills or heroin?

**JH:** He was using pills. Allison had not really dabbled in using anything other than—she had lived with this other woman for a while, and this younger—Allison had some issues with alcohol. She told me about Allison drinking too much, so I don't know if Allison was drinking too much. I sensed that she had, but I don’t know. So, Allison was working at the pizza place and going to school.

Then that’s when the odd stuff starts happening. “Can I borrow $50 because I don't have enough?” The stories. The stories started, you know? The elaborate stories of tuition and of this or that. And at first you have no clue. “Okay, that’s reasonable.” “Mom, can I have money for groceries?” Is there anyway you can take us to Target and get some groceries? I need to pay for…”

**AS:** All of a sudden she had a lot of financial needs that she didn’t have before.

**JH:** She had a lot of financial needs. There was some erratic behavior that I couldn’t understand. I would meet her for coffee or something and she would be manic. Just manic. I was like, “Oh my gosh. Her bipolar is getting…” That was the first place I went. Her bipolar was getting worse. Then I started seeing these things right here on her arm. Like, this darkness. I thought “Oh my god she's cutting again. She's cutting her arm.” I didn't realize it was tracks. I didn’t realize that these were tracks. She wasn’t even hiding them from me. She wasn’t covering them up, and I didn’t know. So I didn’t know… I don't know why I didn't say anything. I didn’t know what I was going to do. She was nineteen. So, I thought she was cutting again. I think I said to her, “Are you cutting again?” “No, no.” I still didn’t suspect heroin. I had no clue. And looking back it’s like, “You dipshit! How do you miss it?”

**AS:** With the nodding off. I didn't even know what heroin use looked like. I wouldn’t have even expected it.

**JH:** Yeah, and this was seven years ago. This is something that even in the last seven years has risen to the top. Growing up in the ‘70s, heroin killed people. People don’t use heroin because it’s so flipping dangerous. My child isn’t using heroin. She dropped out of school. Was still working at the pizza place. She was being persecuted by the owner of the pizza place. The guy was kind of a jerk, so when she told me the story that he was accusing her of stealing from the till I’m still going, “Oh my God. You poor thing.” She calls, “Mom, I’m going into treatment.” What are you going into treatment for? Well, she tells me, “Andy takes Percocet for his back, and I started using it and now I’m addicted to it.” All right. “I’m going into treatment,” I’m like “Okay that’s good.” She goes into treatment, and I think she lasted, I don’t even remember. She’s been in treatment so many times I couldn’t tell you.

**AS:** She’s been in so many times you couldn’t...

**JH:** Ten. Ten at least. Ten at least, and then jail for a year. So this is in six years. That was her first time though.

**AS:** How did she end up in jail? And where was she?

**JH:** Ohio.

**AS:** So did she kind of flee? For a circumstance here? Is Andy still in the picture?

**JH:** Her and Andy lived here for a while. I mean you know the stories. I mean there are so many stories I don’t even know how they have stitched together over the last six years, but at some point she met up with this dude named Shake. Bad dude, bad dude. He’s got some scam he’s doing with cell phones that she’s in on.

**AS:** Probably for dealers?

**JH:** I don’t even know. I can’t even ask at this point. I mean you fast forward… I’ve been through, “Oh, she’s going through treatment. She’s doing better.” “Oh, yes you can come stay with me.” I’m going to love you back to health. I’m going to walk in and she’s shooting up at the kitchen table.

**AS:** That happened?

**JH:** Oh yeah. I’m going to have my work friends over, and you are going to come home and nod off at the table. I used to have an end of the year school party at my school where all my teacher friends would come here and have a party here and she came home. Her and Andy came home wasted. Absolutely wasted. Talking to my friends, nodding off while they were talking. I was so… because everybody knew. Everybody knew and I couldn’t… it was a disaster. I was in the middle of this disaster. I’m the chairman of the board of this school, and my child is coming home on heroin with her boyfriend. Nodding off.

**AS:** What did you do?

**JH:** I’m trying to remember. I think it kind of solved itself. We were all sitting at the table back there. By the time they came home the party was down to some of the people who absolutely knew what was going on because I took a leave of absence to deal with what was going on.

**AS:** Why?

**JH:** To help her navigate what was going on. Her and Andy went downstairs. I am trying to even remember it. It was one of those things like the people who were left were kind of looking at me, and I could tell that they could feel for me because she was supposed to be clean. She had just gotten out of treatment. She was coming to stay with me because—

**AS:** Instead of a sober house.

**JH:** Yeah. And I kicked them out very shortly after. That was one of those things where I said, “You two are out of the house in an hour or I call the police to come and take you out of the house, so get what you need and get out of my house.” I went to my friend Linda’s and I got everything. I took my computer. She ended up stealing my guitar, and I got it back. Carey went and got it for me. I had a mandolin at the time, she stole that. Left behind just shit. I went down and cleaned up and found paraphernalia: needles, bags, all that crap.

**AS:** Food and...?

**JH:** Yeah. Andy was still living here. My son lived here at the time. He’s smoking pot, and he’s getting sicker. I’ve already had him taken away once by COPE.

**AS:** What’s COPE?

**JH:** COPE is the Community—psychiatric team. Psychiatric emergency team. That’s a whole other tangential story.

**AS:** How are you functioning at this point? Are you just getting through it? Are you just kind of in that—

**JH:** I had a really good friend who it also turns out has marijuana issues, and I ended up having to stay away from her as well. But we were friends for thirty years. Do you know my friend Theresa? The blonde? She is an interesting person, but she has been steady my entire life.

**AS:** She has been there for you. Is she the one who grew up in Texas?

**JH:** That was Kit. Theresa was tall and skinny and probably has one of the most Minnesotan accents of the whole group. She is a person who you will never guess she is as intelligent as she it. But anyways I have known her ever since I was nine. We grew up across the street from each other.

**AS:** Is she the psychiatric nurse?

**JH:** Yeah.

**AS:** Her sister…

**JH:** Was schizophrenic and died at thirty-one of natural causes. Anyways, she helped me a lot. My friend Linda was a really big help. She had her own addiction issues. I mean I was really connected at my work. I worked constantly. I was committed to work. I was very connected at that school. It was a mission. I shifted my focus to early childhood literacy.

**AS:** That was a charter school?

**JH:** Yeah. I didn’t date or anything. I was on my own. Jill and I had broken up. I don’t want to say it was the best time.

**AS:** Did you have many resources around like parenting or mothering through addiction or around mental health issues? Did you have any support at this time? What was your strategy?

**JH:** I realized something was going on with Andy. I knew it started out as anxiety and all these other symptoms started adding to his anxiety. I knew that something was going on with him. I contacted Nar-Anon, and I went to their parent or their family’s education—it’s a twelve week thing. I went to this group in St. Paul called Families Anonymous, but that wasn’t until later. I got a therapist that I saw, Nancy was her name. I saw her off and on.

I started getting into Buddhism. I started looking to spiritual things because clearly that was the only thing I could hold onto at this point. The only thing that was going to help. I mean, I don’t know if it is this way for you, but it is this way for me. At my spiritual group that I go to at church this week the topic is, “What was your spiritual awakening?” Bring a story of your spiritual awakening. I’m like, “Oh my God, I don’t know what to bring because I don’t have a story.” It happened over such a long period of time. And all these things and all these really challenging things that, yes, they bring up emotions and tears. They have got me here and I kind of like who I am [laughs]. You know?

That’s tangential, but I don’t like all these… I’m not going to say I’m not going to be one of those people that’s going to be grateful for my child’s addiction. I’m not, but it is what it is. I am who I am. I responded to it by going inward and outward and reaching out to people. I have good friends. I have people that get what’s going on. I have people that I can go to and say, “My child is an addict and this is what my weekend was like.” And they don’t judge me. I don’t know if I lucked out or if it… you know natural selection, how that happened. I have and am surrounded in my life by people like that. They aren’t my family. It’s not my family.

**AS:** The stigma around addiction didn’t affect how you reached out to people around you to tell them what was going on in your life?

**JH:** Not people I really cared about. Not the people that mattered. When I changed jobs and left Sojourner and went to a new school I didn’t talk about the fact that my child was an addict.

**AS:** But at Sojouner there were colleagues that knew.

**JH:** Yes, absolutely. I had a lot of support.

Because this is about mothering, I’m so cognizant of trying to stay on that topic about mothering, and I wanted to touch on this toggle that occurred with me where I would toggle between, “I need to do everything I can to be the mother that makes this okay,” to, “I have to walk away from you. I have to save myself.” What came up was, “I don’t give a shit! Do what you want. Mess up your life. Get away from me. I’m moving.” There was a time when I thought “I’m selling this house and I’m moving. You will never see me again. You guys do what…” You know? Then, “No, that’s not okay.” Then getting really involved and, “Yes, you can come live with me after….” There were four different times I said, “Yes, you can come live with me after treatment.” Until I realized, “You can never live with me again. No. You can’t even come to my house.” You know? I hope it’s not always that way, but it’s that way now.

I’m not saying I have reached this place of equilibrium, or some kind of balance where I’m doing the right thing, but it is definitely more balanced where I would have these… I would oscillate between, “I don’t care about these people. I have these three—” Carey and the two kids all kind of have this sameness where they are very smart, very intellectual, and they are very addicted, and they are very mentally ill. They have told me they had this conversation about how I’m the dumb one in the family. I’m not the intellect. I'm not the intellectual in the family, but I’m the only one that can function. [laughs] Yeah, you know, I’ll be the dumb one!

One of the women in one of my circles last week was talking about how she has come to learn that intelligence is not necessarily an indicator for anything worthwhile in a person [laughs]. She said she was married to a really intelligent person but he turned out to be mentally ill, or… And you know that is what the three of them are. I do feel very separate from them. It is them and me in this family of four. Carey and I have constant conversations about the kids and about things. I never address his addiction. He’s an adult. He has lost all of his teeth because he doesn’t take care of himself. He is sixty-seven years old. He’ll be sixty-eight. He looks like he is about ninety. Every email he send me ends with “I love you” [laughs]. He’s very, “We’re in this life together for better or worse. You are what you are I accept you for what you are.” You are a hopeless addict. You are hopeless. He has written three books, published them all himself. Loves his children, but enables until the end. Ali lives with him now. She went to court yesterday for some charge. I’m sure it was a possession charge. I don’t even ask her what the charges are anymore.

**AS:** At what point did you stop asking what her charges were? When were you able to detach? We talk a lot about detaching with love. Did that happen because of multiple disasters?

**JH:** Yes.

**AS:** The impact of them over time?

**JH:** Yes.

**AS:** Or was there a moment that you remember when you were just done?

**JH:** I don’t think there was a moment—I am not that kind of a light bulb person. I am a slow, brooding Scandinavian. Things happen over time. I don’t even know that it has happened yet, the detachment. I mean I’m still attached. I get the email that she has gotten off, and I want her to go to jail. I want her to be sentenced to treatment. I get this email from Carey, “Guess what? Ali got off!” I get this pit in my stomach and I go, “Okay, well that’s…” I walk away from it. I have really applied those, “I cannot control it, it is not about me, she is an adult.”

This is something relating back to mothering. I am not particularly maternal. I’ve got a mother view. I’ve got to fix this. I’ve got to be with you. I want you to have your own life kind of. I’m not overly involved. I think if my children were not addicts and had mental illness I don’t know if I would be over involved either.

That’s how my mother was. That’s how I was mothered. I turned eighteen and moved out of the house. In the course of forty years I probably met my mother for lunch or dinner, not a birthday or something, a half dozen times. I don’t have a relationship with her. I have an interaction with her. And that’s how I was mothered. I have these conflicts. I don’t necessarily want to be that kind of mother but I don’t know anything else. I have these children with these really dramatic needs and I care about them and I will help them, but I can’t fix it. I am very aware that I can’t fix it. Even with Andy I can’t fix it. There is a high likelihood he will kill himself. I know that. I accept that. There is a high likelihood Allison will kill herself, on purpose or accidentally. Surprisingly enough that doesn’t conjure up the same kinds of emotions as some of the other things have because I have so reconciled that.

**AS:** You have prepared for their death? Is that what you are saying?

**JH:** That sounds so horrible to say out loud. I know that you understand that and I can say that out loud.

**AS:** I do. I do.

**JH:** There are places I can’t say that out loud. There are a number of people I can say that out loud to. Allison was on a respirator for three days. Three days. They said, “We don’t know if she is going to pull out of this opiate overdose. Intentional opiate overdose.” So when you come that close… I came home and that was the third time. That was the third time I had been to that brink with her. It is not that it doesn’t matter because it does matter. It’s that it just gives you this thing where you go, “Okay, I’m very likely to lose my child before me.”

This is something that I don’t know… I also don’t often say out loud because I don’t know if it will make people irritated or mad, but I’m going to say it. This is oddly comforting to me. I grew up in the Vietnam War era, and my uncle was in Vietnam, and I lived next to a guy who’s son was in Vietnam. All those mothers who had all those children in Vietnam sat in the same place I sit every day. Not knowing whether or not their child will survive that day. Knowing their child is engaged in something so dangerous that their life is [unclear].

Why is that comforting? To know that I’m not the first person. That I am not the only mother. That I am not isolated in this being a mother who is on the brink of losing her child. I know there are other situations that mothers are in where their children are doing dangerous things but that’s the one that comes up in my head. All these years of my childhood, because as a child that is what I thought about surprisingly enough. I have very distinct memories where as a child of eight, nine, ten, eleven thinking, “I feel sorry for the moms.” And I felt sorry for mothers because they had kids who were in Vietnam that were being killed. I think you are too young to remember that. It was on TV every night. How many kids had died? All I could think about was all of these boys had mothers who had lost their children in combat. I just listened to this *Invisibilia* [podcast] thing about, “You can’t control the thoughts that come up in your mind.” Why did those thoughts about mothers in Vietnam come up? I found it comforting.

**AS:** When did that come up for you recently?

**JH:** A couple years into Ali’s addiction. Maybe the second almost death. There were a number of not even overdoses where… once you realize your child is doing heroin you walk it every day. Every day. Every time your phone rings. How many times do you change your phone ringer because the sound is so anxiety provoking? I cannot stand the sound of my own phone ringing. I very rarely take my phone out at work in the coffee shop. I had it out for some reason yesterday and I was at the tell ringing up someone’s coffee order and my phone was back on the shelf and the ringer went off. This is even a new ringer [laughs].

And off in the distance I heard my phone and I was very aware of the physiological response in my body where I got hot. I was standing at the till talking to somebody who I knew and I could tell that my face started to turn red because I was having this anxiety and I said, it was a woman, I said “I’m having a hot flash.” I didn’t want to say I’m having an anxiety response to my own phone ringing and this is because my child is a heroin addict and I have a child who is schizophrenic who tried to cut his own penis off, so any time my phone rings I’m scared shitless [laughs]. You know? That’s why I don’t call people very much. I text and Facebook because for me it’s a less scary way

**AS:** Jarring.

**JH:** Jarring… a phone call is jarring for me because it is.

**AS:** So can you talk a little bit about, because we have prior knowledge of each other you never really talked about what happened to your son Andy when he was diagnosed and what he was diagnosed with. Can you just explain a little bit about how that happened? You did talk a little bit about that simultaneity with Ali’s addiction. What was that? You called COPE, was it?

**JH:** He got expelled from high school for smoking pot. He had never missed a day of school from kindergarten to senior year. Never missed a day of school. Got expelled halfway through his senior year because he was smoking pot in the parking lot. Came back and got caught. I kind of knew he was smoking pot…

**AS:** And this is when she is 19, been in treatment...

**JH:** Ali is… yes… Ali’s addiction is… I’m not sure that this thing that starts with Andy in high school. I’m not sure… he’s a senior, Ali is 19, I’m not sure yet that I know she is an addict. He gets expelled, finishes with an alternative program, gets out, and then Andy got obsessed with video games. He had a room in the basement and so we’d… it was just me and Andy living here and my dad died. My dad died that summer. That was another story but I won’t tangentially go off on that but that was kind of… I went into what I would say was just a serious depression. Just depression. I was off for the summer. Good and bad. Basically, a number of things had happened. My relationship with Jill. There were so many things that had just… I suffered from depression. Whatever.

Andy kind of was just doing his thing and he was starting to smoke pot and I was kind of addressing it. Ali was off to school and things were starting to get bad with her. I mean I wasn’t… I didn’t know what to do. It wasn’t that I was completely ignoring it I just didn’t know what to do. Carey wasn’t any help. I was kind of by myself. I had been in this relationship for nine years that was over, and she was kind of hostile. So I had some hostility… I might have been drinking a little bit that summer. I know I was depressed. I know I was really concerned about whether or not I was going to be able to go back to work in September. That is when I started seeing a therapist.

My dad had a surgery that led to a heart attack. Had a surgery after he had a really long manic episode where he really wasn’t taking care of himself. Led to a heart attack where they resuscitated him. It took forty-five minutes of resuscitation and put him on life support so we could get there in time to say goodbye to him. Oh, the other thing was my sister was an addict. A gambling addict. I had taken over her house to avoid a housing foreclosure. That was a whole other story that was going on. My dad has a heart attack, they put him on life support. We get there. My sister didn’t want to take him off life support so he could die. He was on life support for twenty-one days. Finally the doctors were like, “We have to take him off. Everything else is shutting down.” She went flipping nuts. He was basically brain dead. She claimed that he squeezed her hand. She claimed that he said he loved her. Said he said goodbye to her. I mean this man has been brain dead for twenty-one days and my brother and I are like “Please, please.” After eleven days I just went in and I said goodbye. I said, “Dad, I don’t know when she is going to let you go, but I’ll come back when it is time.”

So all those things were happening that kind of led to this depression, and Andy starts getting this anxiety thing. He won’t leave the house. He asked for a bulletproof vest for his birthday. You know… you have to get a job, you have to do something. He is becoming more and more reclusive. I am fighting with him constantly to get out of the house. He starts smoking pot. He can’t stop smoking pot. That’s not good for you! I wasn’t getting help from Carey. He said, “He’s eighteen years old.” I sign Andy up and he decided—he doesn’t decide. I helped him decide he was going to do something if he was going to live with me. He was going to go to college or work. What do you want to do? Go to school or work?

He goes to Minneapolis Community College. Sign him up. He is now becoming afraid of everything. I am seeing this just slowly build. He is afraid of the grocery store, he is afraid of people. He can’t make eye contact. He doesn’t make eye contact. He just… anxiety, you know, if we go into a restaurant, I would take him out for a hamburger and it is crowded and he would start to have this physical kind of panic attack. He’s having panic attacks. He’s staying in his room, he’s playing video games. I shut the Internet off. I completely shut the Internet off. I had no Internet, TV.

I am trying to… It’s like if you see that your kid is using a drug and you are the one bringing the drug into the house. That’s how it was with the Internet. He goes to school for one quarter and I think, “Okay, he is just having some…” and then this is when I’m starting and Allison is starting to fall apart too… we sign up. I’m paying for this out of pocket by the way. [laughs] The second quarter: I’m working, I realize he’s not going to school. So, he’s smoking, he doesn’t go to school, he’s not going, he’s getting more and more reclusive. He’s smoking pot and I said, “These are the rules of my house: you can’t smoke pot, and you’ve got to do something.” I signed him up for therapy. “I’m taking you to therapy.” I’m monitoring everything. I’m going down when I come home from work and saying, “You need to get up and we are going to go to the parkway and we are going for a walk.” I’m dragging his six and a half foot butt up the parkway. I’m doing all this stuff to try and get him to not do what I know is happening and that is he’s sinking into this mental illness that I’ve seen, you know. I’ve seen it.

**AS:** It was familiar.

**JH:** It was familiar. You know I didn’t want it to be true. You don’t want it to be true. I came home one time and this is while I'm toggling through this… I’ve had enough. What happens is I—this is a common thing I think. I do all these things and then I’ve had enough and I can’t do it anymore. I just want to curl up in a ball and die. I never would kill myself, but there were nights where I would think, “If I don’t wake up I’m okay with that. I’m okay with not waking up tomorrow.” [laughs] I don’t know if that’s going to happen.

**AS:** If I die before I wake…

**JH:** If I die before I wake… oh well! So, I kicked him out because he won’t adhere to my rules. “You can’t live with me.” He goes to live with his dad who is still living in our house in northeast Minneapolis, but has let it go into foreclosure. Just stopped paying for it. So Ali who is starting to use is living there, and Andy. And the timeline starts to get blurry for me because it is just like—I mean it is a shit storm.

So, I just knew I had to separate myself. I had to deal with my… I still had to work, I still had all these things I have to do. And, all this stuff is going on. I’m not completely cutting myself off from them. By now I know that she’s an addict. I found out it was heroin on the phone at work talking to someone who was doing her Rule 25 Assessment, getting information from me. I’m at work and I get this phone call on my prep. I know she’s getting a Rule 25 Assessment, this is maybe her second time in treatment. I’m in my classroom and I see the phone and I’m like, “Okay, I’m supposed to be getting this phone call,” and I talk to the… “So, Allison has been using heroin for the last year and a half.” And I’m going, “What? Are you kidding me?” “Oh, you didn’t know that?” “No, I had no idea.” I felt like I had been kicked in the stomach. I almost puked. I almost puked.

This is such a distinct memory because I have such a good visual of my own classroom. I remember my kids were gone and there were no students because they were at music or wherever they were. I was walking around with the phone and I remember just rocking back and forth because I knew that I had to get rid of the panic before twenty-eight eight-year-olds came back. I was still a smoker at the time and I remember as soon as I got off the phone I went to my purse and I grabbed my cigarettes and I told my co-teacher I said, “If I’m not back in fifteen minutes will you get my kids?” I just walked out the back door and up the block and lit a cigarette and just paced back and around the block. I was a block from the school because I had to smoke so bad. I think I just kept saying, “Oh my fucking God. Oh my God. Oh my God.” You know? I bet that is the first I had heard heroin. All of that, you know, ‘60s stuff that I had grown up with. Nw that was Allison. I think at that point it felt like a death sentence. That is really dramatic and I understand how dramatic that is but that’s what—

**AS:** But you knew immediately the impact of that.

**JH:** I did. Of it being heroin and not Percocet. I was thinking it was Percocet. Or Oxycontin.

**AS:** So get back to Andy.

**JH:** Andy. So I kicked him out, he went to live with Carey. I went over, I would call him. He was just getting—I don’t know. He was doing drugs, not getting out of bed, or something. I stepped away for maybe a month or two or just like you know I would call him but I was really like, I mean by now they are eighteen and twenty, you know? Carey is sixty—I don’t know how old he is. Fifty-eight? These are people that I….

So, I call and I talked to Andy and I talk to him and he was not making sense. I went over there and something was tremendously wrong. I didn’t know if it was drugs—I didn’t know what it was. Carey’s elderly mother was living with them at the time, and I was talking to Andy and I was like, “So what’s going on?” And he was not making sense. He was delusional. I got up. Carey’s mom was sitting in the living room. Carey was sitting on the couch, and I said, “Do you have any awareness of how sick our child is?” And he’s like “What?” I said, “I’m calling the county. Prepare for it.”

I got in my car and I called my friend and I said, “What do I have to do? This is what is going on. Who do I call?” She told me to call COPE. She said, “This is what you say. This is what you need to say to get people up there. Don’t lie. But this is how it works.” That is how she has been. “This is how the system works. If you say you’ll take him to your house, they will let you. But, you don’t want that. You say he can’t…” So I called and I said, “What is going on?” And one of the things she said, “Parents tend to want to mitigate the severity of the danger. You don’t want to think that your child is dangerous to themselves or someone else. So you say ‘No, I don’t think so.’ Don’t say that.” She said, “Don’t say that, if you had any… don’t lie. But if you think he is a danger to himself you say ‘My son is a danger to himself.’ And you say it over and over again.”

So, she really was helpful that way for me to advocate for him to be taken in and they took him. They came. They assessed him. Carey’s mom screamed at me. Screamed at me. That I was the reason the kids were messed up because I was a lesbian. Oh my God. He also came from a very religious background. His dad was a missionary and was killed was in Ethiopia and that is a whole other story. [laughs] She is screaming at me and I’m like, “This is my child. This is my child to fix.”

They took a 72-hour hold on… that was his first. They didn’t keep him. He came back and lived here. I mean, there are a lot of details, but he kept smoking pot and kept trying to… I mean they both simultaneously were just going down. It was just one tripping over the other. It just came to me having to step away from both of them in that way that people in recovery step away and not the way people in panic step away. I was stepping away in panic a lot. And that wasn’t helpful and then when I realized, “I’ve got to recover, I’ve got to take care of myself. I’ve got to fix myself.” Not fix myself, but I’ve got to attend to myself.

Because I’m not being a good mother. I’m not being a good mother. I have to mother. I have to mother these disasters. That was the first, the very first key to me being able to do it better was to accept it for what it was. Because the whole time I was mothering in panic and reacting in panic I was not accepting that this is what I got. These are my children. I mean they are not what I thought it would be. It is not what I thought it would be. It is not what some of my friends are going through. That's really hard. Because all of my friends’ kids were having successful families. They are of that age of going to college. Not being addicts and schizophrenics. So, that first place wasn’t a light bulb moment, and still maybe isn’t completely solid, but is the acceptance. And that was when Buddhism came in because acceptance is everything. Not accepting is all struggle. You accept what it is. You accept that it is yours.

**AS:** That is really powerful.

**JH:** And when it is your children. The other thing that I let myself do and I still let myself do is I let myself mourn my losses. That is something I have learned as an adult that I was not allowed to do as a child. Whether it’s a relationship like my one with Kathy or Jill—but, my children. I have let myself mourn the loss of having the kids I thought I would have. I thought I would have different children. I thought that they were really Waldorf-y kids. [laughs] I really thought that that’s what I would end up with. Even with Carey’s addiction—I let myself mourn that. I don’t think I still mourn it the way I did. I have really come to accept that this is what I have in the rights to my life.

I have two children that have serious mental illness. One is manifesting itself in addiction and the other is schizophrenic. Andy also, they diagnosed him as on the autism spectrum, which I guess also goes hand in hand with some of those behaviors. He was originally diagnosed with Aspergers. That was the first one. Then that started off a whole round for trying to find psychiatric help for your child when they are an adult. They don’t want to find help because they don’t think they are sick. All schizophrenics—that’s their… So I’m trying to find places. Is it 2006? I am going to say from 2003 to now I had to—I’ve know he is schizophrenic. I had known he was schizophrenic. Because I have been watching him and have been reading about it and I have been seeing him. I will take him to psychiatrists and say, “He is a schizophrenic,” and they say, “Well, it doesn’t really help us to take that diagnosis. Well we’ll put him on lithium…” Well, he’s not going to take it. I can’t force him to take it. That’s what is happening now. He’s on Jarvis which is a quartered medication. I knew really solidly two years ago that my… what I had to do was to step away and watch him walk the road and fall down the hole.

**AS:** Just like they tell us we have to do with our addict children. Leave them alone. Cut them off. Kick them out.

**JH:** It’s harder when someone has—it has been harder with Andy than with Ali. He can’t take it. I’m going to say he can’t take care of himself. There is the mother—because he’s my baby. It is kind of true. He’s can’t—

**AS:** He’s not functioning in this world, right?

**JH:** He can’t make decisions for himself. He can’t. Here is the difference in…

**AS:** And he’s now in a hospital?

**JH:** Yes. He’s civilly committed.

**AS:** Just for the record.

**JH:** Yeah. He is in the hospital. He is civilly committed. I am working very closely with the psychiatric team. I am mothering him. I see him twice a week. He wants to see me four times a week. I bring him Taco Bell once. I set up my limits.

**AS:** Did they let you take him out for his birthday?

**JH:** No, and that was okay. I called his psychiatric nurse. I said “I’m going to advocate for this as much as I need to.” I said, “Can I take him out for his birthday?” She said, “No.” I have a really good relationship with his social worker at the hospital. He has been there for months. They all know me. He has been there longer than anybody has. They don’t know what to do with him.

**AS:** Really? They don’t know where to send him? Are there are other options?

**JH:** Right now they are trying to get him into the intensive rehabilitative treatment center. He got sent to one once and he cut himself again and they sent him back. So then he just went back to the hospital. That has just been within the last two months. His commitment is through September. He still thinks he’s going to get to go back with his dad. Carey will not tell him “no.” Will not tell him “no.” I tell him “no.” I am really working on having good boundaries with him. I tell him, “You do what people tell you to do.” He will say, “These people think I’m schizophrenic.” I’m like, “Yeah, they do Andy! You know what, here’s what happens what you cut your penis off. You have to stop.”

I’m listening to this thing about the Freudian thought process: every thought that you have, especially if you are mentally ill, there is something behind it. And then there is this counter idea that the thoughts just come and go but the ones we latch onto may be kind of random. Some people latch onto these dark thoughts. I have been thinking, “What happened to him? What happened to him?” I don’t know. Because he is obsessed with the idea that he is going to be killed. That is his obsession. He is going to torture himself before someone else can. So he can prepare himself. That is what is going on with him psychologically. There is no talking to him. That was the bulletproof vest. That was the start of it. Now I start tracing it. That is the hindsight is 20/20. I see things that he was doing in high school that were like the precursor behavior to this. So, I want to stay on topic because I know time is an issue.

**AS:** We should wrap up soon. This is tiring and emotional for us.

**JH:** I don’t want to go off on too many tangents. So, as it stands now he is getting treatment and he is under a commitment which is kind of like jail in a way. When an addict is in jail it's like “Okay, someone else is taking care of it.” And that’s not how it is. I do talk to his county psychiatric team. He’s got a site psychiatric nurse at the hospital. For the first three months he was hospitalized he wouldn’t sign the release papers. No one could talk to me, no one could tell me anything, but I could still give them information. He was a little bit freer with Allison. And God bless her. If he would tell her something she thought was important she would pass it on to me and I would pass it on to his psychiatric team and he couldn’t talk to me but she could give me a message. This is what Andy is intending to do. He is cheeking his meds. He is stealing his knives off of his dinner tray. Just so you know this. And I would never get any response about it, you would never hear anything. I didn’t go visit him the first month. I went twice and he would say, “You are dead to me.”

**AS:** Because you had committed him.

**JH:** Because I called the police. I called the police because he tried to cut his… he tried to cut his toe off. We didn’t discover that he was trying to cut his penis off until he was in the hospital. He had cut his little toe almost completely off and he had tried to cut his eye. I went to go pick him up and I had been watching the progression of him. I noticed some burns on his arm and I was like, “What happened?” While I am watching him go down and I know he is going down and I know he is getting sicker and I am just waiting for him to do something. Because then they’ll keep him. So I see that he is burning himself and I’ll say, “You shouldn’t be burning yourself.” We are at Baker’s Square or Wendy’s or something. I’m just like “Okay. I’ll see you next week.” I pick him up for dinner. I watch him and I knew he was injuring himself. I was preparing. I knew that there was going to be a time when I was going to pick him up and we were either going to the hospital or I was going to have to do what I ultimately did, which was call the police.

**AS:** From home?

**JH:** We were driving. I picked him up. The day that I picked him up Allison called me and I had seen him a couple of days before and I knew we were getting close, I knew that it had to come. This is the sad state of mental—I knew it had to be over a threshold. I knew if he was just burning his arm maybe they would put a 72-hour hold on him and then release him. I had COPE come out three times and the third time they said, “Maybe he needs to go to a job placement program,” and I’m thinking, “He’s schizophrenic! How can you not see this. Yeah I’ll look into it. Yeah.”

Allison called me and I don’t even know where I was. I think I was coming home from church, yeah, it was Sunday and I was coming home from church and Allison says, “Mom, Andy just did something to his eye. He is limping and he did something to his eye. It’s bleeding.” She is like, “Get over here.” I’m like, “Allison, tell Andy that I am coming.” I had plans to see him later that night. “Just tell him, don’t panic, tell Andy I’m going to get him from lunch a little early. And to be ready.” And I’m like, “Allison don’t panic. Okay? Just don’t panic. It will be okay.” Well, I’m talking to an addict. “It will be okay. I promise it will be okay. Just tell him to calm down.”

So, I go there and in my head I’m thinking, “Okay, I thought I was going to take him here. And, get him here and then go over to Nancy’s, or go somewhere and call the police to come and get him. So he comes down to the car and he has cut the white of his eye. He cut the cornea of his eye and the white of his eye is now just red. And he comes down and he is limping. It is clearly bad. And he gets in the car and I’m like, “Hey. Hi. Wow, what happened to your eye?” “Oh, I cut it.” I said, “You cut your eye?” Acting like I know nothing about this eye. He’s like “I cut it on purpose.” “Andy, you cut your eye on purpose? What’s going on.” “It didn’t hurt.” I said, “Alright.” I’m thinking… this conversation needs to stop. “What do you want for lunch?” [laughs] The whole time in my head I’m thinking, “How is this going to play out?” “What do you want for lunch? Do you feel like spaghetti?”

So we are driving down Lowry Avenue and we are going towards the house and he goes, “Where are we going?” and I said, “I think we should go back to my house and I’ll make spaghetti and I made a cake and we’ll just have lunch at my house.” And he looks at me and goes, “You’re going to call the cops.” And I’m like, “Andy…” I think whatever my reaction was he opened the door and just got out of the car while the car is moving. I’m lucky we are on Lowry Avenue. I’m just going, “Oh fuck here we go.” I pulled over and 911, “My son is schizophrenic. He has just injured himself. Please, he is not armed. You need to take him to Fairview Riverside. You need to get him. This is where he is. He is not armed. He is not armed. He is not armed. He will run. He will fight. He is mentally ill. Please get him.” And I get off the phone and pulled into Betty Dangers, the place with the ferris wheel in Northeast—Lowry and Marshall. I don’t know if you know it. The cop says, “Where are you? We will come and talk to you. Pull over and we will come and talk to you.” I just pull into the parking lot and I just sat in my car and I don’t think I started crying yet… This is the weekend Kathy moved out too. I just sit there and I think I started praying, “Please don’t kill my child. Please don’t think my child.”

**AS:** That they are going to shoot him.

**JH:** Well, at least he’s white, you know. I had that thought. At least he’s white. Because if he wasn’t white he might be dead. That is a really horrible thought, but it’s the truth. I did say a number of times, “He’s not armed. He’s not. He’s going to fight you. But he’s not armed.” I don’t think he fought though. I don’t know.

**AS:** How far did he get?

**JH:** You know I don’t know. I don’t know how far they got.

**AS:** He had an injured toe and a bleeding eye.

**JH:** I mean he’s six foot six. You’re not going to miss him. He looks mentally ill too. He’s bald, he shaves his head. He looks scary. So, they called me, “Where do you want me to take him?” “Fairview Riverside. I’ll be there. I’ll meet you in the emergency room.”

So they took him. I have to be thankful for the police. They did exactly what I said. Don’t take him to Hennepin County, take him to Fairview. That was partly because he had been there and where his records were. He had already been there twice. There was another thing that happened in between. This is the first one of this one.

They assured me. He was put on suicide watch and brought back to the psychiatric ward. I went back there and sat with him and he was just agitated: “I hate you. You are dead to me.” So, I sat there with him for about an hour. And I talked to the nurse and I said, “You’re not going to let him go, are you?” She said, “There is no chance we are going to let them go.” Because that has happened. I’ve had that happen with Allison and him. I brought them to the emergency room and two hours later they are telling me to come pick them up. Allison poured boiling water on her arm. I brought her... probably to get pain meds looking back. I think she was also in a meth psychosis looking back.

**AS:** Can you say where is Allison now and what is she doing? Is she currently using?

**JH:** Yes. Allison is currently using meth daily. She works at a bagel place locally. When she came back from Sweden she worked at this bagel place. All through high school she worked in Golden Valley. And the manager of that bagel place took a risk and hired her when she came back from Ohio. She was in Ohio for a year in jail, it was like a treatment center. And then we sent her to Pennsylvania and she didn’t stay and she came home and she started using even before she got off the bus here. Started using meth again. She’s living with her dad who lives in subsidized housing because he is a senior. He lives in senior subsidized housing in northeast Minneapolis. She works and she holds down her job and she just bought a car but I guess the car is having some issues. I saw her a week ago. She came into my work because I had a pair of shoes she wanted. And I quickly ushered her out. Because I don’t want that.

**AS:** At the cafe?

**JH:** Yes. Because she doesn’t think anyone can tell she is a user but…

**AS:** Oh, really?

**JH:** Yes. She said, “I have to quit this mom. I have to quit.” I said, “Yeah, you do.” “I’m just getting so tired of this life.” Can you imagine? You know? “You can go to AA.” “I just hate AA.” “I know you do. I hope you can do it honey. You can’t be a meth addict and have a good life. I hope that you know that. I love you. See you.” She sees her brother twice a week. So, she is really good. And I’ve said to her, “You have to survive for him. You’ve got to survive. You can’t do it for yourself. Can you do it for him?” I kind of use anything. [laughs]

**AS:** [laughs] Another good mothering tactic.

**JH:** Don’t stay alive for yourself. Don’t go clean for yourself because you’ve got a brother who is really sick and your brother needs you. And he will always need you. There will never be a time when he is not schizophrenic.

**AS:** There could be a time when you are not an addict.

**JH:** Your dad is sixty-eight years old. I’m pretty healthy but I had cancer this last year. It could come back. I use that with her a lot. I try really hard when I catch myself doing that. With either of them. That the coercion and talking them into it. It is loaded with hope. It’s not that I don’t have hope because I do have hope. I want to have hope because they are my kids. When you have hope you have something. I used to say when you have hope, you have everything. That's not true. When you have hope you have something.

I don’t know what the future is, you know? There are stories of redemption and human spirit that I don’t know, aren’t my story or my children’s story. I’m not going to act like I don’t have moments of like total bleakness where I just go, “Oh my God. Who put shit in this fan anyway? Who put shit in the fan anyway?” [laughs]

**AS:** Right, the little plaque.

**JH:** Right, I have a little plaque [laughs]. I don’t dwell on the possibility that I will survive both of my children, but I do understand that it’s very possible.

**AS:** That it is likely.

**JH:** Right, that it is likely. I know that Andy has not let go of the obsession to harm himself. The unfortunate thing is that he seems to think that he needs to cut his penis off and it won’t kill him if he does. And Allison is a drug user and and intravenous drug user. That’s as dangerous as it gets. There is a good possibility that both of my children will not make it through their twenties. I hope that that’s not the truth of my life. I’ll cross that bridge if I come to it. If I ever come to it I will cross it and accept it. Not to be flippant or dismissive but nobody is meant to live forever. I don’t believe there is a God with a plan—we had this discussion. I don’t believe there is a God with a plan for me or my children. I don’t want to. That is disturbing to me. It’s not even comforting for me. That is downright disturbing. That is a whole other conversation.

**AS:** You were awesome. Thank you. Thanks a lot.