

# Only a higher power can save us

Alcoholism is an equal opportunity destroyer. It destroys rich or poor, single or married, religious or irreligious.

Pat Feeley has written a book about addiction, its effects on the one addicted and on those who love that person.

The book is titled: "Please Tell Me No." It's not a technical work. Rather it reads like a memoir, almost like reading someone's diary, put in narrative form.

This is both the book's strength and its weakness. Its strength is that it is 'easy' reading. This is a story, essentially a love story, although a tragic one. Pat suffered from a dual addiction, first from alcohol and later from drugs. His wife insisted that he get treatment or she would divorce him. He got treatment, and divorced her.

While at the treatment center, Hanley, Pat fell in love with Kathryn. He followed her to her home in Florida, and her second home in Montana. Kathryn is well off. It would seem like she could have an idyllic life, free from financial worries and stresses. But she too has an addiction to wine - an addiction she is not able to overcome despite multiple hospitalizations and multiple treatment center visits and personal counseling. The old frontier preachers used to refer to 'demon rum.' Alcohol is indeed her demon, and the demon ultimately wins.

Pat shares his sins and weaknesses. In being honest about his life, he hopes to help other addicts confront the reality of their own lives. As I've written so often, one of the greatest gifts we can give is to turn our own pain into compassion, to make our experiences helpful to someone else.

In a conversation, Pat stated, "It's easier to have an addiction yourself, than to watch someone you love suffer with his or her addiction."

While not everyone would necessarily agree with that statement, it also is the heart of this book. Despite his best efforts, and, occasionally, his worst efforts, he cannot keep Kathryn from drinking.

That may be the greatest gift of the book. Families, friends and loved ones torture themselves over an addict's drinking or drugging. But despite all of our efforts, it boils down to a decision to save his or her own life.

The weakness of the book is that the narrative style told me a lot about things I wanted to know more about. For example, I felt there were way too many pages spent on chronicling Pat's success selling real estate and garage doors! Conversely, I would have loved to have heard more about what helped Pat successfully battle his own addiction. There were numerous stressful experiences that could easily have led him to 'use' again. What was most helpful in preventing this?

I would like to have heard more about the pain of his wife, and her struggles. I found myself feeling bad for her, and thinking about her.

His love for his son was impressive. At a great cost of time and money, Pat continued to try to be a good dad to his son.

Somebody very humorously and wisely said: "It's too bad we didn't get the other fellow's problems. We all know what someone else should do!" But all of us have a hard time running our own lives. And none of us can save someone else from himself or herself.

In many of us men there is the "White Knight" syndrome, wanting to rescue the fair damsel in distress. In women there is the Florence Nightingale complex: "I'll love him and he'll change for me." But soon we discover that rescue and romance don't mix. Soon the rescuer becomes the object of the addict's anger and blame.

And that's how we learn eventually that only a higher power can save any of us. And that's why there are 12-step programs for addicts and 12-step programs for their families, friends and loved ones. For those who try to wrestle their demons without God, too many end up as Kathryn, in ashes!

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