

The Gift

How 2020's tough Christmas set author and (now) Miklat graduate Brian Douglas on his path to recovery... just in time for Christmas 2021.

This is the season for giving and receiving. Last Christmas I received a gift which at the time felt much more like a curse than a present. It is a custom in our home that the first Sunday of December is set aside for decorating the tree and spending the evening sharing dinner together. My children have now grown, yet we still gather in my home on that day to share in this holiday tradition.

Last December they arrived in the early afternoon, along with my grandson who would be spending the night with grandpa. Few things in life bring me more joy than time spent with four year old Hudson. The dinner dishes had been cleared and we began to talk. Soon the conversation turned to more serious issues before landing on the heart of the matter.

With tears in her eyes, my oldest daughter said "Dad, I'm not going to allow Hudson to spend the night." The reason being I was in no condition to be alone with my grandson.

You see, I had been drinking since before noon that day, which was not much different than the day before that, and pretty much every day for the past many years.

Tears streamed down their cheeks as my beloved children shared of the pain my addiction had caused. The mistrust, the fear, and the shame my selfishness had wrought, poured out like rain on the Sunshine Coast in December. They expressed their sincere love for me and their desire to see me well. But they could no longer be part of my problem. I could continue living the way I had been, but I would do so alone. The choice was completely mine to make.

Now, one might think that such a decision would be a no brainer. After all, like most parents, I would die for my children, but I could not stop drinking for them. Such is the nature of addiction.

In the meeting rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous one often hears heart wrenching stories of what it is like when an alcoholic hits their bottom. For me it took the loss of my career as a pastor, the loss of my counseling career, my hospital chaplaincy, a three year federal prison sentence, my life savings, my marriage and very nearly the loss of my family before I chose to end the insanity.

On August 29 my feet touched down in Powell River for the first time in my life. Filled with fear and anxiety, I walked through the doors of Miklat Recovery House.

From the outside Miklat looks very much like many homes in this beautiful city, but inside these walls things are vastly different. Miracles happen here. Hope lives here. It lives here in the lives of 10 broken men. Men whose lives are as different as the places we travel from to be here. Yet we share a common illness; addiction. None of us chose to be addicts, nevertheless here we are. Not because we enjoyed what our addictions gave us, but rather what they saved us from —ourselves.

Together we learn about our common illness, why we are unable to stop the self-sabotage, and more importantly, what we can do and what we must do if we are to be free. This is no easy task.



We are guided gently into our pain by an amazing team of loving professionals who know the journey which we are on, for they too have been here.

These dedicated men and women are at times harder on us than we believe we can handle, yet always as compassionate as we need them to be. They love us until we can love ourselves. And when we can, we get to love the new guys that walk in through these doors, just as we did short months ago, with downcast heads and hearts; until they too can love themselves.

Our healing comes hard. The pain is deep; as deep as these holes we have dug that brought us to the end of ourselves, and to the beginning of something much greater.

We would never wish our pasts upon anyone, yet I do wish you could spend some time with us. I doubt you've ever seen an addicted punk rocker with a goats head

tattoo embrace an alcoholic pastor and tell him how much he loves him. Or an NFL draft candidate smile from ear to ear while scrubbing a toilet bowl. Or, for that matter, a grade seven drop-out write poetry so beautifully raw it brings you to tears. However, if you were as fortunate as I am, you could.

In this place, laughter often flows more than our tears, and that too is healing. But make no mistake... about the work we are committed to, we are dead serious. We do this work as if our lives depend upon it, for they do. We follow a simple program involving twelve simple steps. Yet it is the hardest work many of us have ever done, but we do it because the rewards are so worth the agony.

If we are painstaking about this work, the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous reminds us, we find ourselves amazed. We are coming to know a new freedom and a joy such as we've never known. Much serenity and peace is emerging, the book says. Feelings of self-loathing and self-pity are disappearing, self seeking is slipping away. In fact our whole attitude and outlook upon life is changing. Even fear of people and economic insecurity is fleeing away from us. And, as we do this very hard work we are coming to realize that a much Higher Power is doing for us what we could never do for ourselves.

These are not extravagant promises, I know this because they are happening in my life. Sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly but they are materializing as I work for them.

The present I received from my children last December, the one that felt so much like a curse, has turned into the greatest gift I could have ever received.

By the time you read this I will be back home. Our Christmas tree will be decorated and when the dishes are cleared and the conversation begins, there will be tears shed once again, of this I am sure... But this year... I suspect they will be tears of joy.

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